

CHARACTER-DRIVEN, COLLEGE PREPARATION

Parents and Teachers In Partnership Through University Model Schooling

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Chapter One

HOW WE DISCOVERED UNIVERSITY-MODEL SCHOOLING (UMS)

I'm not a salesman for University-Model Schooling (UMS). I'm a satisfied customer.

Putting myself in your place, I can imagine scanning this page right now and wondering, "Who is this guy, and what in the world is he doing here?"

I'll try to answer that in this chapter.

Then, it will be my privilege to introduce you to a new model of college-preparatory education (UMS) that is incredibly effective for the elementary through high-school grades. In UMS, students take challenging, age-appropriate courses of study that are set in a university-type scheduling of classes -- either on Monday-Wednesday-Friday or Tuesday-Thursday. Outside of class, the students work to develop sound study habits and the kind of strong work ethic they will need for success in college. This is assured because of the attention paid to an essential ingredient that the U.S. Department of Education repeatedly affirms as a proven difference-maker in any child's education: meaningful and wise parental mentoring. How it all works will be explained in the chapters that follow, but first I would like you to know that, for me, UMS is not just an intriguing theory. It is a personal experience. I am a father of UMS students.

The groundwork for my appreciation of UMS was laid in my own upbringing. I can illustrate by showing you a couple of snapshots from my childhood. I just happen to have them with me, right here in the wallet of my memory banks. Would you like to "see" them?

This is my Mom, and that's me when I was six years old. If you look closely, you can see that she is holding some of my schoolbooks – the English ones. We were citizens of the USA living overseas in an Arabic-speaking country. Every weekday afternoon when I got home from my Arabic first grade class, Mom would take me through some additional lessons in English. This picture was taken just seconds after Mom asked me, "John, would you like to sit down now and do this reading with me?"

I answered, "No thanks, Mom, that's alright. You go right ahead."

She loved telling that story to people.

This next picture here is of my Dad. That's one of my sisters there with him. If I saw this scene once, I'll bet I saw it a thousand times: Dad sitting down to help at least one of us with homework. All five of us kids could tell you stories about Dad somehow pulling us through a tough, last-minute study situation in the "nick of time."

That serious look on Dad's face is because he is trying to figure things out for himself before teaching my sister. For me, that was always a good time to go get a sandwich.

You know what? Those sessions with Mom and Dad taught us much more than lessons from books. We couldn't help but also learn about love, care, priorities, and sacrifice. Just by being with them, we got an education in living, laughing, cheering, and crying – together.

We not only adopted their values but their faith as well. We wanted to know the loving God they knew, who delights in giving good gifts to His children.

Oh! Speaking of children and gifts: the last picture I want to show you is right here on this page. Our five children surprised Roxie and me with this picture of themselves on our 25th wedding anniversary. Meet our children Mandi, Ginger, John, Thomas, and Bekah.

What a thrill it is to take the legacy of love we have received and be part of passing it on to the next generation – and even to the generations we will never see! Is there anything greater than that?

University-Model schools give parents more time for being with their children than do traditional schools. This gives parents greater opportunity to impart the faith and values they hold precious. Students from public, private, and home schools alike are being attracted to the model because of its uniquely balanced approach to partnering with parents and preparing students.

Would you like to know how we discovered University-Model Schooling? Remember, we are just one family with one story. Families have entered the UMS community from a variety of public as well as private school backgrounds. The reason I share our experience here is to illustrate some of the unique benefits and flexibility of the model. Hopefully, the picture this paints in your mind will be helpful when you study the more technical descriptions of UMS later in this book.

Our Story

In the spring of 1993, we were settling into a new home after moving halfway across the country. Here was the situation: Mandi was approaching 10th grade, Ginger 8th, John 5th, Thomas 2nd, and Bekah was not yet two years old. Until that time, we had taught all of them at home. I did my best to help; but, of course, it was Roxie who carried the day-to-day load of responsibility. And she loved every minute of it!

To say that Roxie had done a tremendous job would grossly understate the high quality of her work as a wife, mother, mentor, and teacher. She was (and is) amazing! Her first priority was home, yet she still carried on various ministries with people outside our home.

For Roxie, teaching our kids was more than a preference and more than a studied conclusion as to what method of educating was best. It was a calling, an integral part of her God-given identity and mission in life. Since I was the one blessed to be her husband, that made me part of that calling, too. For that, I can never thank God enough. What an astounding difference that shared calling has made in our children's lives and in our family!

The calling did not change in 1993, but some of our ways of living it did.

That spring, you might say we went through a kind of "storm before the calm." The storm was not terrible, but threatening nonetheless. Both Roxie and I could see the clouds coming from a distance, but each of our responses was different. Roxie took the matter seriously yet was sure we would weather the storm just fine. I guess I was the one that panicked when I saw this huge wall of mystery approaching called "Mandi's TENTH grade." Whoa, scary!

That meant she had only three more years until . . . COLLEGE! Were we ready to get her ready?

I saw that dark, ominous thing coming and wanted to run for cover! I started checking out every "storm shelter" around – every local school option I could think of. Some of the ideas I came up with in those days startled Roxie more than the storm itself! Was I abandoning our call, she wondered? I did not think so. But did that big storm cloud scare me?

Do I have to admit that I think it did?

Roxie was totally calm and confident but agreed that together we should search for additional resources and/or tutors to assist with the college-preparatory math and science courses that we knew Mandi needed. We

considered many possibilities; but, in light of the calling we understood and the busy schedules we kept, none of the options fit.

The rest of the story is the reason I am writing this book.

In May of that same year, Roxie and I attended a huge convention on education held annually in our city. We were still on our quest for “shelter” as we attended seminars and browsed displays of curricula and resources. At the end of the day, with our arms full of books and brochures, we were tired and ready to go home to process. As we headed for the parking lot, I suddenly remembered one more resource that I wanted to check out. Roxie waited as I hurried back into the convention hall.

I do not remember what the resource was. All I remember was that, when I finished conversing with the spokesperson about his display, he said something in passing about a new school getting under way in our city. It was a different kind of academy that required less time in classrooms and more time at home in order to provide an effective transition to college. I was in a hurry, so I said something like, “Uh huh, well thank you very much,” then turned to go.

The next thing I did could have looked like one of those double-takes in an old TV sitcom. I walked three steps away from the man, halted dead in my tracks with a wide-eyed stare, then slowly turned back to the man and asked, “What was that you just said?”

I cocked my head slightly to listen so that, as he repeated each word, at least one ear would be likely to get it right! When I was sure that I had heard him correctly, I scribbled down the phone number for more information, went home, and called as soon as I could.

The more Roxie and I learned about this new academy, the more intrigued we became. We agreed that we should start the application process so that we could at least ask more questions. Every step in the process led us to greater agreement that this was an alternative worth trying. We had never heard of a school like this before! It offered the college-preparatory assistance we needed in a way that was both consistent with and supportive of our desire to continue investing in our children at home. We now know that the academy was the first to test University-Model Schooling (UMS) as it is described in this book.

We enrolled both Mandi and Ginger that fall. Our roles with them then shifted from being primary teachers to that of partner-teachers with each of their excellent, professional instructors. Qualified, dedicated adults presented academic material to Mandi and Ginger in classes that met three hours a week (like a college class) while we accepted responsibility for giving them additional guidance at home, keeping them on track in their academically challenging curriculum. (See Chapter 5 for more on the various roles that parents play in the learning design of a University-Model school.)

Meanwhile, Roxie continued her full time work with John, Thomas, and Bekah at home. Over the next three years, John was able to take a few courses at the University-Model school in math and art; then he began a full load of courses his eighth-grade year. Attending class primarily on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, he then studied on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday under our guidance at home. Similarly, Thomas began easing into the curriculum in the seventh grade and began his full load in the ninth. Bekah, who at this writing is approaching fourth grade, is still being taught at home.

Update and Summary

How effective was this model in preparing Mandi and Ginger for college? Well, Ginger began her junior year in college with a GPA of 3.9. Mandi graduated summa cum laude in May, 2000, and began her training to become a medical doctor the following August at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. The delight of our hearts, however, is that each of them has a confident, vibrant faith and a wholesome mission and direction in life. We attribute all of this to the marvelous grace of God and the wisdom of His ways.

How is the University-Model “test school” doing? While controlling growth each year, it has grown from its original 186 students to over 500 in eight years. Hundreds more are on a waiting list to be admitted while the majority of those graduating receive college scholarship offers. Some students, like ours, transition into the academy from home schools. Others come into the University Model from full time public or private schools. By

now, there is also a growing population of students who started elementary school at the UMS test school and plan to continue all the way through graduation from high school.

Some students at the test school take only one or two classes a semester and receive the rest of their instruction at home. Others take a full load of five or six courses a semester and will graduate with a diploma that is commanding greater and greater respect among the nation's universities because of the college-simulated training it represents.

Some families are drawn to the model because, compared to traditional schools, it offers greater access for parents to stay involved in the most important dimension of their children's education – their values and character formation. Others are interested in the high academic standards and strong work ethic promoted through the college-simulated learning environment, which successfully eases the transition into higher education. Still others are attracted to the character emphasis built into every aspect of the school's service, including the academic and student activities programs.

Whether coming from public, private, or home schools, all families are admitted into University-Model Schooling with the understanding that a high degree of parental mentoring will be expected. While it is true that all approaches to education are strengthened when parents are meaningfully involved, the University Model absolutely depends upon it. Without someone who will provide responsible parenting, it is difficult to imagine how the model could ever work.

The University-Model approach is certainly not to be considered the only way or the "right" way for everyone. Every family faces different circumstances; therefore, each has a different set of needs. To believe that one educational alternative is right for every family is to believe that every situation is the same. This, of course, is not the case.

It is our hope that ALL parents reading these pages will be challenged by the principles that undergird the University Model and find renewed courage and confidence to accept their unique roles in their children's educational journeys. We desire to see parents inspired to seize the extraordinary opportunities they have to make a positive difference in the next generation. If this book motivates even a few passive, timid, or discouraged parents to think, take heart, and become more positively active in their children's educational lives, then this work will be a success.

Chapter Four

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY MODEL

Involving parents will not compensate for an inadequate reading program, any more than public relations campaigns will cover up poor instruction and low expectations. Collaboration with families is an essential component of a [school] reform strategy, but it is not a substitute for a high quality education program or thoughtful, comprehensive school improvement.[1]

What is University-Model Schooling?

University-Model Schooling (UMS) is a new educational alternative that, until now, has not been among the typical choices available to parents. Though off-campus parental roles are clearly defined and required in the model, UMS should not be equated with home schooling or home schooling cooperatives. Nor should UMS be understood as traditional classroom education that has simply reduced classroom time. Its significance lies in its ability to effectively utilize parents in partnership with highly qualified professional instructors to gain better academic results, especially among average students. This partnership is facilitated by using a university-type schedule, administrative system, and strong work ethic in age-appropriate ways for the elementary through high school grades. The result is an excellent, well-rounded education with less time in school, less cost for families, increased opportunities for positive parent-child interaction, and improved order and discipline in the classroom. It also results in the successful transition of students directly into college with minimal "culture shock" since they have already experienced a college-simulated work environment at the high school level.

UMS is designed to bring together the best attributes of traditional schooling with the best attributes of home schooling and integrate them into one model. The immediate goal is quality, cost-effective, college-preparatory

education accomplished in a way that gives parents more time for imparting the faith and values they hold precious. The ultimate goal is that of producing wholesome, competent men and women of character who make a positive difference in the next generation. It is also hoped that University-Model schools, both public and private, can gain nationwide acceptance among parents and educators as a schooling alternative that is needed in every community.

[1] Henderson, 13.