AHEPPP Journal

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As AHEPPP continues to grow as an organization that supports parent/family program professionals at colleges and universities across the country, so does the number of research papers and dissertations that focus on parents/families as they relate to students' transition from high school to college, including the ups and downs of college life and students' persistence to graduation. We hope the research presented in this issue will provide additional tools to further develop the services and support you offer parents and families.

The first article focuses on the role breakups, depression, and self-esteem play in a student's overall adjustment to college. Research indicates that romantic relationships may have a bigger effect on adjustment than has been previously suspected. The two authors, both Associate Professors of Family and Child Development at Texas State University – San Marcos, believe parent/family program professionals should add these considerations to their discussions with both families and university personnel so warning signs of depression and low self-esteem related to relational breakups are distinguishable from the more typical adjustment issues students may face.

The second article analyzes the positive effects parents and families can and do have on their first-generation sons and daughters during college. In previous research, the invaluable support available from first–generation students' families is frequently overlooked or minimized, often to the point of including families in the list of ways these students are "educationally disadvantaged." This article by a parent/family program professional from the University of Southern California serves as a call for action for campuses and parent offices to recognize and utilize the untapped potential of first-generation families in support of their students. Persistence can be a challenge for first-generation students, and parents can help.

The final article allows readers to follow along with a new parent/family program professional as he completes his first six months on the job. Seasoned professionals will undoubtedly reflect on their own experiences from the beginning of their careers while newer professionals will benefit from many of the lessons learned.

We continue to appreciate our peer reviewers: Todd Adams, Duke University; Lady Cox, Auburn University; David McCandless, University of Oregon; Colleen Heykoop, Biola University; and Chris Hall Lynch, Florida Atlantic University, and thank them for their efforts to strengthen these submissions through their edits and suggestions. Special thanks as well to our Copy Editor, Chelsea Petree, who generously shares her multitude of talents with us.

Reader feedback is always welcome, and we urge parent/family practitioners, higher education researchers, and graduate students to submit articles examining the role of parent/family involvement for future issues. Please see submission guidelines at www.aheppp.org/aheppp-journal.

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Breakups, Depression, and Self-Esteem as Predictors of College Adjustment

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how breakups, depression, and self-esteem predict overall college adjustment in the first year. A total of 297 students participated in our online study. Findings indicated all of the independent variables were related to overall college adjustment in the expected directions. A multiple regression analysis indicated the model was statistically significant and accounted for 34% of the variance in overall college adjustment. Our findings suggest the need for programs and services that support students as they are adjusting to college life. Parent/family professionals are in an ideal position to educate institutional personnel regarding the impact romantic relationships can have on students' adjustment and subsequent achievement. In addition, they can inform parents about the warning signs of depression so that they do not discount their children's behaviors as a typical part of the adjustment process.

When students go away to college for the first time, they are faced with distinct challenges ranging from living with unfamiliar roommates to navigating changes in pre-college friendships. Although these friendship changes can be distressing, they "do not have the dramatic and abrupt quality of romantic 'breakups'" (Giordano, Phelps, Manning, & Longmore, 2008, p. 51). In fact, Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, and Hatch (2003) found romantic relationship breakups can be particularly challenging to college students who have moved away from their pre-existing support systems. In addition to dealing with the emotions associated with ending a romantic relationship, breaking up with a romantic partner might also impact some students' psychological well-being. Dealing with such a pile-up of stressors might be particularly trying if they occur during the transition to the college environment.

The aforementioned scenario is of particular concern to parents and parent/family professionals as recent studies have indicated depression is more common among college students than among individuals of the same age in the workforce (Tietjen-Smith & Ansel, 2007). Moreover, counseling centers on university campuses report they now serve students with more severe psychological problems than in previous decades (Erdur-Baker, Aberson, Barrow, & Draper, 2006; Kitzrow, 2003; Tietjen-Smith & Ansel, 2007). In their study of 50 counseling centers across the United States, Erdur-Baker and colleagues (2006) found the severity and chronicity of mental health issues experienced by college students increased over time. These increases were most pronounced when examining changes in depression, romantic relationship issues, and academic concerns. In light of these findings, we were interested in exploring how experiencing the breakup of a romantic relationship and the greater propensity toward depression might have an adverse impact on college students' academic adjustment.

This study is particularly important due to the dearth of literature in this area. At this time, there are no studies specifically exploring the relationship between either the breakup of a romantic relationship and college adjustment or depression and college adjustment. Although we expect these variables to be related, this is the first study to empirically examine these relationships. We base this assumption in part on Dixon and Reid's (2000) argument that depression, which they found was related to negative life events such as a breakup, might be particularly problematic for college students because it can negatively impact their school performance. At the same time, it is important to examine self-esteem because previous research has shown that self-esteem predicts college adjustment (Boulter 2002, Hertel, 2002; Toews & Yazedjian, 2007). Yet, there is no research to date that explores how breakups, depression, and self-esteem predict overall college adjustment. The importance of exploring the degree to which such factors predict college success is highlighted by research that finds cognitive variables (e.g., SAT or IQ score) leave 65% to 78% of the variance unexplained (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993).

It is especially important to explore how the aforementioned variables impact adjustment during the first year because Tinto (1975) has argued it is during this time that students are initially facing the challenges of how to integrate into the college environment. Supporting Tinto's (1975) theory, more recent researchers have begun to discuss the transition to college as a complex process that includes both academic and social integration (Kuo, Hagie, & Miller, 2004; Roe Clark, 2005; Swail, 2003). Furthermore, as Tinto has suggested, persistence in college is related not only to students' initial integration, but also to their ongoing academic and social integration. We believe the process of academic and social

integration can be adversely influenced by the three variables explored in this study. For example, it is possible that after experiencing the breakup of a romantic relationship, a student may be less inclined to participate in social activities on campus that might impact his or her adjustment to the college environment. Similarly, a student who is depressed may be unable to devote enough attention to his or her academic work, which can then impact his or her sense of academic adjustment. Although these are all plausible outcomes, they have not been empirically tested. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how breakups, depression, and self-esteem predicted overall college adjustment in the first year. Specifically, the hypotheses guiding this study were as follows:

- Hypothesis 1:   Higher self-esteem will predict more college adjustment.

- Hypothesis 2:   Depression will predict less college adjustment.

- Hypothesis 3:   Experiencing a breakup in college will predict less college adjustment.

Method

Participants and Procedures
In order to focus on traditional aged students, we recruited all first-year students between the ages of 18 and 19 (n=3,177) at a public four-year university in central Texas. After receiving approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, we sent students an email asking them to complete an online survey on romantic relationships and college adjustment. We believe this method of data collection was appropriate for our sample because recent research indicates that the majority of college students regularly use e-mail and the internet (Carini, Hayek, Kuh, Kennedy, & Ouimet, 2003). A total of 816 students completed the survey in the fall semester (Time 1) and were asked to complete a follow-up survey in the spring (Time 2). The final sample at Time 2 consisted of 297 students, 22.6% males and 77.4% females, with a mean age of 18.7. Consistent with the ethnic distribution of the university, the sample was 67.3% White, 23.6% Hispanic, 3.4% Black, and 5.7% Other. By Time 2, 32.3% of students had experienced a breakup since starting at the university.

Measures
Our online survey consisted of several instruments chosen for their psychometric properties and their relevance to this study. Specifically, in addition to the demographic information that was obtained through the survey, several standardized instruments were used to examine our hypotheses.

Breakup. To determine whether or not the student had experienced a breakup since starting at the university, we asked "Since being at [university name], have you been in a relationship that has ended?" Responses were dichotomously coded as no (0) or yes (1).

Self-esteem. We selected the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Inventory because it is one of the most widely used, valid, and reliable measures of global self-esteem (Sinclair, Blais, Gansler, Sandberg, Bistis, & LoCicero, 2010). Students were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of 10 statements about themselves. Sample items included statements such as: "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "At times I think I am no good at all." Responses ranged from (1) "strongly disagree" to (4) "strongly agree." A mean of the responses was used in the analysis, with higher values indicative of a higher level of self-esteem (range = 1.90-4.00; mean = 3.16; SD =

.47). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .86 for this sample.

Depression. Derogatis' (1993) seven-item depression subscale from the Brief Symptom Inventory was used to measure students' perceived level of depressive symptoms. Participants were given a list of symptoms related to suicidal ideation, lack of interest in life, and feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness, and asked to rate how much they had been bothered by each symptom. Responses ranged from (1) "not at all" to (5) "extremely." A sum of the responses was used in the analysis, with higher values indicative of higher levels of depression (range = 1-5; mean = 2.02; SD = .79). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .88 for this sample.

Adjustment. The 67-item Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1989) was used to measure students' overall adjustment to college. Designed for first-year college students, this measure has four subscales: (a) Academic, (b) Social, (c) Personal/ Emotional, and (d) Goal Commitment/Institutional Adjustment, and is the most widely used measure of college adjustment. Items were scored on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from "(1) does not apply to me at all" to (9) "applies very closely to me." For this analysis, a mean of the responses was used to derive an overall adjustment to college score (range = 2.21-8.58; mean = 6.13; SD = 1.06). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .95 for this sample, denoting a high degree of consistency.

Results

Correlational analyses were first conducted to determine relationships between the study variables (p<.05). We found all of the independent variables (self-esteem, depression, and breaking up) were related to overall college adjustment in the expected directions (Table 1). We then used a multiple regression model to examine the extent to which our independent variables were predictive of college adjustment among first-year college students (p<.05). As demonstrated in Table 2, our model was statistically significant and accounted for approximately 34% of the variance in overall college adjustment. As hypothesized, students with a higher self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and who had not experienced a breakup since starting college reported they were more adjusted to college.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for All Study Variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Self-esteem	1.00			
2. Depression	-.63***	1.00		
3. Breakup	0.00	0.05	1.00	
4. Adjustment	.51***	-.53***	-.14*	1.00
Mean	3.16	2.02	0.32	6.13
SD	0.47	0.79	0.47	1.06

*p < .05. **p< .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2. Regression Analyses Predicting Adjustment

	B	SE B	β
Self-esteem	.69***	0.15	0.30
Depression	-.45***	0.09	-0.33
Breakup	-.27*	0.11	-0.12
Adjusted R2		0.34	
F		44.93***	

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Discussion and Implications

Although the results of our study are in line with our initial hypotheses, we were surprised to find how much of the variance in overall college adjustment these variables explained. This supports our assertion that non-cognitive variables are important factors to consider when examining college adjustment. Our findings also support previous research regarding the impact a romantic relationship breakup can have on students who are negotiating the challenges associated with transitioning into a new environment (Moller et al., 2003).

These findings suggest the need for programs and services that support students during these challenging times. Such programs are particularly important because, too often, institutional personnel are quick to dismiss the impact romantic relationships have on students' adjustment and academic performance. Therefore, it is important to educate faculty members regarding the impact romantic relationships can have on students' adjustment and subsequent achievement. For example, some students who are having difficulty dealing with their breakup might not be aware of the availability of short-term counseling services offered on many campuses for these purposes. Similarly, faculty who are often the frontline people who talk to students when they are dealing with these circumstances might also be unaware of the availability of these services.

Institutional personnel are in an ideal position to use the findings from this study to design programs geared toward assisting students through breakups and in building new social support systems. Providing students with those skills might also foster their feelings of institutional support. A sense of institutional connection is important as it has been shown to positively predict college adjustment (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). However, rather than incorporating such programs into new student orientations, we believe they should be incorporated into freshman seminar classes as previous findings have indicated the information at orientation can be perceived as very overwhelming to new students (Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). Furthermore, these programs are more likely to assist students when they are provided during, rather than prior to, the time when they are experiencing the greatest changes.

In addition, the relationship we discovered between depression and adjustment is in line with Dixon and Reid's (2000) argument that depression may be particularly problematic for college students as it can negatively interfere with school performance. Not surprisingly, our findings also confirmed the positive role self-esteem can play in facilitating college adjustment (Boulter 2002, Hertel, 2002; Toews & Yazedjian, 2007). In light of these findings, parent/family professionals could educate resident assistants (RAs) on how to identify the warning signs of depression among students. As many freshmen might face challenges during the transition to the college environment, it is important for RAs to be able to differentiate between those students who are experiencing the normative challenges associated with transitioning to college and those who might need professional help.

Parent/family professionals could also educate parents about the warning signs of depression. Doing so would allow parents to provide effective support to their children in times of need as many times parents might also be quick to disregard their children's behaviors as a typical part of the process of adjusting to college. Furthermore, if properly informed, parents can direct their children to the appropriate services on campus. Although the availability of these resources is discussed during new student orientations, Yazedjian and colleagues' (2007) have found that students do not always absorb that information and are unaware of the myriad of services available to them on their campuses. In sum, although many other studies have examined how cognitive variables facilitate college adjustment, the findings from our study suggest this process is greatly influenced by non-cognitive variables as well.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite these findings, the results of this study must be interpreted with some caution because of several methodological limitations. First, because the sample was selected from one institution and consisted of predominately White females, the results of this study might not be generalizable to other college students. In addition, those students who completed the questionnaire might have had different motivations for doing so than those who did not complete the questionnaire. For example, those who participated in our study might have been more adjusted to college than those who did not. Last, because the data were correlational in nature, no causal interpretations can be made.

Future research should follow up on the findings from this study by exploring what impact the nature of the romantic relationship prior to the breakup might have on college adjustment. For example, does the dissolution of a long-term relationship have a more negative impact on college adjustment than the dissolution of a relationship that is shorter in duration? In addition, scholars should consider how these variables also influence college achievement and whether adjustment mediates this relationship. Finally, future studies should longitudinally examine both cognitive and non-cognitive variables in order to clarify the role they play in predicting college adjustment and achievement over time.

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The Contribution of Family Members to First-Generation College Student Success

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Abstract

Research has shown that first-generation college students are educationally disadvantaged in a number of ways. While a variety of interventions have been recommended to increase the success of this population of students in higher education, little attention has been placed on the role families can play in supporting these students, specifically during the college years. The study outlined in this article approached the role of family in first-generation college student lives from a non-deficit perspective. Utilizing Gofen's (2009) family capital framework, this study found that a better appreciation of the role families play in successful first-generation student lives and a re-conceptualization of family support for college students will allow higher education institutions to recognize the efforts put forward by the families of these students and work more effectively with this parent and family population to increase student success.

Research has shown that first-generation college students are educationally disadvantaged in a number of ways (Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005). While a variety of interventions have been recommended to increase the success of this population of students in higher education, less attention has been placed on the role families can play in supporting these students, specifically during the college years. If colleges and universities are interested in closing the gap in persistence between first-generation students and their non-first-generation peers, greater attention must be given to this issue and new interventions must be designed (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996). Researchers agree that in order to better serve first-generation college students, we must enhance our understanding of the experiences of this population (London, 1989; Riehl, 1994).

This article presents a snapshot of a study aimed at examining the role families play in first-generation college student lives. The purpose of the study was to identify ways in which parents and family members assist in the persistence of successful first-generation college students. Little research exists on the influence of parents and family members on first-generation students and tends to view parents' low level of education as a background variable that hinders student persistence in higher education (Pike & Kuh, 2005). This approach suggests that parents and families of first-generation students make few, if any, valid contributions to the academic success of their students due to their lack of understanding of the benefits of college or the processes required to access higher education. A new approach must move away from the deficit framework through which parents have been viewed and emphasize the ways in which parents and families support first-generation students (Knight, Norton, Bentley & Dixon, 2004). By understanding the family dynamics at play in the lives of first-generation students, family support and involvement can be seen as a supplement to university services, helping to keep students in college, rather than a hindrance to this process. Accordingly, two research questions were explored. The main research question was: How does family support contribute to first-generation college student persistence? One sub-question was also examined: How do student perceptions of their parents and families influence their motivation to persist in higher education?

Literature Review

First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students, defined as "those whose parents' highest level of education is a high school diploma or less," are comprised of some of the most educationally disadvantaged students in higher education (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998, p.7). They are less likely to enroll in college (Choy, 2001), and when they do, they are more likely to attend two-year colleges (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) and less selective four-year institutions (Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation students are more likely to be ethnic minorities, tend to come from low-income families, are more frequently non-traditional age students and are more likely to have families and dependents of their own (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

First-generation students face an array of specific challenges once they arrive at college. They tend to have lower educational aspirations than students whose parents attended college (Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005), view themselves as less prepared for higher education when compared to their non-first-generation peers and are

more likely to report the completion of a two-year degree or vocational training as their final educational goal (Inman & Mayes, 1999). They tend to work more during college, are less likely to live on campus, participate in fewer college-sponsored volunteer and other extracurricular activities, are more apt to attend college on a part time basis and complete fewer credits (Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation students tend to have lower grade point averages than their non-first-generation peers (Riehl, 1994) and are less likely to graduate within a five year period (Ishitani, 2006). They are 130% more likely to leave college prior to degree completion when compared to students with two parents who completed a Bachelors degree (Ishitani, 2006).

Parent and Family Involvement
Increased parent involvement in college students lives has come to be viewed by some on college campuses across the country as a problem. However, Wartman and Savage (2008) pointed out that "helicopter parents" represent only a small and extreme minority. Parents of today's undergraduates are as varied and diverse as the students themselves. Furthermore, a growing body of research speaks to the many positive student outcomes that result from parent and family involvement at the college level. Parents can have a positive impact on students' transition and adjustment to college (Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson & Boswell, 2006) and can boost student academic achievement (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline & Russell, 1994; Fass & Tubman, 2002). Positive parent involvement and support has resulted in greater psychosocial and identity development for students (Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994; Winter & Yaffe, 2000), as well as better health and physical wellness (Abar & Turrisi, 2008). Parents and family members can offer the social and emotional support students need when facing new social settings in college (Cutrona et al., 1994) and can provide much needed social support and validation for ethnic minority students who may perceive the campus environment as uninviting or unsupportive (Rendon, 1994). Most importantly, parent involvement and support has been shown to increase the likelihood of persistence to degree attainment (Herndon & Hirt, 2004).

One population that has been largely left out of the parent and family involvement literature is first-generation college students. The contributions of parents to the persistence of first-generation college students can be overlooked since these parents often lack information about the college going process and other social capital needed to assist students in gaining access to and persisting in college (Coleman, 1988). The small body of literature available on first-generation students and their families has framed the issue around the idea that parents and family members act as barriers to student persistence (London, 1989; Pascarella et al., 2004; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Theoretical Framework

The present study took a different, non-deficit, approach to the issue of first-generation students and their families by looking for ways in which families contribute to the persistence of these students. As such, this study used "family capital," conceptualized by Gofen (2009), as a theoretical framework. Gofen (2009) defined family capital as, "the ensemble of means, strategies and resources embodied in the family's way of life that influences the future of their children," (p. 115). Unlike deficit views of parents and families in relation to first-generation student success, the family capital model recognizes the important and even critical role families play in the achievement of these students. Family

capital contains elements of both social and cultural capital, yet it encompasses more than either of these concepts (Gofen, 2009). Family capital recognizes the importance of relationships and knowledge within its framework, but also acknowledges the significance of parents' values and priorities on education as major influences on student educational attainment. Moreover, family capital takes the perspective that first-generation students persist in higher education as a result of their parents' influence, rather than in spite of their parents' lack of cultural knowledge and beneficial relationships (Gofen, 2009). Utilizing Gofen's (2009) family capital model aided in identifying ways that families support first-generation student persistence in college through the family's attitude toward education, relationships between family members and the values families have instilled in students.

Method

This study incorporated a qualitative, narrative methodology. A narrative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to gain a greater understanding of lived experience (Patton, 2002) and provides insight into a specific issue (Creswell, 2007). The goal of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of how parents and family members influence persistence among first-generation students in higher education by collecting and analyzing the stories of students and their family members. Data was collected through interviews with students, family members and university administrators, as well as reflexive field notes.

The student participants for the study included 11 first-generation college juniors and seniors at a large, private, academically competitive, urban research university in the west. The study site was chosen because of the lower numbers of first-generation students typically found at this type of institution. Understanding the reasons for first-generation student success at this type of university can provide clues as to how to increase numbers of first-generation students on academically competitive campuses and ensure their persistence to graduation. The study focused on traditional-aged college students since parents may play a stronger role in their lives. The final group of student participants consisted of six women and five men. Their ages ranged from 20 years old to 23 years old, with a mean age of 20.91 years old. Ten of the students were single and one was married. None of the students had children of their own. One student lived on campus, two lived off campus in university owned housing, seven students lived off campus in private, non-university housing, and one student lived at home with his parents. All seven of the students living off campus in private, non-university housing lived within two miles of the university. The majority of the students' families lived relatively close to the university. Nine of the students' parents lived within 30 miles of the institution. The other two students' parents lived over 300 miles away.

With regard to race and ethnicity, seven of the students self-identified as Latino/a, one as Chinese, and three as multiethnic or multiracial. Of these three students, one self-identified as part Vietnamese and part Chinese; one as Filipino, Chinese and Spanish; and the third self-identified as White, Spanish and Native American (Apache). Although no formal data regarding income status was collected, all 11 student participants appeared to come from low- to moderate-income backgrounds. This assumption was based on conversations with each of the students in which they indicated that they received both need and merit based financial aid, a factor that weighed heavily in their decision to attend

the university. Four of the students were working on double majors and one student had three majors. Their self-reported grade point averages ranged from 2.85 to 3.85 with a mean grade point average of 3.327.

Each student was asked to identify one family member he or she felt had made significant contributions to the student's persistence in higher education. While few studies have been conducted on the role of family members in college student persistence, even fewer studies have incorporated the perspectives of family members in this process (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Five of the students identified their mother to participate. Three students identified their father, two identified a brother and one identified a sister. Of the identified family members, four of the mothers, two of the fathers, both brothers and the sister agreed to participate, making nine family member participants in total. The level of education among family members ranged from elementary school to a few semesters at community college. Three of the family member interviews required a Spanish translator and one required a Vietnamese translator. Two university administrators identified in student interviews as having had an impact on student success were asked to participate as well.

Results

The data were analyzed through the lens of the family capital framework (Gofen, 2009), which includes three major categories of parent support and influence on student persistence. The three categories are attitudes toward education, interpersonal relationships and family values. Telling the stories of the student participants using Gofen's (2009) framework enabled me to focus on the efforts families make to help students get through college, which have been unrecognized throughout much of the literature.

Attitudes Toward Education
Parents and families who participated in the study believed that education for their student was extremely important and communicated this belief through their words and actions throughout the student's lifetime. Parents viewed higher education for their student as a way to make their own unrealized dreams of college come true. Additionally, higher education represented a way to establish greater financial security, gain access to better, less labor intensive jobs, have more "success" in general and find greater happiness in life. Parents wanted better opportunities for their children than they had and saw college as the means through which to achieve this. As a result of this perspective on higher education, parents and family members were involved in students' education in a number of ways and consistently emphasized education as a priority.

One parent shared that she and her husband worked in labor-intensive jobs throughout their lives and saw education for their children as a way to secure less physically demanding work. Her son recounted how his parents emphasized the need to go to college: "They both didn't want me to do, like, the sort of physical menial labor that they had to all their lives. So they really stressed education and going to a higher institution at some point throughout." Another student's mother wanted her daughter to go to college so she could have "more options other than just oh, find yourself a boy and get married" and have children. Parents' attitudes about their own education helped to shape their attitudes about their students' education as well. Parents and family members often used

themselves and other members of the family as examples of what their students should not do. One student shared that her parents wanted her to do well in college so she "won't be like them."

Parents' objective in their children's education resulted in fewer conflicts between students' school lives and family obligations such as family gatherings, house chores, caring for younger siblings and earning money to contribute to the household while in college. Parents expressed that school work came first. This point is in contrast with what much of the literature says about families of first-generation college students, which tends to suggest that parents are often unsupportive of students' higher educational pursuits (London, 1989; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Terenzini et al., 1996). The difference between the finding in the current study and those of previous research could be that most studies on first-generation college students have been conducted with students at community colleges and large public universities. Family obligations and responsibilities at home may play a significant role in students' decisions to attend these institutions, which creates greater tension between home and college life.

One of the biggest ways parents conveyed education as a priority was through involvement in their student's schooling prior to college. Many examples of involvement were as simple as engaging the student in a conversation about school or providing assistance or transportation to school related activities. Deeper forms of involvement included attending school functions, helping with homework, participating in parent portions of early college outreach programs, providing financial assistance to students in order to participate in school activities and talking about college with students. One student explained his parents' involvement:

> I don't think my dad ever missed one parent conference. He was always there at awards ceremonies. I also did four years of ROTC in high school, so he would come to all of our ceremonies and huge presentations. He was really, really involved. My mom wanted to be more involved, but she's usually the one that stays at home, takes care of my sister, just because she requires a lot of attention. She wanted to be more involved, but she just couldn't.

After students went to college, their families continued to be involved, most commonly through conversations students had with their families about school, either by telephone or when students went home to visit. University administrator participants felt that parents talking with their students about school and "checking in" with them are good practices to keep students focused on their college lives.

In addition to being involved in students' education, parents and family members conveyed the message that education is a priority through what they said and how they behaved. Parents nurtured the belief in students, starting at a young age, that students were college bound. Students explained that they "just knew" they would go to college based on the messages they received from their parents. For one student, college was something that was continuously emphasized by her parents. "Throughout high school and even during elementary and middle school they just instilled this belief in me that, like, you have to go to college." This student's brother confirmed that growing up, his parents' attitude was to "get your work finished and play afterwards."

Another student knew she was going to college since she was young and described her parents' feelings toward her education by saying:

> It's a priority. It has always been a priority. They may not know how the whole education system works here with applying to college or financial aid, or where to go when you need help. They might not know the logistics of it, but they have always pushed us to go to college and become the best we can. This student's parents did not have the procedural knowledge to help her get into college, but they knew it was important and continually emphasized college, which helped her to believe that higher education was in her future.

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships between students and family members played a key role in getting students in to college, motivating them to do well once they were there and assisting students through difficult times during college. All students expressed closeness to their parents and family members. Examples of close family relationships included the frequency with which students talked to their families on the phone, most at least once a day, as well as conversations students had with their families about their college experiences. One student's father commented that he knew "everything about her" and considered their relationship "more than parent and child, but that of friends."

In these relationships, students tended to be the focus within the family, with parents doing what they could to support students in their educational endeavors, giving them the best chance for a good education and ensuring their students were happy. One student described how his parents emphasized that the children came first:

> Well, that's one thing that I consider myself really lucky to have is a family that had both parents, and had them at home all the time. And that they did support me and loved me, and they would consistently reiterate the concept that their lives kind of revolved around us, and that they wanted to see our success.

Putting students first and giving them the best opportunities for a good education often required parents to make sacrifices. Sacrifices parents made ranged from taking time to help students with their activities in the face of competing priorities, to coming to the United States so that their children could have better opportunities. Families made financial sacrifices in order to give their children better options for education, including skipping work to attend college outreach programs and purchasing supplies needed for school.

A prominent feature within the parent-student relationship of all participants was the parent's belief in the student's abilities. Parents explained how they "always had confidence" in their children's abilities do to well in school and recognized their children's academic potential from an early age. Once students were in college, parents demonstrated their belief in their student's abilities by trusting them to do well in their coursework, even when parents did not know the details of students' academic performance or grades. At the same time, students demonstrated a great deal of respect for their parents and expressed a desire to please them. Students' need to please their parents was derived from the sense of responsibility they felt to their parents, their recognition of the sacrifices their parents made to give them greater opportunities, their

desire to represent the family in a positive light and their interest in making their family proud. Being able to help the family financially after graduation was another reason for students' desire to please their parents. If students had younger siblings, they worked hard to act as role models, encouraging their academic work, providing assistance and even taking on parenting roles.

Family Values

The close relationships students had with their families aided students in developing their personal value systems. These values helped students in achieving their goal of graduating from college. Families emphasized the importance of family solidarity and taught students to respect themselves and others. Students' drive to achieve in higher education was a value that had been nurtured by their families. They learned about the value of hard work through the examples their parents set for them. Giving back to society and helping others was a value that many parents instilled in students, noting that the more educated a person is, the easier it is to give back. Each of these values aided students in their journeys through college, motivating them to persist to graduation and helping them to navigate obstacles they encountered.

Student participants were highly motivated to succeed. They were committed to their goal of graduating from college and displayed a sense of determination that they attributed to learning from their parents. Much of students' drive and belief in themselves came from their resiliency in the face of adversity. Each of the students faced multiple hardships along their path through higher education. When encountering these obstacles, students often referred back to lessons they learned from their families to get them through tough times. In reflecting on the opportunities he had been given and his efforts to do his best to take advantage of them, one student noted, "If you're in the position where you've never had everything you've wanted and now you have this amazing opportunity, you're going to take advantage of it and do everything that you have to do to do a good job."

Additional Findings

Two findings were outside the scope of the family capital framework. First, while parents and families supported their students in many ways while in college, their understanding of the university system and knowledge of its resources was vague. Families knew little about students' academic lives on campus, and what they did know, they learned from their student, rather than from the university. As a result, parents did not have a complete picture of what life was like for their student at the university and were not aware of how they could further support their student's college going efforts. Some means of communication to parents implemented by the institution, such as websites and emails, did not reach the parents of these students. Only one of the parent participants had an email address. Also of significance, eight of the 11 students who participated in this study spoke a language other than English with their parents. Students noted that parents occasionally received letters and brochures from the university, but because these documents were in English, they did not understand them. The divide between families and the university was further exacerbated by the fact that families of student participants rarely came to campus, if at all. They did not participate in university programs, such as orientation or family weekend, designed to acclimate parents to university culture and provide them with information about institutional policies and procedures. Unfamiliarity with the university system, a lack of awareness that a particular event was occurring and costs associated with such programs were reasons cited by students as to why their parents did not attend.

The second finding outside the scope of Gofen's (2009) framework emerged during the interviews with administrator participants and points to the fact that some successful first-generation college students do not have supportive families. While the students who participated in the present study came from families who have supported their college going efforts, interviews with administrator participants indicated that this is not the case for all successful first-generation students at the university. For students with supportive families, these relationships can have a significant positive influence on student persistence and success in college. Students with poor relationships with their families can still be successful, but their families have little, if anything to do with their success and can even hinder student progress.

Discussion

This section will consist of a description of the four themes that emerged from the data, followed by implications of the study and suggestions for future research.

Themes

Family matters to first-generation student persistence. Students cited their families as a major reason for their academic success and persistence in college. Encouragement was a common way for parents and family members to support their student. This finding is in contrast to previous research which found that first-generation college students reported receiving less encouragement from family members to pursue higher education (Terenzini et al., 1996). Students' academic needs almost always came before family obligations and responsibilities. Throughout students' lives, parents shared their perspective that higher education would provide students with better job opportunities, greater financial stability and happier lives. Being involved in students' schooling was another way parents and family members aided in student persistence. Finally, parents taught students values such as respect, hard work and trust, which helped students to persevere in the face of challenges they encountered at college. Student participants recognized the sacrifices their parents made to give them educational opportunities. They had a tremendous amount of respect for their parents and were motivated to work hard and make them proud.

Family support. Family support manifests itself differently for first-generation students than for their non-first-generation peers. This study found that while parents are often unable to assist first-generation students with procedural aspects of college going, they support their students in other ways. Family support of student participants occurred overwhelmingly within the family home, at family gatherings away from campus, and over the phone when students were on campus. Parents and families visited campus rarely and had not attended organized campus events. They did not contact the university on their student's behalf. From the untrained campus administrator's perspective, these families may appear disinterested, unwilling or unable to support their students' college pursuits. In reality, parents cared very much about their students' success and did whatever they could to support them in college. This phenomenon is similar to the lack of recognition by K-12 school administrators of the multiple ways working class parents support their children's academic success in Lareau's (2003) and Knight et al.'s (2004) studies.

A great deal of trust was established between the students in this study and their parents. Parents did not know the particulars of what students were studying or the grades they got, yet parents trusted that their students were doing well academically, which in fact, they were. Students were aware of the trust their parents had placed in them and worked hard to maintain that trust. Since parents lacked familiarity with college processes, students were required to navigate the university without assistance from their families. Whereas parents of non-first-generation students may be more inclined to complete procedural tasks for the student, students in this study had learned to do these things on their own. Further, parent participants were supportive of students, but recognized them as adults, nurtured their independence and did not think it was their place to be overly intrusive in their students' college lives.

Conflicts between student responsibilities and family roles. Conflicts between successful students' responsibilities at college and their roles within the family were minimal. The data suggest that some of the most successful first-generation college students, able to persist at an academically competitive, private, research institution, have families who have made education the priority over family obligations, often at the expense of additional work and sacrifice on the part of the parents. Students acknowledged that their parents consistently placed students' educational needs before family needs, which provided further motivation for students to achieve in college. Each student was able to identify situations when parents excused them from family obligations in order to study or participate in school sponsored activities. Students recognized the sacrifices parents made in order to allow students to put their education first.

Disconnect between families and the institution. A disconnect between the families of first-generation students and the institution exists. Overall, parents knew few resources available to students on campus. Many of the ways the university communicates with parent constituencies were unavailable to these families, including email and websites, which require computer and internet access. The majority of the parents spoke a language other than English as their primary language. None of the families in the study participated in programs such as orientation or family weekend due to factors associated with the cost to attend, lack of knowledge about the programs, feelings of intimidation and fears that they would not understand anything. Not knowing about resources available on campus hinders families' ability to support student persistence because families are unable to guide students regarding where to get help at the university.

Implications
This study has five primary implications for professional practice.

The first implication is that colleges and universities must recognize that parents and families can have a significant positive impact on first-generation college student success and persistence. Results show that family support of first-generation students may not always be easily seen from the college administrator perspective. Findings suggest that a re-conceptualization of parent support and involvement in college is necessary in order to fully recognize the contributions these parents and families make to student success. Though families may not participate in events on campus or contact the university, this

does not mean they are not providing support to their students. Findings challenge previous literature that indicates parents have a minimal or even negative impact on first-generation student persistence in higher education. Data indicate that parents of successful first-generation students have high academic expectations for their students and encourage their students to have high educational aspirations.

The second implication is that universities must provide communication and services that reach parents of first-generation college students in order to leverage their full potential as partners in student success. Building stronger connections with parents and families is one way for institutions to provide additional support to first-generation college students. University administrators cannot assume all parents of undergraduates attended college. In order to adequately address the needs of this parent population, parents' lack of familiarity with college processes, potential language barriers, technological barriers and financial barriers must be considered. While not all first-generation students come from low-income households, they are disproportionally represented within this group and financial considerations should be a priority. Since much of the support these families provide takes place in the home, it is critical not only to encourage families to come to campus, but also to find effective ways to communicate essential information and reach them at home, so that they can serve as the best possible resource for their student. If we do not engage these parents and family members with the university, we miss an opportunity to provide students with added support through networks that are already in place. By cultivating relationships with first-generation students' parents and families, university administrators have an opportunity to break the cycle of cultural reproduction and impact the success of these students in significant ways.

The third implication for professional practice is that universities should reach out to first-generation students on campus and encourage them to get their families more involved with the institution. For these families, coming to campus and participating in parent and family programs can be intimidating. Students may be able to ease some of this apprehension by encouraging their families to attend and by participating with parents in some programs.

Fourth, institutions of higher education must train staff to work with parents of first-generation college students. Since lower numbers of first-generation college students attend academically competitive institutions, parent and family office staff at these universities may not have as much experience working with the parents and families of this group of students.

Finally, it is critical for universities to know their parent constituency. Just as students on college campuses vary in background and experience, so do their parents. Institutions can more effectively address parent needs by knowing parent demographics.

Limitations and Future Research
A few limitations of the study should be noted. Participants included students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, making it impossible to draw conclusions about students from any one particular race or ethnicity. Future studies may wish to focus on students who share the same racial or ethnic background, as findings from this type of study may draw on cultural norms and values as well. The study incorporated the experiences of both male and female students. Therefore findings are not gender specific. Future studies could focus on one gender or compare experiences between males and females. While ethnicity and gender are important aspects to consider, the core goal of the present study was to understand the experiences of first-generation students, regardless of these factors.

Finally, because the study was conducted at only one site, and due to the small and intentional sample size, results cannot be assumed to be generalizable to students at other colleges and universities. Further research should be conducted with first-generation students at various types of institutions. Still, the findings of this research have implications that provide guidance to university leaders when working with first-generation students and their families. It is recommended that future studies continue to take a non-deficit approach, seeking to identify ways families contribute to student success rather than framing the issue so that families appear deficient in some way.

Conclusion
The data from the present study have shown that family support and involvement can play an important role in helping first-generation students persist in college. Students derived much of their motivation to succeed in college from their families. The study challenged two common perceptions, that parents and families of first-generation college students are uninvolved or lack interest in their student's success in higher education and that, as a standard, parents are intrusive in their college students' lives. Findings clearly indicate that the families of first-generation students in this study were heavily invested in their students' education and supported students in a variety of ways, often resulting in added work and sacrifice for the parents. Additionally, while these families have encouraged their students' educational goals, they have not been overly involved in their students' day to day lives on campus, giving students the autonomy to make decisions and complete developmental tasks on their own. This finding confirms previous research that the term "helicopter parent" does not apply to all parents of undergraduates (Wartman & Savage, 2008; Wolf, Sax & Harper, 2009). By re-conceptualizing our idea of family support of college students, strengthening partnerships with this group of underserved families and viewing their support of first-generation students as an additional resource to leverage in students' higher education efforts, universities can enhance the environment on campus that promotes first-generation student success in college.

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The Journey from the Known to the Unknown:

My Process from Career Services Professional to Parent Resource Professional

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IIn Summer of 2010, Marjorie Savage, Editor of the AHEPPP Journal, received a call from Marvin Roth. Mr. Roth had recently been asked to make the transition from Career Services to the field of parent and family programs. Ms. Savage asked Mr. Roth to consider six questions as he moved through his transition: 1) Would he consider tracking his journey? 2) Where will he look for information? 3) What resources that he needs are not readily available? 4) Who are the resources in his own institution that are most helpful? 5) Who is not helpful? 6) What resources could AHEPPP provide that would be helpful to his transition and to other professionals starting a parent/family program? This personal journal, documenting Mr. Roth's journey of exploration and evolution, serves as his response to those questions.

The Beginning
This is the first week of my tenure as Parent Resources Liaison. The program does not even have a formal name yet. I am leaving a position in Career Services where I have been director for 10 years with a staff of 15 to assume the singular position of "Parent Liaison". In addition, I am also separating from career services, a field where I have been a leader for over 30 years. It is an emotional week. The only things that help to ease the pain of a change like this are that my new office is still near the old one, and I can now relate to my former staff as both friends and colleagues. So many good friends, what was I thinking when I told the Dean that I was willing to make this change? I have successfully notified former career service colleagues at other institutions and am now prepared to move on. The field of parent and family programs is completely new to me. In fact, I did not even know it was a field.   I remembered that a friend from a previous institution where I worked had begun in parents programming nearly 20 years ago. I telephoned her and began to gather early nuggets of information. I begin to realize that there are a variety of models for parent programming, and that more institutions across the country have programs relating to parents and families than I realized.

Heading Into the Frontier
I am learning that parent and family programs are a relatively new field, but a rapidly growing one. It is obvious that some institutions have had parent offices for many years while other colleges and universities are in the early stages of developing their parent program. I cannot help but view myself as an explorer, leaving familiar territory and heading to the new frontier. I see myself in an outpost where there are raw materials, but not many manufactured goods. This is not necessarily a bad thing. As with frontier outposts, success lies in foraging for other resources and exploring for other villagers. This is the way to build a bigger community.

During my second week as Parent Resources Liaison, I begin attending presentations by the different schools within the University of Pittsburgh during their two-day summer advising sessions. These presentations are required for all students, and since parents accompany their sons and daughters, they offer a good opportunity to begin connecting. The variations of delivery and messages are quite interesting. Observing these sessions, I realize how segmented the nature of our messages to parents have become.

I understand the importance of building strong bridges with parents, such an important stakeholder group. I do not want the various presenters to think I am trying to "take over" the niche they have created, but I believe I can be helpful in strengthening their connections to the parents and families of our students. I begin marketing myself as a first contact with parents to buffer some of the calls these offices may otherwise get. On the other hand, I do not want them to think that they should be forwarding parent enquiries to me if they go to them first. We must avoid too many hand-offs. This is a delicate balancing act.

This week, I am continuing to reach out to other professionals across the country. I decided to do what I had to do and reach out to a total stranger for more help. I placed a call to Marjorie Savage, Parent Program Director at the University of Minnesota. She showed me how considerate and thoughtful she is of the novice out here in the outposts.

Her insights were of great help, and they led me to more outreach efforts.

I speak to two more professionals by telephone as I anxiously await the week ahead. This week should be interesting. All of our Student Affairs Directors are taking a bus trip to two of our university's benchmark institutions. Both schools have parent and family programs so I am anticipating meeting their professional staff and learning about all they do.

The bus trip was tiring, but very helpful. It was especially beneficial in that our entire group heard about parent programs by the program directors of the institutions we visited. Everyone came away with a great deal of new information and a new appreciation for the journey to establish a parent/family program office that we are embarking on. I also spoke individually with each director and got to observe an actual parent orientation presentation at one institution that was coincidentally being held the day we were there.

July

Defining and Redefining
One month has passed. The benchmarking trip has elevated the vision of the program considerably. Our goals are more defined. We are now in full speed mode to have all of our structural work done by New Student Orientation, which is coming up in approximately one month. This means a new website, written publications, an e-newsletter, and my presence in all parent sessions sponsored during Orientation. I also encouraged the Dean to rename the program Parent and Family Resources. In turn, my title also underwent a change to Parent and Family Liaison. In addition, my position was reassigned from Residence Life to Student Life, since that is the department that oversees New Student Orientation and Family Weekend. I will also be moving to a different office with space for a small reception area for parents when they visit. All of these changes make a great deal of sense.

A helpful hint for others starting a new program might be to avoid printing business cards and other materials until you are sure of your title, the name of the program, and other details. Often times when creating something new, titles and departmental names can seem like a moving target. After a week of vacation, it is now week six. This week begins with the preparation of a comprehensive program budget. Fortunately, it includes professional development funding as well. I am excited that it includes membership in the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP) as well as travel expenses to their conference in November. I am looking forward to meeting with other professionals in person.

August

Building Connections
Week eight has arrived. Two months, and my nomadic life has finally come to rest, or at least I hope it has. A "permanent" office is located for me near a colleague who plans Family Weekend as well as the parent sessions of New Student Orientation. I think this new arrangement will allow for more effective communications since I had originally been assigned space in a different building. Current projects include finishing the Parent and Family web site, the written communications pieces promoting our program, and a new Parent Handbook.

I have an opportunity to attend the local Alumni Club Student Send-off. The picnic in a park near campus is a pleasant way to meet a group of parents and introduce our new program. I solicit useful input from parents in attendance regarding the type of information they might find useful. I regret that I was not available to do more of these. Next year I will build the Send-offs into the summer schedule.

It is week nine, and I am ramping up the meetings with department and school representatives who have significant parent contact. I now realize that "you can't turn over a stone without finding a place where parents are found." (Forgive me, just a metaphor.) That may sound derogatory, but is not intended to be. I have begun asking each person I meet for the names and contact information of additional resources.

I have successfully connected with Admissions, the Chancellor's Office, the Provost's Office, the Honors College, Health and Rehab Sciences, the College of General Studies, and the central information office for Housing and Dining Services (a huge focus for first year student parents). Other offices I intend to contact include Arts and Sciences, Financial Aid, the Business Office, and Academic Records. Everyone I meet is ecstatic that this program was started, and everyone reveals a hint of relief in their voice.

Another week, and more of the same. I am enjoying connecting and, in many cases, reconnecting with staff I have not spoken with before or for some time. My new realization is that I cannot possibly be well versed on the myriad of issues that are likely to come my way this first semester. As I have begun telling the offices I interact with, my goal is to be able to "scoop the top layer" of questions that parents present. My involvement will hopefully relieve other offices of some of the questions they receive.

It is week ten, and next week begins New Student Orientation, the start of the school year, and the public launch for our program and our promotional efforts to parents and families. I will be far more engaged in Orientation than ever in the past because I will try to be wherever the parents are. We have several sessions specifically for parents and I will be in attendance to pass out contact information. I will also be in the alumni parent sessions and the move-in rest stations. I suspect parents will grow tired of seeing me, but I think this is the best way for them to begin thinking of me as a resource when they have questions and concerns.

New Student Orientation
The time is here - my first New Student Orientation as the Parent and Family Liaison. This year I vow to be at every session that focuses on parents. Fifteen sessions and multiple evening hours later, I have met and interacted with many parents and families. It has been great! I have had parents calling out my name and saying, "Are you here too? Do you ever go home?" Every parent I meet seems delighted that this new office and my position were created. Several say it gives them a feeling of relief that there is someone at the university for them and advocating for them. I am touched and pleased during the parent brunch when I see red-eyed parents filled with emotion benefitting from the interaction and moral support coming from other parents. The quality of the interactions happens naturally and is a fulfilling thing to observe.
In all of the many conversations I have had during Orientation this summer, the comment of one mother resonates with me and continues to stand out in my memory. It sounds as if it could be a tag line for our department. She looked earnestly in my eyes and said, "I just

want to be informed, not intrusive." That is such a healthy attitude, and I would hope one that will be shared by all parents. Perhaps that is wishful thinking, but I hope not.

Our parent sessions are well attended and well received. Near the end of the week I am invited to attend a Parents' session at a nearby institution where a parent professional from a larger institution gave the parents' presentation for their move-in day. The format is very creative and covered many relevant topics. I think the parents attending are hearing wonderful information and advice. The presenter is Marjorie Savage, and I am finally able to meet her in person. There are sessions like this at schools all over the country, as well as articles in the popular press and journals that demonstrate the growing importance of parent programs on college campuses today. This field is no longer a service that is "nice to have," it has become a necessity. Eleven weeks after its inception, the Office of Parent and Family Resources is launched and in flight.

September

Academic Year Begins

The new academic year is underway. More than thirty years ago, in my first career services job after grad school, I wondered whether I could do that job. I didn't feel prepared. I was nervous when my first student appointment came in. After it was over, I thought, "That wasn't so bad". Very similar feelings arise now when I answer my first parent call, with a very similar result. I am beginning to receive emails from parents interested in being involved with our program. I am pleased that my earliest contacts are parents being proactive about building a relationship. In a recent meeting with a group of parents, a couple of new initiatives were explored and a pilot program initiated to create regional parent clubs. We will start with three informal gatherings in different locations. We are also considering a parents council, but need to determine how that might look.

The pace of inquiries is picking up, and in mid-September I am seeing a flurry of concerned parents. I know from the literature that these inquiries are very normal. Calls include a parent concerned about her first-year daughter being able to find friends, a parent of a first-year student who has a conduct violation, and additional questions regarding other conduct issues. Parents need support and suggestions for helping their sons and daughters be successful. I see the urgency of each of their calls. For every parent who calls, the incident in question is an immediate concern, and they want someone to listen and understand.

A student death on campus has led to an additional responsibility to my job description. In communicating the process for closing a deceased student's University account, I will now serve as the liaison between families and the Registrar's and Business Offices. I find this role challenging given the circumstances and the significant sensitivity required. The family does find the assistance helpful.

With the end of September fast approaching, the institution is in the final stages of readying for Family Weekend. We have a large number of registrants, over 4,000 individuals, a 30% increase over last year. Our event is often held in conjunction with Homecoming, but this year we have a separate Family Weekend. Everyone is excited that this many families will be attending the event.

Family Weekend

My first Family Weekend has come and gone. The hours were long and tiring, but the activity level and excitement of families was great. Check in on Friday was challenging with several thousand family members checking in. Everyone had a positive attitude, and we were able to process all registrants quickly, which is definitely an important issue for parents. We had a lounge available for parents and families where they could meet their students and where I was stationed with handout materials on our new Association and to answer questions. It was a good way to connect with a large number of families.

I am so pleased that a few parents I met at Orientation came up and greeted me by name. Others that I assisted over the last few weeks also introduced themselves. This helps to personalize this service beyond being a "call-in help line." These personal connections reinforce our goal of developing relationships. I know this will not happen with hundreds or thousands of parents, but even a few families help make the connections and outreach real. One of the weekend activities included a program called Family Match Game, a takeoff on the Dating Game. The competing families and audience loved it. The laughter and energy in the room was great. Our team won the football game--that always helps too. On Sunday we had information sessions about our Association as well as ones hosted by Career Development and the Judicial Director. That same morning, just before the first session was to start, a parent came to my office and talked with me for 30 minutes about a concern she had about her student. It appears clear now that the word is out about our program and the resources we can provide.

The end of the month brings increased daily contacts from parents, both through email and telephone. It is also evident that each contact generates several follow-up internal contacts to properly address the inquiry. This may decrease as I become more familiar with protocol. So far though, the questions/issues have all been quite different – each presenting a new learning curve. I thought I knew the University, but it is obvious how much I did not know in spite of having been here ten years. The first full month is history and we move forward.

October

Having an Impact

The seemingly never-ending variety of questions and concerns is very interesting. I am definitely interacting with a wider array of University staff in this job than in my prior job, just searching for answers to questions. There are occasional questions I can answer, but more that require digging for information. I have identified one issue in particular, though, that is problematic. It involves the parent of a student who has encountered a judicial infraction, and for some reason the circumstances are such that they think their student has been too harshly treated.

The calls I have gotten are not asking how the judicial process works or for clarification on the code of conduct. The student has done something contrary to university policy, and parents want a different outcome than what the university imposed. Parents assume my role is an advocate to help them "fix things." In these cases I am quite sure they are not satisfied with my customer service because they do not receive the outcome they are seeking. When I explain to them that I do not have any power or impact on the judicial system, they are disappointed. These are difficult lessons for students to learn, especially

the outstanding student who makes some bad choices early in the semester. They will likely end up with a suspension. It is difficult not to get caught up in these situations, because I can certainly sympathize with the parents as they try to shift their focus from fixing things for their student to helping their son or daughter take responsibility for his/her behavior, which is the university's recommended response.

On the other hand, there are times I feel like I could be having an impact. A mother called despairing about her junior son who transferred into Engineering from one of our regional campuses. He is having difficulties with classes and his social integration. I suggested several resources that might help him interact with more students, and I then reached out to Engineering and spoke to an advisor who could readily relate to the student's situation. I asked the advisor to meet with the student, and he agreed to do so. I am hoping these resources help the student to become better integrated into his new environment. His mother was very appreciative. The outcome appears quite positive with the student connecting with several engineering students and gaining access to academic support. Oh, here is a jolt into a new reality for me. The mother of a first-year student called to ask a question. As it turns out, she is a returning parent whom I had helped a few weeks earlier. She said," I have a question and did not know who to ask and I have your number in my speed dial." In the words of this text savvy generation, "OMG!" I guess this is a good thing. She thought of my office first, but I never saw this coming, being on a parent's speed dial!

We are beginning the planning process for creating regional parent clubs and a parent council. We have reached out to a number of colleagues at other institutions to benchmark, and we met with our Alumni Association to see where alumni regional clubs and parent groups could collaborate. The Council is most likely going to begin with clubs being brought on line gradually. As a pilot club initiative, three parent volunteers will host a parent event near their homes as a way to establish a regional presence. One will be next month. I look forward to seeing how this works.

I have another, "I didn't see that coming." It sounds so innocuous, "We will publish a monthly e-newsletter." As the saying goes, "I am not a communications professional and I don't play one on TV!" I have written articles on specific topics about which I am familiar, but I never published a newsletter, let alone a monthly newsletter. Our first newsletter went out last month with very positive feedback, but I did not realize that I should have been planning these multiple issues in advance. This month I am scrambling for content and trying to get the newsletter to our designer in a timely fashion. This month did not go so well. I have learned. We created an editorial team to help with gathering and editing articles. We will be planning the rest of the year next month. I do not want to have to stress over deadlines again and put other people under deadline stress either. Lesson learned.

November

The Newsletter Process
I am beginning to feel that one of my hats is that of an editor. The newsletter process flowed into this month. We wanted to get November out mid-month and at the same time start to write January articles so we can get a jump on it with the holidays coming. I have gotten better about engaging guest writers on specific topics. We have most of the issue

outlined and written. The more they write, the less I have to write.

The other topic we are focusing on in addition to helping parents is the establishment of a Parents Council. We have developed an organizational structure and goals for the group. It will be a group of hopefully 20 family representatives distributed by class year of their student. They will focus on ways of helping us enhance parent programs. The membership requirements of the group will also include a contribution to the University. This creates an element of uncertainty, since we are not sure how many parents will be interested or able to do this. It remains to be seen.

I am excited about attending my first, in fact the first, AHEPPP meeting. The timing for this conference could not be better. I have a few months of experience in which to frame my questions and also to put the information gathered into a proper context. I have always valued professional organizations and the networking with colleagues in my past 30 years in career services. I look forward to the same relationship with AHEPPP. I have been very impressed with how warm and welcoming parent and family professionals have been with me during my information seeking stage. My goal is to learn and interact with as many professionals as possible.

AHEPPP Conference
My goal was realized. The conference was great from start to finish. It was helpful to see which institutions are doing interesting things. I feel like we have so far to go to be on a par with many of these longer tenured programs. I must keep reminding myself that we have come a long way in a short time and that I cannot expect to be in "full bloom" in just a few months. I need to keep my sights set on immediate goals and build toward longer-term achievements.

With each session of the conference I was able to add something to my toolbox of ideas. Unfortunately this experience was somewhat one directional in that I did not have a great deal to contribute to others, but that will change in the future I am sure. A colleague attended the conference with me, allowing us to split the dual breakout sessions and cover the entire content of the conference. This was an outstanding conference and an excellent use of time and resources.

A topic that I began thinking about early on in my tenure was how do I assess my activities and our programs. How do we prove accountability? I put a few processes in place to receive feedback on services, but this was not comprehensive. Also, it was clear we do not have a good data management system. And, to be completely honest, we have no data management system! I have a binder of parent interaction notes. The importance of data management/assessment is one message that came out of the AHEPPP conference loud and clear. We need to be able to record and track everything we do. To this end we are now exploring the design of a comprehensive database system that will allow us to manage our total effort from keeping family records, to tracking their activity, to maintaining records of how families are helped,. This is perhaps the most important mission I have at this point, because it helps us to not only do our job effectively but to report our results as well. We are reaching out to a group with this expertise to see what can be designed.

I mentioned earlier that we were doing some pilot regional activities with our first one focused around an athletic event. I will be attending a football game viewing party at a

sports bar in Philadelphia. This will be our first such activity hosted by a parent. It will be interesting to see how this goes.

The event went off well, and other than a team loss on the field and a smaller headcount than had RSVP'd the event, the interactions and connections that were made were very positive. In addition to the parent who hosted the event, one of the dads who attended volunteered to help coordinate an event in the future, which was a positive development. A co-worker will be attending a second parent outreach event next weekend in Buffalo, and hopefully that will be a positive experience for those parents as well.

December

Parent Engagement
The second regional event occurred and by all accounts it was successful. Most everyone who registered came and by the most important measure - parent engagement - it was great. The staff person in attendance reported that parents immediately began interacting with each other. In fact, she said the group barely watched the game because they were so engrossed in conversation. Parents overwhelmingly asked for more of these gatherings. They are obviously eager to connect with other parents who live in their same area. This program will definitely grow.

What Have I Learned?
Why do a journal anyway? What is the value of retrospection and reflection? In a word, "enormous." In some ways I feel like I started this journey into parent and family programs last week, and in other ways it seems like years. The reality of the "miles covered" within six months is represented in these notes. I can hardly believe the progress this program has made in such a short time. This helps me realize the tangible results of the Parent Handbook, web site, e-newsletter, marketing materials, the beginnings of a Parent Council, developing a trust level with parents who reach out to me, and more plans in the process. I am excited and gratified at the support and guidance of colleagues both internally and, as I observed earlier, externally. I learned that everyone on a campus can be a resource and that areas I didn't even know existed hold a piece of the puzzle. I also learned that parent and family program professionals across the country are always generous with their time and always willing to share both their ideas and their publications. These results would not have occurred without these resources.

My University is committed to parent and family programming, and will continue to build this program. Institutional support is critical, and the rewards down the road will hopefully be found in increased retention, increased student success and satisfaction, and the development of loyal parent ambassadors long after their student graduates. Looking back over my notes, I realize how much effort this journey has required, and yet it was exhilarating. I hope anyone new to this field will grow to embrace it as so many have before and I have in these past six months.

Editor's Note

Much can be learned from the experiences of others. By printing this "Journey from the Known to the Unknown," it is hoped that it will prove helpful for colleagues starting new programs and that it can serve as a useful reflection piece for those professionals with more established programs. Some of the insights offered for the new professionals continue to be the pillars of continuing programs.

1. Parent Offices continue to be on the front line for parent questions and concerns.

2. Parent and Family Program colleagues from around the country are always willing to share and to serve as resources. (Hint: AHEPPP Listserv is a valuable tool for quick communication and answers to burning questions)

3. Institutional "buy-in" is critical regarding the importance of parents as they relate to the underlying mission of student development, student persistence, and student/family long-term affinity for the institution.

4. When starting a new program or making changes to an existing program, don't print business cards too soon....parent and family programs can often be a "work in progress"!

5. The field of parent/family services is no longer "just a nice office to have" but one that is seen as vital and contributing to student success.

6. The issues confronting students and their families today are rarely routine.

7. One's job in parent/family programs is never done, and yes, publication deadlines are always just around the corner!

The Editors welcome any comments about the insights printed here as well as suggestions the readership would like to share with new professionals just starting out in the field of Parent and Family Programs.

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