



Keynote presentation - Bryan Taylor, President and Founder, EduGuide

EduGuide: Sacrifice, entrepreneurship and use of technology keys to connecting youth with college

Pre-college outreach specialists must take risks in difficult economic times to help young people fulfill their dreams of earning a college degree, said EduGuide President Bryan Taylor at the November 21, 2008, Pre-College Youth and Outreach Conference at Michigan State University.



Bryan Taylor

Taylor shared lessons that could be applied from the entrepreneurial story of G.W. Haworth, best known for establishing the Hayworth office furniture manufacturing company. Hayworth himself earned a degree during tough economic times and later supported programs to help other students.

Hayworth was a supporter of EduGuide, an award-winning Michigan-based nonprofit organization that gives strategies and tools to help pre-college outreach specialists engage families and youth in pursuing higher education goals.

G.W. himself benefited from another's sacrifices. As a young employee at a department store in Benton Harbor, G.W. received money from his boss to attend Western Michigan University. He earned a teaching degree, and returned home to teach shop class. Working after hours in his garage, G.W. also began what would become a global furniture empire.

Now deceased, Hayworth never forgot growing up during the Great Depression and that another's sacrifice that helped him fulfill his dreams. It is this recognition that led to

Hayworth's support of EduGuide and belief in its mission.

Fulfillment of the pre-college mission comes during challenging economic times. Within Michigan, evidence of a recessionary period is clear. Pressure is being felt not only in personal expenditures, but also within outreach and engagement programs. It is during these uncertain times that leaders must make even greater sacrifices to push forward rather than pull back.

Economic hardship has also exposed the relevance of education. Michigan has already made great progress on this front by implementing the recommendations of the Cherry Commission: To provide a statewide curriculum that leads to college, addresses dropout problems, and makes college entrance exams free to all students. This has solidified the state's reputation as a leader in the college access movement.

Even with these successes, more must be done to forge pathways for youth. One goal is improving the connections between parents, students and pre-college outreach professionals. Critical to this relationship is the use of technology and electronic communication by outreach professionals.

Recent research conducted by EduGuide found that the number of parents using the Web and wireless technology is higher than might be expected. Eighty percent of first generation parents (those who have not completed a college degree) are online, using various forms of technology to communicate and gather information. The rate of non-first generation adults using these technologies is 72 percent. The level of technology increases further when teens are present in a household.

EduGuide's study also highlights

outreach professionals' failure to take advantage of the digital medium. Many remain "digital immigrants," slow to adapt to the ways that their constituents are communicating and getting information. For many, building relationships in the digital world is uncomfortable territory. Moving forward, therefore, raises the need for digital pioneers who combine offline and online strategies to encourage enrollment in college and university programs.

Working with educators and educational institutions, EduGuide itself has redesigned its programs to provide more digital tools to reach families online. Efforts include a forum where professionals can share advice and respond to students and parents' questions. The forum can be found at www.EduGuide.org. EduGuide is also working on a new system that pre-college programs can use to manage college clubs for their students online.

Connecting pre-college specialists with youth and parents requires some understanding of their needs. EduGuide's research shows that using digital media such as virtual campus tours and social networks to reach youth and parents have been judged effective by those who are using them. In addition, phone-casting and text messaging are ways to reach families offline in ways in which they are more receptive to pre-college outreach messages.

Maintaining a spirit of entrepreneurship is another essential element in forging pathways for youth. Like the sacrifices made by another to enable G.W. Hayworth's dreams of higher education, pre-college outreach specialists must take risks, find solutions by testing out new approaches, and find ways to navigate around tight budgets and administrative barriers to further their programs.

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