

In Their Own Words: Parents of First-Generation College Students

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Introduction

- This session will share findings of a study conducted for doctoral research
- My story/my why



Overview of Session

- Problem
- Research Questions
- Research Design
- Findings
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations



Problem

- Too little is known about what kind of knowledge parents of first-generation college students have about college and what factors influence their involvement
 - Parents of first-generation college students are absent from the majority of literature on parental involvement



Research Questions

1. What is the understanding and definition of parental involvement according to parents of first-generation college students and higher education institutions?
2. How do parents of first-generation college students practice involvement?
3. How can higher education institutions facilitate more effective parental involvement with parents of first-generation college students?



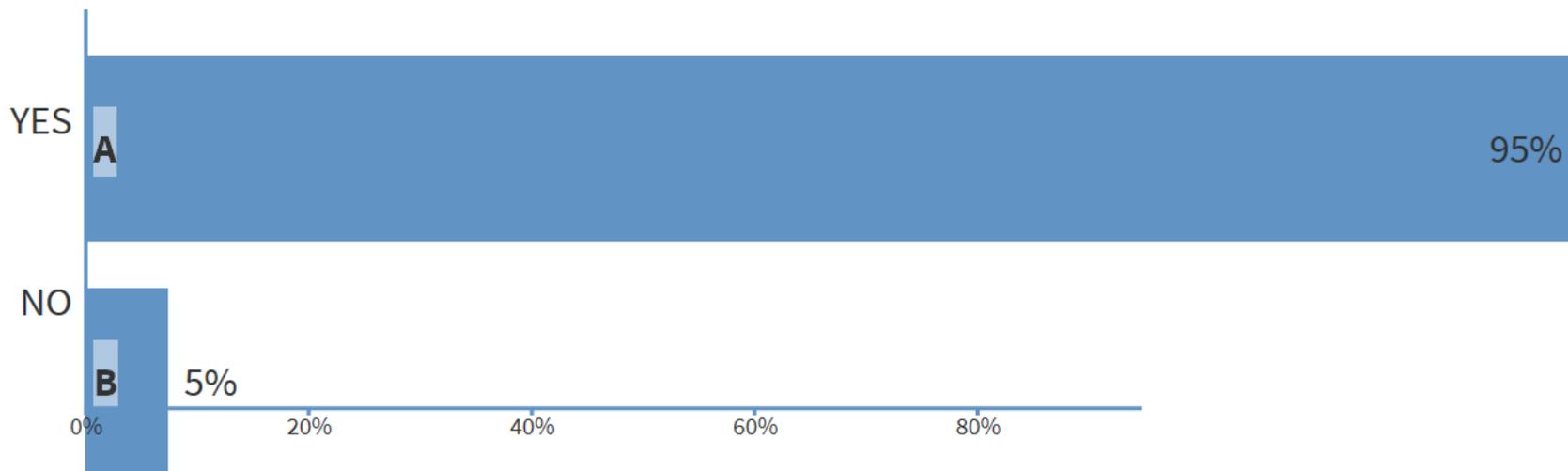
Research Design and Methodology

- **Qualitative Study**
 - Data were gathered through 14 in depth interviews with parents of first-generation college students ($n=9$) and higher education parent and family program professionals ($n=5$) conducted in summer and fall respectively
- **Phase I: (Parent Perspectives)**
 - Phenomenological
 - Stratified Random Sampling
 - ensure diversity within the sample
 - Semi-structured Interviews
- **Phase II (Professional Perspectives)**
 - Feasibility
 - Purposive Sampling
 - Semi-structured Interviews
- **Data Analysis: Analytic Induction**



Does your institution and/or office have difficulty engaging parents/families of first-generation college students?

Respond at [PollEv.com/dawnbruner584](https://www.poll-ev.com/dawnbruner584) Text **DAWNBRUNER584** to **22333** once to join, then **A or B**



Parent Participant Demographics

Parent*	Age	Race	Marital Status	Number of Children	Household Income	Home Environment	Education
Tiffany	39	Black	Separated	3	~\$11,400/yr.	Suburban	Some College
Renee	45	White	Married	3	~\$25,000/yr.	Suburban	Some High School
Lisa	46	White	Divorced	2	~\$76,000/yr.	Suburban	Associate Degree
Michelle	46	Latina	Married	1	~\$80,000/yr.	Urban	Associate Degree
Miranda	47	Latina	Single	2	~\$14,000/yr.	Urban	GED
Wanda	48	White	Married	2	~\$90,000/yr.	Urban	High School
Barbara	55	Black	Single	3	~\$40,000/yr.	Urban	Associate Degree
Christine	55	White	Married	5	~\$120,000/yr.	Rural	Associate Degree
Harriette	61	White	Single	1	~\$30,000/yr.	Rural	Technical Trade



Institutional Profiles

Professional Participant	Institution Type	Number of Undergraduate Students	% First-Generation	Annual Tuition	Formalized First-Generation Program*	Number of Years in Field
Flora	Private	≥2,000	7%	>\$50,000	Yes	3 years
Ilene	Private	≥5,000	--	>\$45,000	Yes	4 years
Clare	Private	≥6,000	~30%	>\$39,000	No	9 years
Alba	Public	≥10,000	--	>\$5,000	Yes	3 years
Mae	Public	≥25,000	16%	>\$15,000	Yes	5 years



Findings

What is Parental Involvement?

Participant Group	Theme	Key concept
Parents of first-generation students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “You’re going to college” ▪ “I very much wanted to go to college” ▪ “I’ve always been involved” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents of first-generation students expect college ▪ Family background and social factors influence definition ▪ History of educational involvement
Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “A pretty high impact” ▪ “Being informed and engaged” ▪ “Not as assertive” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents play an important role ▪ Parents engaged in student success ▪ Parents of first-generation students practice involvement differently



Types of Involvement

Participant Group	Theme	Key concept
Parents of first-generation students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Reach for the stars” ▪ “He will often have me read papers” ▪ “I’ve always worked a lot of hours” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Status • Financial Anxieties • Health Conditions ▪ “They come to me” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She’s an automatic sharer • Wow, look at my kid • She calls it home • It was hard watching her go through that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents provide emotional support ▪ Parents function as a part of academic support system ▪ Parents experience significant life stressors ▪ Parental involvement is embedded in parent-student relationship



Reactions to Types of Involvement

Participant Group	Theme	Key concept
Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ “We want our kids to succeed”▪ “Academic support, this is really eye- opening”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Favorable response to emotional support▪ Surprised by academic support



Connections and Disconnections

Participant Group	Theme	Key concept
Parents of first-generation students	▪ “The only thing that attaches me to the institution is my daughter”	▪ Students are the primary connection to institution
	▪ “Just a check up”	▪ Parents desire targeted outreach and information
	▪ “What comes after graduation”	▪ Parents desire information and resources that will help them support the student nearing graduation
	▪ “This is what we’re going to do with your child”	▪ Parents want ongoing education about the university experience
	▪ “We don’t hangout or talk much”	▪ Parents have minimal relationships with parents of other college students





Special Programming

First-Generation Students and Families Welcome Luncheon
(Orientation 2017)



Connections and Disconnections

Participant Group	Theme	Key concept
Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ “I think it would be logistically overwhelming”▪ “That needs to start at the top down”▪ “It’s our job and it’s our pleasure”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Institutions are faced with limited resources▪ Lacking investment from senior leadership▪ Parents may benefit from changing their behavior



Discussion

- Promoted a greater understanding of parental involvement
- Allowed the exploration of the role of the institution in shaping parental involvement
- Importance of the parent – student relationship became a thread that weaved the study together



Study Implications

- Refutes previous research which suggested that parents of first-generation college students are disconnected from the academic experience of students (Engle, 2007) and provide low levels of support (Sy et al., 2011; Thayer, 2000)
 - Should be acknowledged and supported
- Although professionals were mostly positive about parents of first-generation college students, they were surprised (and somewhat divided) upon learning that these parents actively provide academic support
 - Varying professional perspectives might suggest that higher education professionals may have some difficulty realizing parents of first-generation college students as assets to the students' academic experience
 - Recognizing these parents as assets to students' academic experience may help parents, and students, tap into their strengths for greater success (Rios-Aguilar, et al., 2011)



- Parents of first-generation college students may experience a disconnection between the institution and themselves; professionals cited **institutional issues** which may create barriers
 - Lack of closure
 - Information potential – institutions and parents of other students
 - Information potential is a form of capital in which institutions can take an active role in impacting the level of social capital available to parents of first-generation college students
- The educational context shapes parental involvement (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008)
 - “Whether a particular structure represents social capital, depends on whether its function serves the individual involved in a particular action” (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016 p. 84)
 - This study indicates that institutions may be impacting the social capital made available to parents through the institution
 - Institutions have power to provide access, and they are in a position to be a primary resource of information



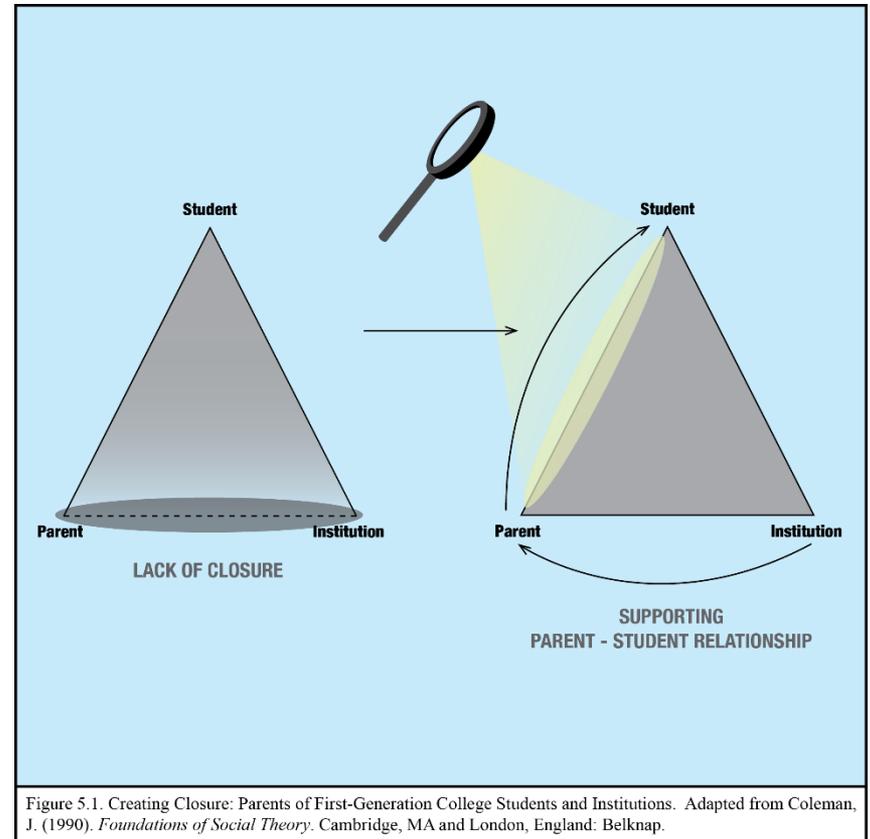
Recommendations – Future Research

- Additional qualitative exploration to access the voices of parents of first-generation college students
- Research on parent involvement should seek to understand the impact of parent-parent relationships (intergenerational closure)
- Further diversification of sample (i.e.: inclusion of fathers and larger family context)
 - Triangulation of parent perspectives and perspectives of first-generation students
- Quantitative methodology, such as administering a survey instrument, would create an opportunity to include a greater number of participants across many institutions
 - Identification of themes and trends occurring by region, state, and institutional type



Recommendations – Higher Education and Parent/Family Programs

- Develop a clear process for identifying first-generation students and families
- Increase efforts to develop closure with parents of first-generation college students



- Consider a new model for reaching parents of first-generation college students
- Embrace a new definition of parental involvement in the higher education context



Final Thoughts

- The study accomplished giving primacy to the voice and perspective of parents of first-generation college students in exploring parental involvement
- It uncovered parents' deep connections to students' education experience and some disconnections with the institution
- Revealed disconnections from the parent and institutional perspectives - creates an opportunity to forge a new relationship
 - ❖ Students are at the heart of that relationship





- How does your office/institution demonstrate value for special populations?
- How does your office/institution support the parent-student relationship with this population?





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