

It Takes a Family:
Balancing the Role of Families Across the Student
Success Life Cycle

NOVEMBER 2018



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

OVERVIEW

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

- 28,894 students
 - 22,815 undergraduate students
 - 6,079 graduate students
- State flagship and land grant
- ~30% Pell eligible; ~25% first generation

UTK's Journey

- Strategic initiative to improve retention and graduation rates
 - Retention: 87%
 - Four-year graduation: 51%
 - Six-year graduation: 73%
- 22% increase in four-year graduation rates in 10 years



WHY FAMILIES?

- To continue improvements, we need to better understand students and their families
- Both faculty and administrative research provides insights
- Those insights can be translated into action
- Those actions can enhance every stage of the student life cycle

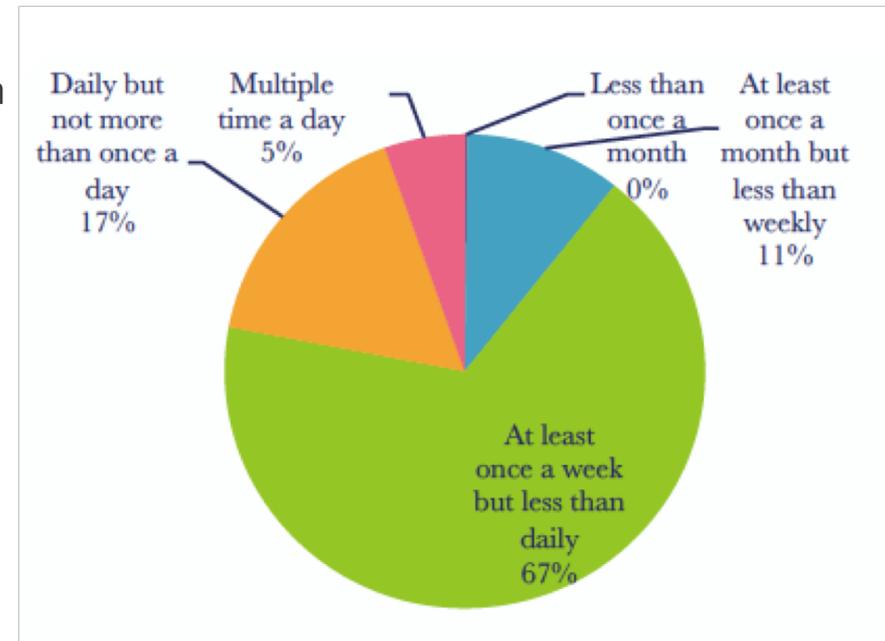
FAMILIES MATTER

- Families contribute an average 10% of their income to their students' college education.
- Families support students in every stage of the student life cycle
- Emerging adulthood is linked to shifting family communication patterns
- Students and their families need to be nurtured and supported in relationships that include the alma mater as part of the family

STUDY 1: PARENT/FAMILY INSIGHTS

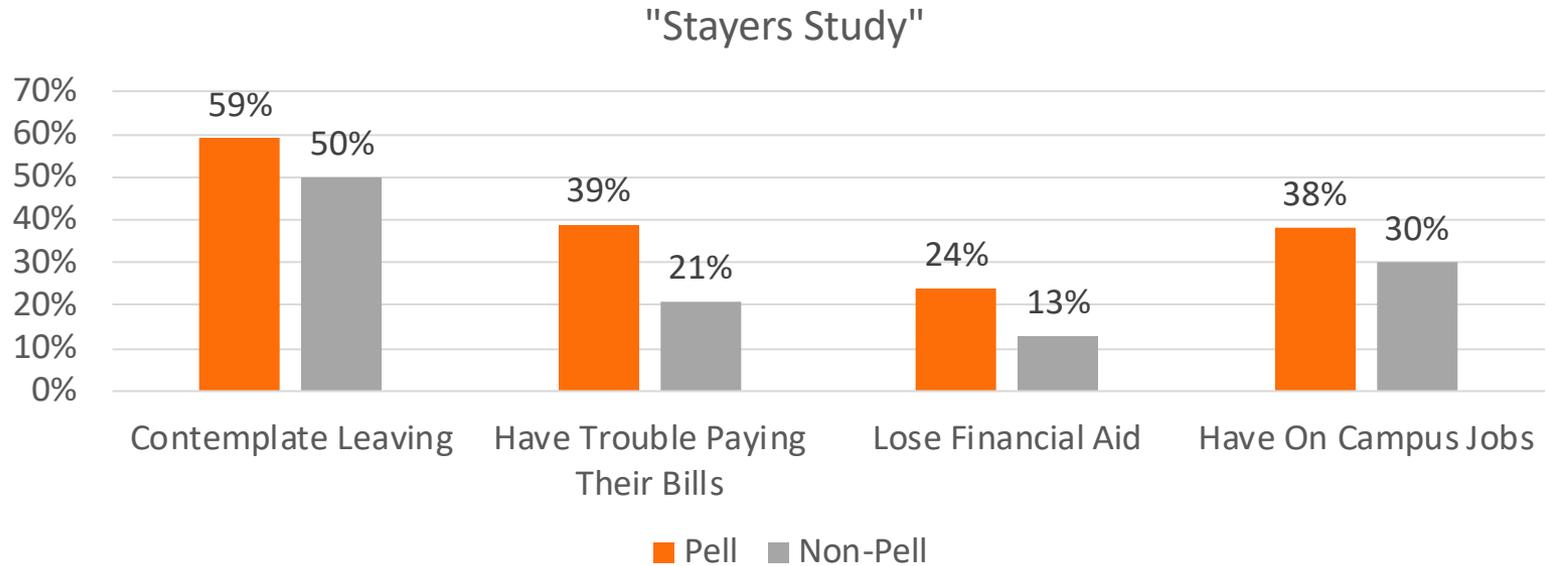
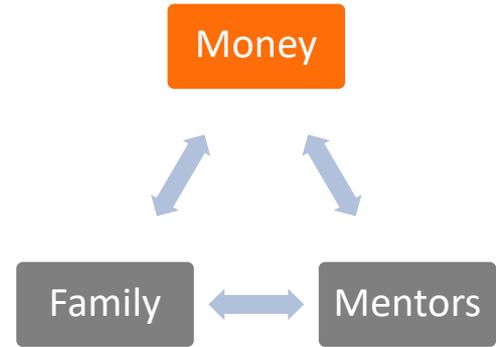
- Survey of 1,500+ members of parent association
- Most frequent topics of communication
 - Academic advising (14%)
 - Financial aid and scholarships (11%)
 - Career advice (8%)
- About 23% contribute to
 - Parent association (33%)
 - Scholarships (16%)

How frequently do you communicate with your student?



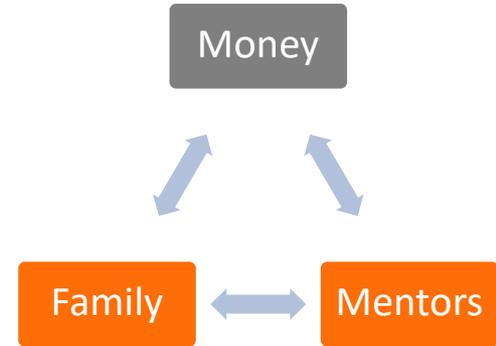
STUDY 2: "STAYERS"

- Survey of 700+ seniors and follow-up focus group with "contemplators"
- Pell-eligible students more likely to contemplate leaving



STUDY 2: "STAYERS"

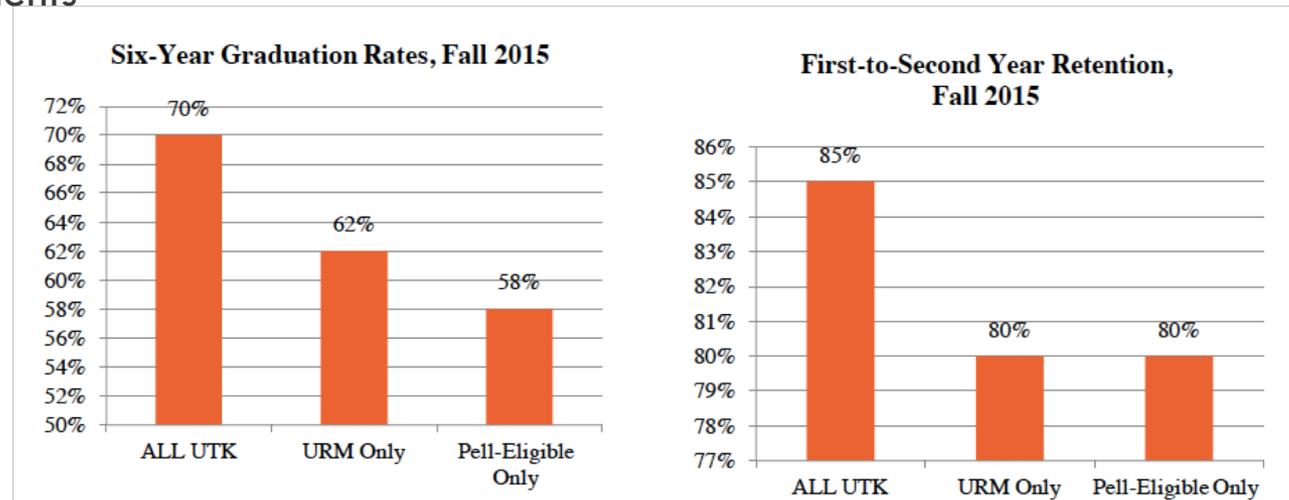
- Qualitative focus groups with 46 contemplators
- Pell students are more likely to identify mentors vs. family as critical to success



What was most important to your success?	Pell	Non-Pell
Grit/determination/etc.	43%	44%
Friends/clubs/Greek life, etc.	34%	33%
Mentors	26%	23%
Family	12%	16%
University Programs	9%	8%
Finances	4%	7%
University Services	4%	4%

STUDY 3: STUDENT RESEARCH

- 45 students completed research and reflection exercise about their families
- Sensitized students and faculty to invisible diversity
- Educational experiences focused on four themes
 - Relationships
 - Accomplishments
 - Challenges
 - Learning



THEMES

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Lessons Learned

- 18 – 24; more distinct among middle class families
- Parents help students navigate topics central to academic success
- Mentors also play an important role in helping students transition through emerging adulthood
- On-campus jobs can connect students to resources – both money and mentors – that can help them transition from family support
- Students from low-resource families are less focused on self-discovery and more focused on career development.

THEMES

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Lessons Learned

- Digital tools have shifted patterns; it works both ways
- Digital technologies have enabled rich and frequent communication between students and families
- Family communication is particularly supportive for high-resource students
- Students sometimes struggle in having adult-to-adult conversations with families

THEMES

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Lessons Learned

- Families “push” and “pull” students
- Pell-eligible students are more likely to contemplate leaving college for a broad range of reasons
- Lifelong learning is more highly valued by those who come from high-resource families

INTRODUCING THE FRAMEWORK

Environmental Changes/
Structural Realities



Impact Across Student Lifecycle



Theme	Recruitment	First-Year Transition	Persistence	Alumni Engagement
Emerging Adulthood	<p>Strategic Planning</p> <p>Collaboration vs. Silos</p> <p>Student vs. Administrator Perspective</p> <p>Parent and Family as Partners/Stakeholders</p>			
Family Communication				
Access to Resources				

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin “healthy separation” of student and family during orientation• Establish “mattering and belonging” program to focus on supporting developmental phases for all students – regardless of diverse backgrounds• Adopt high-tech and high-touch• Incorporate career development themes<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Some students “find themselves” in college- Some depend on support from outside family

Areas for Focus/ Collaboration at UTK	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Retention plan
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Academic advising
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alumni engagement

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include parent/family office in cross-functional student success teams• Establish programs to match faculty/staff mentors with first-generation students• Build on alumni and development messages that focus on “giving back” regardless of “legacy”

Areas for Focus/ Collaboration at UTK	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Parent/family representation in retention taskforce
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	First-Generation Student Success (UTK First)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alumni and development communications

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocate for balanced need and merit scholarships• Assist in developing plans to educating family on scholarship requirements (example – Tennessee Hope)• Advocate for fine-tuned systems for coordinating unit-level scholarships

Areas for Focus/ Collaboration at UTK	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Scholarship Eligibility (Hope)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partnership with Advising
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Work-study undergraduate research

CONCLUSION

Use data and research to...

- Understand changing environments
 - Core theories
 - Existing practices
 - Structural realities
- Work across silos
- Build strategy from the student and family perspective

To improve outcomes for...

- Student
- Parents/Families
- Institutional Mission
- Resources