

Assessing the Feasibility of a Unificationist-Informed Undergraduate College

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Journal of Unification Studies Vol. 12, 2011 - Pages 1-10

In 2005, the Unification Theological Seminary [UTS] began to formally evaluate the feasibility of creating an undergraduate college, tentatively named "Barrytown College," and conducted a formal survey to gauge interest from the Unification community in the United States for this project.[1] The 2005 study was a follow-up to a 2003 pilot study and findings from both showed considerable interest for an "Unificationist-informed" undergraduate college program. The UTS Board of Directors however, decided not to pursue the college project further at that time.

This article reviews findings from two recent studies completed in 2010[2] and 2011[3] which were conducted at the request of the UTS Board to re-examine the issue once again. The research questions addressed in the 2010 study were as follows:

1. What attributes of an undergraduate program are important to Unificationists when choosing a college for themselves or their children?
2. What is the level of interest among Unificationists in an undergraduate program – Barrytown College – located on the UTS campus that would be supportive of Unificationist moral and spiritual teachings with limited initial degree program options?
3. What is the likelihood that Unificationists would send themselves or their children to Barrytown College if costs were affordable?

The 2011 study sought to explore similar questions with a more targeted group of families whose children would matriculate into college in the years 2013-2017. The 2011 study was conducted as a telephone survey and included questions that explored interest in specific majors in greater detail.

Findings from both studies provide empirically based information that can assist UTS leadership in its decision-making as to the development of an undergraduate program. Results show that Unification families would highly prize a college guided by core Unification values and supportive of Unificationist family traditions.

Background

In the summer and autumn of 2004, data was collected from over 500 "paper and pencil" surveys completed by Unification Church [UC] members at various locations. This survey included questions on family demographics such as income and number of children.[4] The survey identified highly desirable qualities for college and factors that would influence a decision to send self or child to the proposed Barrytown College. Findings revealed that participants preferred more than one academic major and there was strong interest in Business as well as Religion.

The 2005 survey was the first empirical study to examine Unification family demographics and preferences for college academic and lifestyle programs. Unification families on average had three children and 95% of the sample reported a household income of \$85,000 or less. Many reported that they were considering sending themselves or their children to state schools, junior colleges or the University of Bridgeport. These schools were identified as the primary competitors for Barrytown College.

Findings also showed that that a decision to choose Barrytown College over a competing school would likely be based on the following: the amount of the financial aid offer; strength of the academic program; school policies that support a strong moral ethos on campus and campus life programs that are supportive of UC marriage traditions. The opportunity for close relationships with faculty and a somewhat religiously diverse student body was also highly preferable. The 2005 findings concluded that there was evidence of a "target market" from the Unificationist community in America for at least the first five to seven years assuming that the college program would start in 2006.

Methods

2010 Online Survey

The survey developed for the 2010 study explored many of the same questions as the 2005 study and examined if interest levels or highly prized features for Barrytown College had changed. To develop the 2010 survey, the researcher collaborated extensively with the UTS Ad Hoc Undergraduate College Committee that was comprised of the following individuals: Chad Hoover, Andrew Wilson, Kathy Winings, Farley Jones, Anthony J. Guerra, Eric Holt and Paul Stupple. The Committee analyzed the 2005 findings and created a more streamlined survey targeting key issues that were important for understanding feasibility and recruitment possibilities for college. At

that time it was important to explore whether a two-year or four-year college was preferable and what types of features would most appeal to the Unification community for choosing a college for their children.

This study used an online data collection method instead of paper and pencil surveys. The 11-item survey included checklist and Likert-scale statements that were analyzed using tallies or percentages. The survey was created using Zoomerang, a professional web-based service to create, deploy and analyze online surveys.[5] The online data collection method had not been used previously to survey the Unificationist community in America. An invitation and link to the Barrytown College Project Survey was deployed at the end of April, 2010 through Blessed Family Association website and listserv as well as through the Unification Church e-Newsletter. Approximately 3000 contacts in the BFA database received the link to the survey via email. At the close of the survey on July 1, 2010 there were 260 completed surveys. Partial completes were not counted in the sample.

2010 Sample Demographics

One hundred and sixty-nine males and 89 females completed the online survey. 9% of respondents indicated their age as 24 years or younger. 12% were between 25-44 years and 79% were 45 years or older. 25% of respondents came from New York; 28% from other East Coast states; 16% from West Coast states; 16% from other states and 15% from outside the US. 67% indicated that they had a child between the ages of between the ages of 12 and 18 years old or at least one child over 18 that had not yet completed an undergraduate college program. 69% indicated their yearly income was below \$75,000; 20% reported income between \$75,000-149,000 and 3% reported income above \$150,000.

2011 Telephone Survey

After reviewing the findings from the 2010 study, the UTS Board decided to carry out one more study to explore the replication of findings with a more targeted population, namely Unification families living in the United States with children who would be college age within the years 2013-2017. These students would be the actual pool of students who might be recruited to attend the college in its initial years. This population was conservatively estimated to include approximately 650 families based on demographic data from the Blessed Family Association database. 300 families from this population were randomly selected to request their participation in a telephone survey. Telephone surveys were conducted by volunteers over a three month period (December 2010 to February 2011) and results were recorded in an online database. Over 200 families were successfully contacted by phone and asked to participate in the survey resulting in 121 completed surveys.

2011 Sample Demographics

Sixty-eight males and 55 females completed the telephone survey. 8% of respondents indicated their age as 24 years or younger. 9% were between 25-44 years and 83% were 45 years or older. 94% indicated that they had at least one child between the ages of 12-18 years old or at least one child over 18 that had not yet completed an undergraduate college program. 24% of respondents came from New York; 22% from New Jersey; 11% from New England; 23% from West Coast states; and 20% from states in the Midwest or Southwest. 92% rated their child's ability to speak and write in the English language as excellent.

Both studies drew over 50% of respondents from the East Coast where there is a larger concentration of Unification families compared to other areas of the country. In both studies, approximately two-thirds of participants reported household income below \$75,000. In the 2011 study 18% reported income between \$75,000-99,000; and 8% reported income above \$100,000. Approximately four-fifths of each sample was made up of individuals over 45 years of age, most likely parents of actual or prospective college students. Less than 10% of each sample was made up of individuals age 24 years or younger.

Limitations

In 2010 surveys were completed online through a link via an email invitation or a link in the Unification Church e-newsletter. This method is not proper random sampling where every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Unificationists who do not use computers or who not proficient in English may not be represented in the sample. The 2011 study aspired to identify a random sample of 200 Unificationist families representing a more clearly defined "target market" for the initial years of Barrytown College. Some individuals contacted by phone chose not to participate because of a language barrier. Many Unificationist families in America have one parent from Korea or Japan who are not fluent in English. The findings of this study may not be representative of those types of Unificationist families or individuals. Recruiting volunteers who speak Japanese or Korean will be important in future studies.

It is also important to note that participants in each study are drawn from populations of "core" or strongly self-identified Unificationist families who have submitted contact information to the Blessed Family Association database. This group does not include couples who have attended a Unification Church Blessing Ceremony where at least one of the partners did not consider themselves to be Unificationist. Some "Blessed Couples" with children who identify themselves individually or as a family as another religion (or no religion) may represent

another possible market for recruitment. It will be important to identify this more religiously diverse group of families loosely associated with the Unification Church in America to gauge their interest in the college.

Results

Interest and Important Features

The first item in both surveys asked respondents to indicate their level of interest in Barrytown College, described in the following manner in 2010:

This college will be located at the beautiful UTS campus in Barrytown, NY. Barrytown College will offer undergraduate degree programs guided by Unificationist teachings and centered on strong academic, moral and educational principles. This college initially will offer two Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) majors; 4-year degrees in Religious Studies or Peace Studies. It will offer an Associate of Arts (A.A.), a 2-year degree in the Liberal Arts. The objective will be to prepare students to enter graduate school, a career, leadership in non-profit or religious organizations, or to transfer to another college or university. The first two years of an undergraduate education can provide an alternative to STF and other current youth service programs with the benefit of earning college credit in a solid academic program. This college will provide a safe environment for the cultivation of a future family life based on Unificationist traditions. International service-leadership programs and an emphasis on sacred traditions of the world's religions and their contributions to peace will be central. The college will cultivate an environment of academic excellence that nurtures students' capacities as capable thinkers and problem solvers. Federal financial aid will be available.

65% of 2010 survey respondents indicated they were "interested" or "very interested"; 23% indicated "somewhat interested" and 12% were "not interested." In 2011 58% of survey respondents indicated they were "definitely interested" or "interested" in Barrytown College. 31% reported to be "somewhat interested" and 12% were "not interested." These findings showed considerable interest within the Unification community for an undergraduate college emphasizing academic rigor and moral values.

Respondents were also asked to identify highly important features for the college. In both studies, respondents indicated that marriage and family life preparation and affordability were the most important features. Other "very important" features were academic rigor and personal relationships with professors. Somewhat important factors included a diverse student body. Less important were internships and sports programs.

Affordability and Attendance

Both studies asked respondents to rate the likelihood of attending Barrytown College under various cost scenarios. Findings from both showed that attendance would be greatly influenced by affordability defined as the expected parental "out of pocket" contribution in a financial aid package. If these costs were \$5000 or less, 65% indicated they would be "likely or very likely" to attend. The chart below from the 2011 study showed that as out of pocket costs increase, likelihood of attendance decreases.

Table 1: Affordability and Likelihood to Attend

Cost per year	Not likely	Somewhat likely	Likely	Very likely
\$5000 or less	5%	10%	27%	58%
Between \$5000 - \$10,000	17%	24%	38%	21%
Between \$10,000 - \$15,000	48%	29%	17%	6%
Between \$15,000 - \$20,000	74%	21%	4%	2%
Over \$20,000	87%	11%	0%	2%

Majors

In the 2011 study participants were asked to rank their interest (from 1-most interested to 6-least interested) in the following proposed majors: Media Arts, Business, Philosophy and World Religions, Psychology and Family Studies, Nonprofit Leadership and Economics. 30% indicated Media Arts as the major of most interest; 23% indicated Business and 20% indicated Philosophy and World Religions. Media Arts and Business were preferred as the first or second choice of major compared to other options. Participants were also asked an open-ended question to identify from one to three other majors of interest. The most frequently occurring majors within the 101 responses were the following in descending order: Arts, Science, Engineering, Education, Business, Media and Music.

After listing these majors, participants rated their interest in attending the college if none of the majors listed previously was available. 13% indicated strong interest, 67% indicated some interest and 20% indicated no interest.

Discussion

The findings from both studies are quite similar in the areas of interest level, how affordability relates to likeliness to attend and features of an undergraduate college that are highly valued in Unification families. In the 2011 study, 80% of survey participants indicated at least some interest in the college even if none of their other preferred majors were offered. This supports the view that the primary interest in this college is based on factors other than academic major offerings. Unification families clearly value a morally and spiritually-rich learning environment that supports Unificationist marriage and family traditions. Barrytown College would likely attract students from "core" Unificationist families that place great emphasis on marriage preparation and family stability as central expressions of their religious commitment. It may be that students from other traditions that hold similar family values would be interested in the College as well. According to a study from the National Bureau of Economic Research, researchers found that students' level of religiosity is a factor in their decision to attend college and in their choice of major.[6] Students who attend church regularly are more likely than other students to enroll in college and are most likely to major in humanities or education.

Findings also show that Media Arts is somewhat more preferred than Business as a possible second major to include in the initial degree program offerings besides Religious Studies (or Religion and Philosophy) and Psychology and Family Studies. Creating partnerships for internships at the Manhattan Center or other organizations/businesses will be an important feature to attract the more career-minded students. Providing opportunities for students to develop a range of professional skills such as communications and public speaking, financial literacy, management competencies, etc. in contexts outside the classroom could be a highly attractive feature for the college.

Affordability continues to be a key factor in college decisions as well. The findings of all of the studies are consistent with current trends that show low to middle income students are far more "responsive to prices" than upper income students.[7] The rising cost of tuition and increased use of loans rather than grants to fund college costs has given rise to a "best value" decision in college attendance. Kim and DesJardines found that students from different race and income groups respond differently to aid packages in their application and enrollment decisions depending on their level of aid expectations.[8] Asians in particular were more likely to complete college applications when their expectations of financial aid were high when compared to other racial groups such as African American and Hispanic. This may mean that to attract academically strong students from Unification families with a high percentage of Asian or Asian-American children, the College would need to offer substantial scholarship and grants in financial aid packages.

Overall the 2011 study that explored the target market of Unification families with children in the age range for initial recruitment years of the College suggests that at least 65% would at least be "somewhat interested" in the college. It is likely that 50% would be interested and approximately 30% would be very interested. For initial recruitment (years 1-5), assuming that families would have one child in the age range, a minimum of 400 students, or 80 per year, might apply. This estimate is supported by the findings from all three studies. If an initial high quality program was priced competitively, Barrytown College would likely be able to admit a class of 50-60 students from Unificationist families living in America per year for the first five years.

Notes

[1] Josephine Hauer, "Barrytown College Project Survey Report," Report for the Unification Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, 2005. This research was supported in part by funding from the Unification Theological Seminary.

[2] Josephine Hauer, "Barrytown College Project Survey," Report for the Unification Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, 2010.

[3] Josephine Hauer, "Barrytown College Project Survey," Report for the Unification Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, 2011.

[4] Hauer, "Barrytown College Project Survey Report," 2005.

[5] Zoomerang,. Online survey software tool from <http://zoomerang.com>. Retrieved May 21, 2011.

[6] M. S. Kimball, C. M. Mitchell, A. D. Thornton, and L. C. Young-Demarco, "Empirics on the Origins of Preferences: The Case of College Major and Religiosity," National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 15182 (2009).

[7] M. Paulsen and E.P. St. John, "Social Class and College Costs: Examining the Financial Nexus between College Choice and Persistence," *Journal of Higher Education* 73/2 (2002): 189-236.

[8] J. Kim and S. Desjardins, "Exploring the Effects of Student Expectations about Financial Aid on Postsecondary Choice: A Focus on Income and Racial/Ethnic Differences," *Research in Higher Education* 50/8 (2009): 741-774.