Renegotiating Parents' Role: A Case Study Examining

Parent /College Official Communication and Messaging During Freshman Onboarding

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Abstract

Renegotiating Parents' Role: A Case Study Examining Parent /College Official Communication

and Messaging During Freshman Onboarding

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Parents of incoming students and college officials often engage during freshman onboarding to support college student success. Elements of college success includes the student's development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills; and success is often measured by annual retention and persistence to degree. This qualitative case study answers the central question of this investigation and fills a gap in the literature by determining that the communication and messaging taking place between parents and college officials during freshman onboarding predominately met each party's intentions and expectations and established a foundation by which the two stakeholders can work to support student success. Eight parents and nine college officials participated in interviews where they shared their goals for students and voiced their interpretations of the messages they received during freshman onboarding. Five themes emerged from the data: (a) parents are active participants in their student's college investigation; (b) parents and college officials are focused on strengthening readiness for the safe and successful transition from home to college; (c) parents and college officials share common goals for students;(d) parents acknowledge receipt of college officials' primary messages; and (e) parents and college officials align on issues but differ on tactics to address the issues. The findings of this study, coupled with a thorough analysis of the literature on the streams of: college readiness, messaging and onboarding, led to three major results: (a) parents and college officials are

focused and united on their goal of developing students' non-cognitive skills; (b) parents and college officials place a low priority on critical measures of college student success; and (c) the foundation has been established for a partnership between parents and college officials focused on student success. Three recommendations were offered to parents and college officials: (a) increase focus on student cognitive development during freshman onboarding; (b) establish intentional communication and messaging promoting the goal of student retention and persistence to attaining the degree; and(c) strengthen the structure by which parents and college officials can communicate with each other. Three recommendations were offered to the community beyond the scope of this investigation: (a) conduct similar studies with stakeholders at other higher education institutions; (b) conduct studies focused on parents who hail from similar educational and cultural backgrounds; and (c) measure outcomes of efforts to focus on cognitive skill development, retention and persistence to degree.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Introduction to the Problem

College student success, often measured by annual retention and graduation rate, is assessed annually in accordance with federal requirements for colleges receiving federal funds (Bain, Gandy &Golighity, 2012; Koutsoubakis, 1999; Krause et al., 2005; McInnis, 2001; Student Right to Know Act of 1990). Nationally, the retention rate from freshman to sophomore year in 2011 was 65%; the graduation rate was 40.3% over the standard six year time-frame (Alarcon & Edwards, 2013; NCES, 2011).

Colleges and universities are concerned about retention and graduation rates due to their impact on government funding, community trust, institutional status, and in some cases, financial survival (Alarcon & Edwards, 2013; Bain, Gandy & Golightly, 2012; Koutsoubakis, 1999; Krause, 2005; McInnis, 2001). To illustrate the importance of government funding to students and colleges, the most recent data on government distribution of financial aid was examined. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014) 85% of first-time, full-time college students in 2011 received federal, state and institutional financial aid which represents a20% increase since 2003. A student who attended a four year, private college, received an average of $15,428 in financial aid. Tables 1 & 2 provide a visual display of the aid distribution by institutional type and average dollar amount awarded. Government officials have been attempting to link financial aid eligibility to a college's retention rate, but thus far have been unsuccessful in that ongoing effort (Lederman, 2007; Lowry, 2009; Titus, 2006).

Table 1

Percentage of Students Receiving Financaial-aid 2011/2012
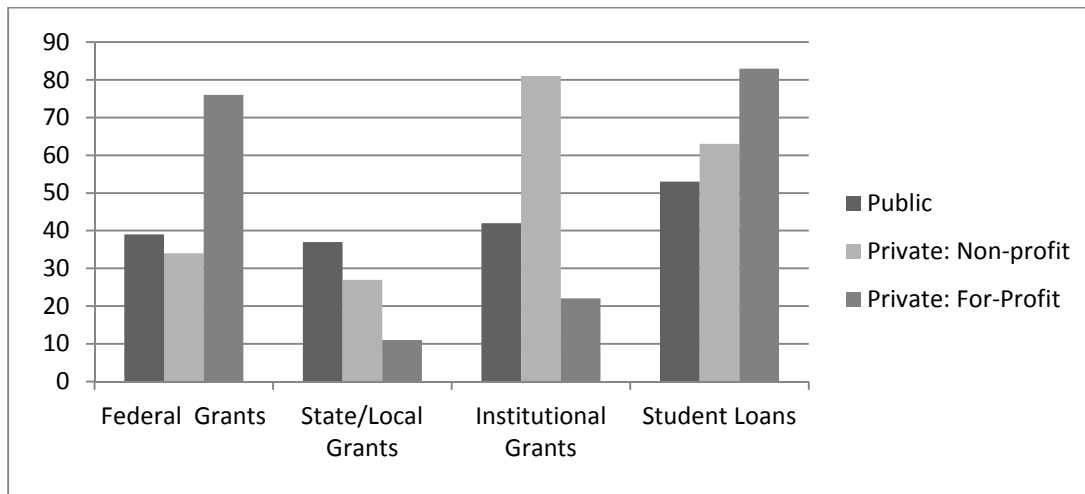
Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013

Table 2

Average aid Awarded Undergraduate Students 2011/2012
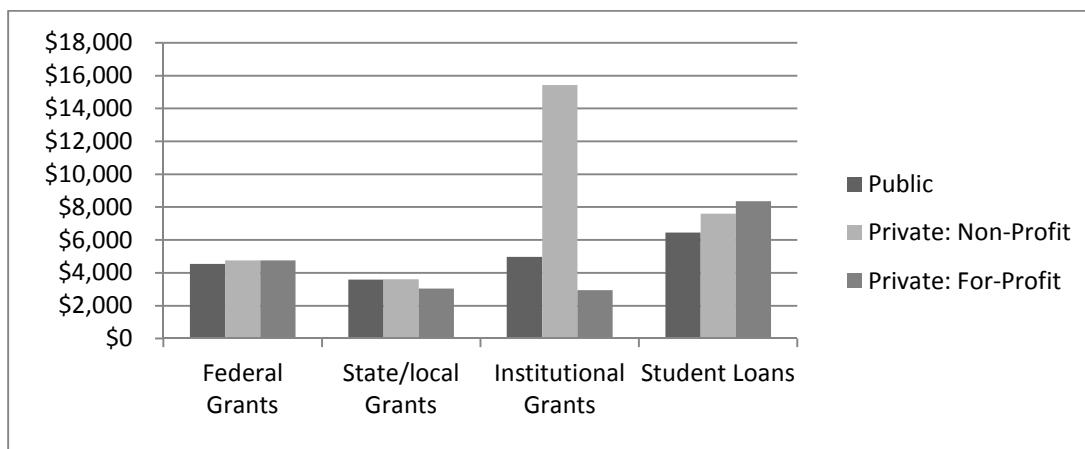
Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013

Another important financial consideration for college officials and students relates to anticipated funds that each had hoped to realize as a result of degree completion. Some colleges are tuition driven and rely on revenue generated from tuition to fund their operation (Fincher, 2002). Other colleges are state-affiliated, receiving considerable revenue from local and state government (Fincher, 2002; Fitch, 2014). Some colleges have significant endowments which allow them to offset lower than anticipated admission and/or retention (Conti-Brown, 2011). Of the 3.2 million students who graduated from our nation's high schools in 2012, 66.2% enrolled in college by October of the subsequent year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Student interviews and surveys over the past ten years demonstrate that students identify a college degree as their path to employment and financial opportunity (Pryor, et al. 2012; Schultz & Higbee, 2007). The United States Department of Labor (2014) validates students' perceptions that there is a correlation between level of degree attained and access to employment. The most recent unemployment data, identified in Table 3 shows unemployment for those with only a high school diploma in 2013 was 7.5%, and earnings were approximately $651 per week; while those with a bachelor's degree had a 4% unemployment rate and earned an average of $1,108 per week. Of course, there are additional important and complex reasons that influence students' decisions to seek post-secondary education, just as there are numerous and complex reasons for their dropping out of college.

Table 3

Earnings & Unemployment Rate by Education Level

Education Level	Unemployment %	Median Weekly Income
Doctoral Degree	2.2%	$1,623
Master's Degree	3.4%	$1,329
Bachelor's Degree	4.0%	$1,108
Associate's Degree	5.4%	$777
Some College (no degree)	7.0%	$727
High School Diploma	7.5%	$651
No High School Diploma	11.0%	$472

Source: U.S. Dept. Labor 2013

Chapter Two of this study further explores the factors impacting student retention, a topic extensively researched. Stakeholders who affect or have the ability to affect retention and degree completion have been the focus of several of these studies. These studies identify three primary stakeholders contributing to student success: community, parents and college (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008).Community, once represented by the church (Cohen &Krisker, 2010), are now represented by local, state, and national government (Cross &Joftus, 1997).

The government supports students by establishing educational goals, creating laws intended to promote those goals, and providing financial support to achieve them (Braceras, 2002; Burd, 2003; Cross & Joftus, 1997; Holtz, 2010; NCES, 2003; Titus, 2006). One federal law which dictates the parameters of stakeholder interaction is the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act or FERPA (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015; White, 2013).Among other things, FERPA, established in 1974, restricts parents' access to student information without explicit consent from the student; potentially limiting parental interaction on matters that may impact student retention (Kiel & Knoblauch, 2010). As noted by Gross (2011), the mandates of

FERPA are vague and consequently, there may be distinctions between what the law says and how colleges interpret it.

Parents of college students who had historically assumed a passive role in their child's education have emerged as active and influential participants in all facets of the college experience including direct interaction with the college their child attends(Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001; Howe& Strauss, 2000; Jeynes, 2005; Pryor, Hurtado, Sharkness & Korn, 2008). Both parents and their students embrace their collaboration between each other, which takes as the student shifts toward academic and social independence (Nadelson et al., 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The ways in which parents communicate with their child during this stressful period can affect the degree to which the transition occurs and ultimately impact the child's decision to remain at college or return to security of home. For example, Hickman and Crossland (2005) found parents who send a message of support of the child's new role can positively impact their child's self–efficacy, which is an ability to take action toward a desired goal (Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011). Further, self-efficacy is one of several important attributes among students who retain from freshman to sophomore year (Hickman & Crossland, 2005).

The parent/child communication structure is built upon a series of role and power negotiations which have taken place throughout the students' primary and secondary education (Arnett, 1994; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger & Sauck, 2007; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kuh, 2009, Nash, McQueen & Bray, 2005; Youniss & Smollar, 1987). Parents and their children are generally comfortable with their communication structure, frequently described as collaborative and mutually beneficial (Elam, Stratton & Gibson, 2007; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kun, 2009). While much of the research reflects an appropriate balance of power in the parent/child dynamic, there are instances in which parents overstep their role, potentially

negatively impacting the child's transition and college success (Epstein, 1990; Padillia-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

College officials' concern about student retention and persistence have led to the development of programs intended to promote the student's transition to and retention in college, especially in the freshman year (Grayson, 1997; Koutsoubakis, 1999; Krause et al. 2005; McInnis, 2001). With no single explanation for student departure nor one solution for improving student retention colleges typically embrace a multi-dimensional approach to addressing this vexing problem (Berge & Huang, 2004).

One approach offered by most colleges to support students in their transition and potentially positively impact college retention is hosting freshman onboarding activities (Abraham, Nesbit & Ward-Roof, 2003; Bruffee, 1999; Gasperetti, 1974; Kuh, 1991; Litchy, 2013; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfe, 1986; Singer, 2001). Onboarding, also commonly known as orientation is a series of communications and activities by college officials to expose students to the academic rigor and cultural mores of the college and aid in their acclimation to the new environment (Golubski, 2009; Jablin, 2001; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Singer, 2001). Numerous studies have confirmed the importance of onboarding programs in creating a positive transition for first year students, and significantly impacting student retention (Budny & Paul, 2003; Bottoms & Young, 2008; Golubski, 2009; Jaffee, 2007; Singer, 2011; Tinto, 1988).

In addition to the common practice of freshmen onboarding which takes place at over 95% of higher education institutions, many colleges offer parent onboarding programs which typically mirror those designed for students (Perigo, 1985; Savage, 2007). The limited research which investigated parent onboarding indicates that parents appreciate the information they received during these events (Amienyi, 2014). There is however, a void in the literature

examining the impact of parent onboarding on message receipt and potential effect on parent support of student retention and degree persistence.

Paramount to successfully integrating new members into a community is the degree to which communication between parties address each other's implicit and explicit expectations (Jablin, 2001; Litchy, 2013). This concept known as a psychological contract (Rousseu & Tijorwala, 1998) began with the work of Barnard (1938) who determined that when an employee enters an organization, both employer and employee enter into a contract of sorts with implicit and explicit expectations and commitments. This theory while having roots in business, has been applied to students and colleges (Scholtz, 2013; Tinto, 1987) but has not yet been explored within the context of college officials and parents of entering freshman.

Statement of the Problem to be Researched

College officials do not know how their communication and messaging is being received by parents of onboarding freshmen or the impact of those messages on college officials' and parents shared goal of supporting student retention and persistence to degree.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

This research study investigated how parents and college officials interpreted the early communication and messaging that took place during freshman onboarding at one university and how those messages may impact the foundation from which the two stakeholders work in support of students' success and degree completion.

With more than 60% of high school graduates enrolling in college (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), they, along with their parents and the higher education institutions which accepted them, believed the students to be college ready. Aided by financial support from the United States government (NCES, 2014), students put forth great money, time and energy to

fund their quest for future career opportunities. Statistics indicate that less than half of those students achieved their goal of college completion, with approximately 35% dropping out in their first year (Alarcon & Edwards, 2013; NCES, 2011). In addition to the loss of future potential opportunities, students and perhaps some or all of the primary stakeholders suffer the financial burden of having to pay for the time the student was in college without having achieved the goal of degree completion.

College officials recognize that among the numerous factors which impact student retention lies an opportunity to engage with parents, who have emerged as active and influential stakeholders in student success. Although college officials seek to communicate with parents during the important process of freshman onboarding, some college officials use terms like "*Helicopter*" (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Wartman & Savage, 2008), "*Kamikaze*" (Shellenbarger, 2006), and "*Velcro*" (Hulsey, 2012) to describe their relationship with parents. Additionally, while the process of parental onboarding has substantial history in higher education, there is limited research on the ramifications of the effort.

Parent interaction with college officials is often the manifestation of a behavior learned through prior relationships with primary school officials (Cox, 2005). College officials and parents have an opportunity to forge a new dynamic in their relationship and positively influence their shared goals of student retention and persistence to degree.

Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding

The research question in this study includes one central question and three sub-questions. The central question (CQ) of this research study is:

What is the relationship being developed between parents and college officials through the freshman onboarding process?

The following sub-questions (SQ1, SQ2, and SQ3) are:

(SQ1) How does the communication and messaging during onboarding meet the intentions and expectations of parents of incoming college freshmen?

(SQ2) How does the communication and messaging during onboarding meet the intentions and expectations of college officials?

(SQ3) How does the communication and messaging of freshman onboarding impact college officials and parents of onboarding freshman work in pursuit of student retention and degree completion?

Conceptual Framework

Throughout this study, the investigation was conducted utilizing a social constructivism framework. Based on the recommendation of Guba and Lincoln (1994), identification of the ontological and epistemological framework establishes the basic beliefs of the researcher and guides the investigation in the selection of the methodology used to conduct the study. One goal of a social constructivist is to understand the world in which one lives and works (Creswell, 2013). The researcher in this study is a professional in higher education who has been working with students, parents, government officials, and college officials for the past twenty-five years to support student retention to degree. Within a social constructivist framework, this investigation sought to interpret meaning of human behavior by examining the complexity of views, rather than ascribing meaning within a narrow category of ideas (Creswell, 2013). To that end, this research study included in-depth interviews and document review to capture the subjective views of a sample of stakeholders who participated in freshman onboarding at one university. The conceptual framework of this study is structured around three independent streams of research: College Readiness; Messaging; and Onboarding.

The first stream began with an in-depth review of literature which examined the cognitive and non-cognitive factors supporting college success. In addition, studies which demonstrate the important role of parents supporting college readiness were examined.

The second stream investigated how messages were being conveyed and interpreted between parents and their students, as well as between parents and the officials at the college the student attends.

Finally, the third stream examined the history, goals and processes which typically take place in onboarding new members into a community. Together, these three streams of analysis created a foundation for this research study which examined the communication between college officials and parents during freshman onboarding.
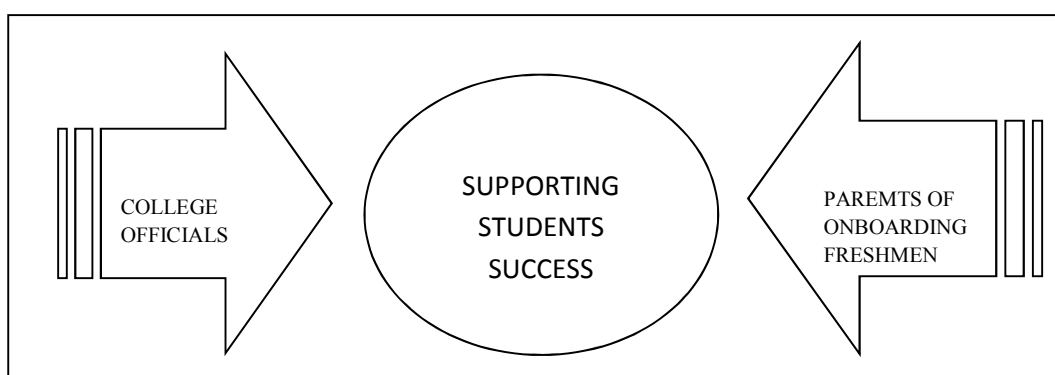
Figure 1. Concept Map: Parent & College Relationship

Definition of Terms

Onboarding & Orientation

Terms used interchangeably to describe the structural, physical and emotional steps in the process of transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education (Bottoms & Young, 2008; Golumbski, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Radosh, 2013).

Parent

This title includes all dynamics that exist in modern definition of this term and include: step -parent and parent partners. Although this definition does not include other family members who may be influential to student including siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles and close friends, this study allows the participant to make the decision of whom they elect to deem "parent".

Persistence

This rate is calculated as the total number of students who complete their degree requirements within 150% of normal time allotted to the program (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

Retention

A measurement of those students who retain from one academic year to the next. In accordance with the NCES (2003) guidelines, college retention is a measurement of first degree seekers who proceed directly from high school to college and are enrolled in the institution as full-time students.

College

A general term used to describe all educational institutions and their employees regardless of status as a public, private, profit, or not for profit higher education institution.

Assumptions and Limitations

Stakeholders identified in this study have multiple and varying reasons for their interest for supporting student retention and persistence. Factors not discussed in this study do not diminish the validity of those goals. There may be additional primary and/or secondary stakeholders not specifically included in this study who may benefit from the findings by virtue of their interest in student retention.

While this study specifically focused on one regionally accredited, non-profit, university in the northeast region of the United States, it is assumed that other colleges within and beyond the United States will find value in the findings of this study.

This investigation does not address the issues which prevent parent participation in their student's educational experience.

This study sought to include a heterogeneous sample of participants to allow for diversity of views based on experience and circumstance. Participants who volunteered to take part in this research study did not include any individual who identified him/herself as Latino or Hispanic; although persons of that ethnic background were invited to participate and comprise 5.6% of the parent/student population at the university.

This study made no direct reference to parents' socioeconomic backgrounds as the investigator had no access to that protected data. Even so, it is acknowledged that participants' socioeconomic data may be a significant factor in framing participant views.

Summary

Parents have become active and influential participants in all facets of their college student's experience and have the ability to positively impact student retention and persistence to

degree (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Pryor, Hurtado, Sharkness & Korn, 2008; William,2005).

College officials are concerned about the low rates of student retention and persistence and have established a multi-dimensional approach to address this problem. One popular method of supporting students follows the recommendations of Tinto (1975, 1993) and includes an onboarding program designed to aid in the transition from high school to college.

Based on successful programs and communications used to onboard college freshmen, many colleges established similar onboarding programs for parents of entering students (Bahmaier, 1988; Perigo, 1985; Savage, 2007). While there is extensive research demonstrating the value of freshman onboarding for students, there is limited research on the effects of parent onboarding in establishing a foundation for parents and college officials to work together to support their child/student to degree (Budny & Paul, 2003; Bottoms & Young, 2008; Golubski, 2009; Jaffee, 2007; Singer, 2011; Tinto, 1988).

This case study invited parents and college officials at one university to participate in an investigation which examined the communication and messaging between parents and college officials taking place during freshman onboarding; and assessed the potential for their interactions to establish a foundation for supporting student retention and persistence to degree.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

All post-secondary colleges which receive and distribute government funds are required to annually assess and report their retention data in accordance with the Student Right-To-Know and Campus Security Act (1990). The requirement to report this data came twenty-five years after President Johnson signed the Higher Education Act (1965) at which time he remarked "To thousands of young men and women, this act means the path to knowledge is open to all that have the determination to walk it..." (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013).

Today, less than half of the students who enter college will persist to degree completion (NCES, 2011). A closer examination of the statistics on student retention reveals that between 28 and 35% of the students who leave college will do so within their first year and make their decision to stay or leave within the first three to six weeks of their first term (ACT, 2008; Bozick, 2007; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2005). These statistics are concerning not only to students, but to college officials, parents and governing bodies all of whom have a vested interest in the outcome of student success (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008).

There is an extensive body of research which examined factors impacting student retention as well as the role that parents and college officials may undertake to influence them. The first stream of investigation, *College Readiness*, examined cognitive and non-cognitive factors that prepare students for college as well as the positive role that parents and college officials can play to support readiness. The second stream, *Messaging*, investigated the parent/student and parent/college official communication dynamic. Further, the deeper message that may be conveyed without being spoken was analyzed as to its potential impact on the relationships. Finally, the process and intent of college sponsored activities designed to

assimilate new students and their parents into the college community was investigated through the stream of *Onboarding*. Together, these three streams of investigation demonstrate the great depth and breadth of knowledge that exists on influencing college student success. Additionally, the literature review identified gaps in the research, exposing potential opportunities to enhance our knowledge of the developing relationship between college officials and parents of freshmen.

Literature Review

College Readiness

According to Richardson (2008) "it is never too early to start thinking about college" (p. 384) and researchers determined that parents and their children begin discussions about higher education expectations as early as the fourth grade (Bozick, Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber & Kerr, 2010; Gupta, 2008). College readiness is described as the level of preparation needed for a student to enroll, succeed and persist in college (ACT, 2008; Malone, 2009; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Parent-child and parent-college official interactions play an important role in the development of student cognitive and non-cognitive skills which are critical components of college readiness.

Comley and French (2014), two leading researchers on college readiness have been conducting investigations into the components of readiness for more than 15 years. Based on their investigations into the perspectives of students and college officials; as well as the nature of freshman year coursework (Schaefer, 2014), they developed a model of four key strategies of college readiness.

The first two strategies are cognitive factors and entitled: (1) *Cognitive Strategies,* which refers to the student's ability to identify, collect and analyze information; and (2) *Content*

Knowledge, described as mastering foundational cognitive skills and concepts to be studied in greater depth in college.

The second two are non-cognitive factors identified as:(3) *Academic Behavior* which describes the students ability to identify personal strengths and weaknesses and adjust accordingly; and (4) *College Knowledge*, described as paying attention to the unique institutional steps of gaining access and acclimating to college. In considering the four steps of college readiness, Comley and French (2014) believe that all of these factors are "actionable items" which they explain as skills which can be taught and learned.

Cognitive Factors of College Readiness. The two most commonly recognized cognitive skills associated with college readiness are English and Math both of which are taught in a scaffolding manner throughout a student's education in a wide range of courses and disciplines (CCSSI, 2015; Eubanks, 2014; Roderick, Nagoka & Coca, 2009; Sullivan, 2009). The metaphor scaffolding is used to illustrate the directional transition of information from one platform skill to the next. Amiripour, Amir-Mofidi and Shahvarani (2012) provide a simple example to describe the concept of scaffolding in teaching a student to perform long division. In their example, prior to discussing the division problem, the teacher works with the student to add, subtract and multiply their way to reach the number of 48; and then, after assuring the foundational skills are in place, the teacher and student proceed to divide the number 48 into its parts. The concept of scaffolding stems from the important work by Vgotsky (1978) which was described by Mattahah, Pratt, Cowan and Cowan (2005) as student learning that takes place in a "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD), a place where the student is not yet ready to act independently but is able to function with the support of parent or teacher.

The Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), a non-profit research center under the direction of Comley, conducted a study with college faculty to assess their perceived value of English and math skills in freshman-level coursework. Results of their study, described by Eubanks (2014), demonstrated that college faculty place a significant degree of importance on English and math skills throughout the first year college curriculum. Sullivan (2009), a college professor of English, came to a similar conclusion based on his direct experience with college freshmen. To aid all students in preparation for success in college, he co-authored a collection of essays for ninth grade high school students urging them to begin their preparation for college by focusing on building skills in four cognitive skills of: reading; writing; thinking; and listening.

National Standards of Assessing College Readiness. Educators as far back as 1944, as well as every President since Regan have advocated for national standards in math and English curricula (Bomer & Maloch, 2011; Richardson & Eddy, 2011). One step toward reaching that goal occurred in 2002, when President George W. Bush proposed, and Congress signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This landmark legislation impacts the design, delivery and testing of students from kindergarten through twelfth grade in every state and territory that accepts federal education funds (Eubanks, 2014; Mayers, 2006; NCLB, 2001). One of the numerous elements of NCLB are polices which establish parents as integral partners in student education. Rogers (2006) cited 100 specific references to parental involvement in NCLB including the creation of "family-school compacts" which outlines the role and responsibilities in support of student academic achievement. The act defines parent participation as "providing purposeful and meaningful communication between parents and the school" (NCLB, 2001, section 1118) and mandates that schools establish methods and timetables for communicating

with parents and fostering their interaction with the school (Domina, 2005; Easton, 2010; Rogers, 2006).

Separately and without direct federal government input, directors of education from 48 states came together in 2009 to develop English and math standards for every grade level from kindergarten through twelfth grade (CCSSI, 2012; Eubanks, 2014). Known as "Common Core", the standards which have been adopted by forty-three states, align educational expectations across state lines and aspire to meet college and career readiness goals (Schneider, 2014). Eubanks (2014) points out that unlike NCLB, Common Core is not a curriculum in that it does not dictate what or how to teach as much as it establishes a set of common skills. For instance, Common Core has established ten "anchor standards" of writing that all students are expected to achieve by the time they graduate high school, such as the ability to write an argument (Anchor Standard #1) and the ability to conduct research (Anchor Standard # 7). However, Common Core allows school districts and faculty the flexibility to determine how those standards will be met (CCSSI, 2015).

Measuring College Readiness. With national benchmarks of cognitive competencies established, the next important, yet highly controversial step is the measurement of student achievement toward attaining the goals. In NCLB, math and English proficiency is tested annually in grades 3 thru 8 and once between 10th and 12th grade. Additionally, testing of science skill is conducted once each in elementary, middle and high school (Camera, 2015; Hoff, 2007; Sternberg, 2006). Schools are also tested as to their effectiveness in preparing students to reach cognitive goals through annual measurement of student improvement known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Thompson, Meyers & Oshima, 2011). Testing procedures related to Common Core are in the early stages of development, and there are currently no national

requirements on when, how or by whom these tests are to be administered (Davis, 2013).

Beyond NCLB and Common Core, high school students seeking college admission typically take either the SAT or ACT test; which was administered 3.3 million times in 2013 and is a requirement in 12 states (Lewis, 2013).

Educators and researchers have voiced concerns about several factors associated with the current standard achievement tests. One concern is the amount of time spent preparing for and administering the tests which Rush and Scherff (2012) have determined amounts to about 45 days per year; time which they and others argued could be spent on student development. Another concern lies in the basic tenant of any test, its ability to fairly assess all participants equally. According to Baharloo (2013) test fairness includes validity, absence of bias and equal access; all of which have been questioned in these standardized tests. Buchmann, Condron, and Roscigno (2010) point out that the only limit on the number of times the ACT and SAT test can be taken is the willingness/ability to pay the $45.00 test fee. Additionally, these researches shared concerns about access to test preparation for some students and not all. Known as "shadow education", the researchers described a process where some parents pay between $1,000 and $6,000 for their child to receive test tutoring beyond what is offered in school. Princeton Review and Kaplan, industry leaders in test preparation, are so confident in their ability to boost test scores with their test prep services, they offer a full-refund if the student does not increase his/her test score after receiving their training (Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010). Finally, questions have been raised about the validity of the tests as a measurement of college readiness (Erskine, 2014; Zirkel, 2004). One ironic example was a research study coauthored by the testing organization ACT in which 123,000 college students' GPAs and graduation rates were compared to those students who took the ACT or SAT test and others who

did not take any entrance exam. Their study concluded, and others corroborated, that there was no difference in student outcomes among students who took the entrance exam and students who did not take the exam (Hiss & Camera, 2014; Spencer, 1996). Camera, a Senior Vice President at ACT acknowledged the results of the study but still argued for the test as a means to distinguish student achievement among the 35,000 high schools in the United States.

Non-Cognitive Factors of College Readiness. Referring back to Comley and French's model of college readiness (2014), stage three of the four stage process, *Academic Behavior*, focuses on the importance of non-cognitive factors of student readiness for college. Roderick, Nagaoka & Coca (2009) described non-cognitive factors as a range of attributes including student self-beliefs and behaviors. Closely related to the model of college readiness is social cognitive career theory (SCTT) which is comprised of three components: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Hamel, 2014).

Self-Concepts. Discussions about non-cognitive factors of student development and college readiness include the topic of self-development, as in self-identification and self-efficacy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Taylor, 1995). Pajares and Schunk (2002) credit the philosopher/psychologist James (1842/1910) as an early researcher into the concept of self-esteem which he described as "an individual doing and becoming those things which he has chosen to be and do" (p. 54). Researchers found only a weak correlation between self-esteem and academic success. Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali and Polhlert (2004) for example, found that students with high self-esteem are better able to adjust to social aspects of college, which in-turn, has an effect on college retention (Karp, Hughes &O'Gara, 2008; Tinto, 1993; 2012). In contrast, Kristjánsson (2007) and Goldie and Kristjánsson (2012) voiced concern about the common misconception that positive self-esteem will ultimately lead to successful outcomes.

Another closely related topic which has been shown to have a significant relationship to college readiness and college retention is self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1981).Bandura (1977) described self-efficacy as individuals' perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses. A student's self-efficacy affects his/her decision about the degree of effort that will be extended toward new challenges (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). For example, far too many students have a negative self-efficacy regarding their ability to perform math which typically is expressed as "I am just not a math person". Tao, a leading math researchers, addressed this misconception by explaining that math is not an inborn talent, it is acquired like most endeavors, through hard work, preparation and self-confidence (Kimball & Smith, 2013). A student's self-efficacy regarding their math skill determines the degree to which they apply themselves to mastering a concept. More than twenty years of research on self-efficacy has demonstrated that students with positive self-efficacy display behaviors necessary to achieve the desired outcome (Bandura, 1977; Henson, 1983; Jane, 2014). For example, Zimmerman (2000) found self-efficacy to be positively related to goal setting and time management; Pajares and Schunk (2002) found a relationship between positive self-efficacy and a student's willingness to work harder and persist longer on a task. Other researchers investigated the effects of self-efficacy on specific racial groups such as Smith (2000) and Bonner Hamilton (2014) who found a positive correlations between positive self-efficacy and African Americans; Mejia (2006) found similar results in her study of Latino Americans and self-efficacy. One long running and highly successful program which builds student self-efficacy is the "Oliver Scholars Program" which has been supporting African-American and Latino students for over 30 years (Schaefer, 2014). Based in the city of New York, the organization invites students to attend a Summer Immersion Program (SIP) which consists of academic courses and non-academic events held on college campuses where students

can "imagine a possible self". According to their website Oliverscholars.org, 99% of Oliver Scholars Program students matriculated from high school to college in 2013 (2015). The organization does not share the percentage of students who persisted to college degree.

Closely related to self-esteem and self-efficacy is an emerging concept referred to as "grit" which describes a person's willingness and passion to pursue a long term goal (Duckworth, 2006). While still in the early stages of research, Duckworth has developed a Grit Scale which is designed to measure perseverance and passion toward long term goals. The researcher believes this scale will become as important as the IQ or SAT test is today in determining a student's readiness to take on the challenges of college (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

Parent Influence on College Readiness. Parent involvement with their student and with the schools which they attend has been known to promote student cognitive and non-cognitive development; which in-turn promotes college readiness (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hill et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2005; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Researchers have demonstrated that parent involvement has positive impacts on: student retention (Wintre &Yaffe, 2000); attitude about school (Mo & Singh, 2008, Shumow& Miller, 2001); GPA (Gutman & Midgley, 2000); and advanced level coursework (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). One example which illustrates the effect and methods that parents use to support their child's development was described in the study by Falbo, Lein and Amador (2001). These researchers followed twenty-six sets of children and their parents during their transition from junior to senior high school. Results from their investigation found a significant increase in student success, as measured by GPA, credits earned and class attendance, for those students whose parents were involved in their education. Further, the researchers identified three types of parental involvement common among successful

students: monitoring of student actions; evaluating what students are saying versus what parents are observing; and intervening with their student and with the school.

With regard to how parents and college officials can work together to promote college readiness, Cox (2005) completed a meta-analysis of eighteen studies that took place between 1980 and 2002 and examined home and school collaboration. Findings from this investigation concluded that home and school collaboration was effective in helping to raise levels of academic and non-academic student performance. Epstein (1990, 2001), Co-Director of the School, Family, and Community Partnership Program and a leading researcher on the parent-school dynamic, created a framework for parent involvement with school (Holtz, 2010):

1. *Basic Obligations of Schools* refers to communication from school to parents about school programs and student progress;

2. *Involvement at School* includes parent participation in school sponsored activities;

3. *Involvement with Learning Activities* such as helping the student with homework, academic decisions and planning;

4. *Involvement in School Decision Making* takes place when parents join and take a leadership role in school organizations, advisory councils and committees; and

5. *Collaborative Exchange with Community Organizations* refers to participation in activities which integrate resources, strengthen school programs, and encourage student learning development (p.33).

A study by Leonard (2013) is offered as an example of successful collaboration between a high school, local community college, students, and their parents. In this three year investigation which began in 2007, academically average students were invited to enroll in three college courses while in their sophomore, junior, and senior

years of high school. In addition to all 74 participants passing their courses and earning college credits, this project demonstrate the role of parents in supporting their child in developing college readiness skills. Leonard (2013) concluded that parents supported their children in three main ways: recruitment into the program; financial support to attend the program; and emotional support to retain to program completion. Eighty-five percent of the students in the study indicated that parents were the primary reason for joining the program. Students also reported that when the work became increasingly difficult and they wanted to quit, it was their parents who urged the children to remain in the program. One poignant exchange between a father and his son took place when the child came home with a lower than expected grade. His father told him that if that was the best he can do, than he would accept that outcome but if it was not, than he was only cheating himself. The child told his father that he understood the message.

Messaging

Having demonstrated the validity of parental participation in the child's educational development, the Leonard study (2013) also provided valuable insight into the importance of messaging. In that simple exchange between a father and his son described previously, the student acknowledged that he understood the message that his father was trying to convey. As Clark and Schober (1992) point out, communication involves far more than the words we say, the real influence stems from the meaning that is gleaned from the interaction. Where once, communication was used as a tool to understand oneself (Plato, 380 BC) today, communication is primarily used as a tool to influence the behaviors of others (Argyle, 1957). The degree to

which the message is influential is dependent on reducing the degree of uncertainty (Stanley, 2012).

  Messaging Construct. Grice (1913/1988) an influential researcher on the topics of communication and messaging, offered four maxims of communication which Neale (1992) described as: *manner and relation*, which is further explained as the speaker considering the specific recipient(s) of the message and their relationship. *Quantity,* urges the speaker to carefully balance the need of providing enough information without overly saturating or monopolizing the conversation. Finally, *quality* refers to the importance that the speaker conveys in the message. Harris and Monaco (1978) added to the conversation by explaining that the message recipient makes meaning of the message either semantically, which is the literal interpretation of the words in the message; or pragmatically, where the underlying message is interpreted as to the intent of the message. For example, a common exchange between a teacher and student might be "our class begins at 8:30 a.m." A semantic interpretation would be understood as the class lecture or activity commences at 8:30 a.m.; while a pragmatic interpretation may lead the student to believe that the he/she is expected to arrive to the classroom by 8:30 a.m. and begin the process of finding a seat, taking out materials, and/or conversing with classmates in preparation for the class to begin.

  One important tool which the message recipient uses to decode (Weick, 1987) or interpret the message is reliance on the "standard or normal discourse" of the community. This concept posits that the way the message will be interpreted takes into consideration the norms and values of the community (Bruffee, 1999, Grice, 1965; 1978; Igwee, 2004; Morris, 1934/1962). In the Leonard study (2013), it is unlikely that this was the first discussion between father and son regarding academic expectations and those previous discussions possibly enhanced the message

being sent. Boyun and Parke (1995) pointed out that parents expect their children will increasingly be able to "interpret and reply to the emotional component of verbal communication as well as the content"(p 593). In fact, researchers determined that children understand gestures as early as three months of age, long before they can speak, which is at about 18 months (Macneilage & Davis, 2004). In a study of 60 kindergarten students and their parents, Hallberstadt, Fox and Jones (1994) found that children from non-expressive families are generally stronger at assessing non-verbal cues; while children from highly communicative families become more skilled at expressing themselves through verbal communication. The researchers in that study specifically tested and found no variation between messaging development and gender.

Parent/Student Message and Dynamic. Extensive research has been conducted on parent/child communication and one of the significant findings relevant to this discussion is that healthy family relationships enable or at least tolerate a changing power dynamic over the course of the relationship (Best, 2006; Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger & Saick, 2007; Hillaker, Bropyhy-Her, Villarrurel & Haas, 2008). As children enter school, they get involved in activities beyond their parents direct supervision (Nash, McQueen & Bray, 2005) requiring parents to shift their role from one of monitoring to that of engagement, with the parent remaining in the authoritative role.

Rudy, Awong and Lambert (2008) reported the findings of Barbara and Harmon (2002) which identified two broad categories of authority that parents exert over their child during the early period of separation. The first is behavioral, which includes the regulation of the time set aside for homework, attire, and manners expected at school (Rudy, Awong & Lambert, 2008). The second authority is psychological, which refers to parent intrusion on the child's thoughts

about things such as love, belonging and self-worth (Rudy, Awong & Lambert, 2008).

According to Hart et al. (2003), when behavioral control includes parental support, the child

demonstrates signs of maturity. Bayer, Sanson and Hemphill (2006) warn that over-solicitation

by the parent in these categories may lead to negative outcomes such as withdrawal, shyness and

difficulty with peer relations.

In one of many case studies which examined communication and message exchange

between parents and elementary age children, Shine and Acosta (2000) documented the

interactions between 14 parents and their children at their local children's museum. Results of

their study indicated that while at the museum, parents spent 18% of the time participating with

their child in play; during which they defined the game, assigned participant roles, transformed

objects used in the game and took the lead in sequencing the evolving story. When parents were

not actively engaged, they observed from the sideline and offered verbal and non-verbal

messages of support and approval. Interviews which followed the observations concluded that

while parents understood the museum promoted child-play, they felt a strong desire and

obligation to use the opportunity to teach their children cognitive and non-cognitive lessons such

as math and sharing skills (p.50).

During the middle and high school years, parental authority shifts as children seek

independence (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Where during elementary school years, children were

satisfied with the unilateral authority of their parents, the transition to secondary education

coincides with a quest for shared authority and collaborative decisions (Collin & Laursen, 2004;

Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger & Sauch, 2007; Youniss & Smoller, 1987). Developmentally, this

period, known as adolescence (Hill & Tyson, 2009) finds children struggling to find their

individual identities and Beghetto (2001) suggested that children continue to benefit from

parental support and encouragement during this transition. Trivette and Anderson (1995) as well as Golnick, Price, Beinswenger and Sauck (2007) recommended a shift from unilateral authority to one of shared authority where parents and child discuss and establish goals and aspirations together.

There is an abundance of research which documents a communication discourse between children and their parents during this period including corroborating studies by Laursen, Coy and Collins (1998); Smetena (1988) and Taris and Semin (1997). These studies concurred, likely to the great relief of parents, that the conflict between children and their parents experienced in adolescence often amounts to short-lived bickering over mundane matters and represent an integral part of the child's development toward independence.

Technology Role in Supporting Family Communication. One relatively recent development which supports the child's emerging independence while allowing the parent and child to remain involved is the cell phone and similar technological devices. While early researchers were concerned that cell phones and online communication would result in a decrease of meaningful interpersonal interaction (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie, 2001), the majority of research today demonstrates that communicating through multiple means of technology serves to enhance connectedness and deepen interpersonal relationships (Boase & Kobayashi, 2008; Kendall, 2002). Further, researchers found that a family use of cell phones, specifically text messaging, served as a means to remain connected with each other while allowing their child the freedom to move physically away from their parents (Devitt & Roker, 2009; Hillaker, Brophy-Herb, Villarrurel, & Haas, 2008).

As children transition from home to college they bring with them their cell phones, computers and internet connectivity; they also bring the partnership they have established with

their parents. Research varies in accessing the amount of parent/child communication they believe is taking place during college. Donnelly, Renk, Simms, and McGuire (2011) found that parents and their children speak weekly, while Junco and Mastrodicasa, (2007) found that daily interaction is the norm; and Gemmill and Peterson, (2006) found interaction as often as four times per day. Regardless of the actual number of times parents and children communicate, researchers concur that parents and children indicated that their level of communication is both appropriate and welcome.

One of the few large scale studies on college student and parent communication took place in 2007, when the National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh, 2009) interviewed 4,518 freshman and 4,644 seniors about their level of interaction with parents and friends while at college. The results of this study, which has not been repeated since, found that students felt that they communicated with their parents "very often, based on a rating scale of: not at all; occasionally; often and very often. Students reported that electronic communication was more common than in-person and that students communicated more often with mothers over fathers. A limited number of students, 13% of freshman and 8% of seniors, reported that their parents intervene with college officials on their behalf, and students were comfortable with this level of support.

To gain insight into what parents and their children discuss while in college, Wolf, Sax, and Harper (2009) engaged in a comprehensive study which included 58,047 or 38% of student population across nine campuses in the University of California higher education system. Students in their survey were asked to rate what parents were interested in discussing, and the results indicated that 66% of parents were interested in their academic progress, 60% stressed the importance of good grades, and 54% reported that their parents were interested in their leisure

activities and university friends. Daniel, Evans and Scott (2001) found similar findings in their study inquiring what parents are interested in; additionally, these researchers determined that parents wanted to communicate about finance and "negotiating relationships with college personnel" (p.3).

Parent/College Official Messaging and Dynamic. Understanding that their involvement with their student can be beneficial to educational outcomes, an increasing number of parents are extending this participation to direct interaction with college officials where their students attend (Merriman, 2007; Savage, 2009). A study by College Parents of America (2007) found that 81% of parents of college students identify much more involved with their student's college than their parents had been. Similarly, Merriman (2007) found that 93% of the college officials in her study reported increased interaction with parents over the previous five years.

College officials also recognized that parent involvement with the college has become a common practice, and that working with them in some manor has become a necessity if not an opportunity (Budny & Paul, 2003;Crone & MacKay, 2007; King, 2012; Mullendore; Savage, 2005; Wartman & Savage & 2008). As a result of parent involvement, college officials have developed multiple vehicles to communicate with them (Amienyi, 2014). One of the more common methods used to reach parents is through an electronic newsletter, which Savage (2007) reported were distributed by more than 70% of the colleges in his survey. In one instance, Lum (2006) found that when officials at West Virginia University sent out an electronic message to 4,000 parents, a significant number of families opened the email within 24 hours of receipt. Other institutional practices included a parent-handbook (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005), a parent-council (Lowery, 2005), and a parent-designated helpline (Daniel, Evan & Scott, 2001). Additionally, Savage (2007) reported on a growing number of colleges housing parent offices

within their Office of Student Affairs or Alumni Relations. Syracuse University was the first college to create an Office of Parents in 1972 (Severino, 1989); however it is only recently that the concept has gained momentum. Savage (2007) reported that about 45% of offices of parents operating today were opened after 2007. Likely, the most common method of communication and messaging between college officials and parents is direct interaction during freshman onboarding activities; which Pascarella and Terennini (2005) reported taking place at 95% of higher education institutions in various formats.

Despite the numerous strategies employed to communicate and message with parents, there is little research on either the outcomes of the effort or the assurance that the intended messages were received or welcome. Studies which investigated the parent/college official communication dynamic are mixed. For example separate studies by Connelly (2007), Fatma and Guler (2003), and Howe and Simmons (2005) reported an atmosphere of collaboration and openness between parents and college officials. Other studies, conducted by Jacobs (2008), Mullendore (2008) and Peiffer (2003), described a construct which is one-sided, where college officials dictated all parameters of the discussion and came across as a director/subordinate relationship.

The dichotomy of the parent/college official relationship being described by some researchers where one group assumes a position of authority over another is a common construct. Orbe (1998) conducted a series of studies between 1996 and 1998 in which he interviewed hundreds of individuals who self-identified as belonging to one or more of the following groups: people of color; women; gay/lesbian/bisexuals; and lower socioeconomic status. The common thread shared by members of these groups was that they and/or society viewed them as being subservient to other stronger members of society.

As a result of his studies, Orbe (1998) presented the *co-cultural communication theory* which describes the way in which a marginalized individual or group communicates with a dominant individual or group. According to the theory, there are three main ways in which the subservient individual communicates back to the dominant member of the conversation: a nonassertive strategy, in which the limited participant tends to put the needs of others above his/her own; an aggressive strategy, where the communication is described as "hurtfully expressive, self-promoting, and controlling" (Orbe, 1996, p.14); or an assertive approach which takes into account the perspectives of both parties. In addition to three major types of communication, the research described three potential outcomes of co-cultural communication dialogue: assimilation into the dominant structure, accommodation by one or both parties or separation.

Freshman Onboarding

College officials have an opportunity to construct the message they want to send to entering students and their parents. Tinto (2012), a leading researcher in the field of college student integration, considers it an obligation that colleges provide students with meaningful support and feedback in order to meet the high standards of the community. While large scale studies measuring the means by which colleges have chosen to provide early support are limited, those that have investigated this topic concluded that almost all colleges, about 95%, host some sort of onboarding event(s) (Abraham, Nesbit & Ward-Roof, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986).

Onboarding Events. When thinking about orientation one may conjure an image of a single event to welcome new students and parents to their college; and while that is often a part of the process, the term is used to describe all events and communications that supports a

transition to the college (Golumbski, 2009; Kuh, 1991; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Singer, 2001).

For example, some institutions provide handbooks to students and parents with important

contacts, academic requirements and networking opportunities (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005;

Perigo, 1985; Savage, 2007). Additionally, some colleges host move-in day celebrations to

support students and parents during this exciting and potentially stressful moment (Savage,

2007).

A more unique orientation offered by some colleges are "wilderness programs" which use

adventure and physical challenge as a way to establish relationships between students and

college officials (Galloway, 2000). Little and Price (2013) reported that some colleges host

events to target specific populations such as minority and first generation students and parents.

Similar to orientation, businesses host new employee events which are designed to integrate and

acclimate new employees to their community. Such events typically fall under the umbrella term

of onboarding (Golumbski, 2009; Radosh, 2013; Tolbert & Hall, 2009).

Onboarding Models. Regardless of the name or specific event, the goal of onboarding is

to provide information and opportunity for new members to successfully acclimate and adjust to

their new environment, thus improving the likelihood of satisfaction, production and retention

(Friedman, 2006; Gardner, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989).

Recognition of the need to orient onboarding students to college stems from the early work of

Spady (1970) who used quantitative data analysis to conclude that student dropout was

correlated to low interaction with the college environment. Spady's findings are linked to two

earlier researchers on human behavior; Lewin and Cartwright (1951) found that an individual's

behavior was a function of his/her relationship to environment; and Murray (1938) found that

people make decisions to remain or leave a given situation based on the gratification they received from the community.

Those early researchers influenced the work of Tinto (1975; 1993; 2012) who created the often cited, "Model of Student Integration". In this model the researcher offered six components of successful student integration to college which include: (1) pre-enrollment characteristics of the student; (2) student desire and commitment to goal; (3) academic and social structure of school; (4) student academic and social involvement; (5) changing levels of commitment throughout the experience; and (6) a student emotional decision to remain/engage or withdraw from school. Since inception, the model has been tested and overwhelmingly validated by researchers including Terenzini and Pascarella (1977) and Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2008). There are some critics including Tierney (1992); Kuh and Love (2000), and even Tinto himself (1993) who argued that integration into a new community does not presuppose giving up the habits and culture of the previous community.

Closely related and equally well respected is Chickering's seven vectors of college adjustment. Developed in 1978, the researcher established a series of vectors or roadmaps designed to orient the student toward their goals (Lounsbury, Saudargas, Gobson & Leong, 2005). According to the theorist, as a student successfully navigates through each of the vectors he/she establishes the critical skills of self-awareness, confidence, stability and integration (Lounsbury, Saudargas, Gobson & Leong, 2005). Described by Bruess and Pearson (2000), the seven vectors, which are generally mastered in sequence are:

1. *Developing Competence* involves the student's intellectual, interpersonal and physical growth;

2. *Managing Emotion* relates to the ability to manage and express feelings which include sexuality, aggression and fear;

3. *Developing Autonomy* is both independence competencies while simultaneously recognizing the important role of interdependence;

4. *Developing Identity* is an understanding and acceptance of oneself;

5. *Freeing Interpersonal Relationships* is a manifestation stemming from a sense of self which leads *to a greater ability to engage with others;*

6. *Developing Purpose* involves setting goals and actions for the future; and

7. *Developing* Integrity relates to the individual's value system (p. 62-63)

As Bruess and Pearson (2000) pointed out, the original vectors were criticized similarly to Tinto's model both for referring to men and for not including individuation and connection. As a result, the vectors were updated in 1993 by Chickering and Reisner.

Onboarding Best Practices. With a clear understanding of the process as well as some of the typical events colleges host to support the process, the research literature offered some suggestions or best practices to facilitate student and parent integration.

The first of these practices is one of enculturation and reacculturation. Bruffee (1999) described cultural as the characteristic, interests, language and identity of the organization. Where enculturation speaks to the process of assimilating into the new culture (Jablin, 2001; Karp, Hughes & O'Gara, 2008), reacculturation refers to the process of switching membership from one culture to another (Bruffee, 1999; Litchy, 2013; Tinto, 1987). For example, Bruffee (1999) found that freshmen college students "talked, wrote, and behaved" in ways that were appropriate to their cultural and community, which was that of a high school student (p.5). Litchy (2013) who completed her doctoral research on the reacculturation of college freshman,

offered a model which can aid college officials in helping students to transition from their known culture and assimilate into a college going culture.

Among the seven facets of reacculturation offered by Litchy (2013), successful communication, which includes comprehension, honesty and openness, can be promoted by college officials when they provide clear feedback, welcome diverse opinions, and offer outlets for sharing feelings and personal experience. Another important element of the Litchy (2013) model is trust which promotes dependability and confidence. Similar to the previous factor, trust is earned when college officials provide respectful and timely feedback, as well as opportunity for students to express their own ideas, opinions, and concerns.

A best practice which supports student/parent integration is in the form of an opportunity for new and current members of a community to find and display authentic behavior (Cable, Gino and Staats, 2013). In describing the components of authenticity, the researchers described an individual's desire to "have people see them as they see themselves" (p.25) as well as an ability to identify the strengths that the individual brings to their new community. To promote authenticity, Cable, Gino and Staats (2013) suggested that the host allows opportunity for individuals to articulate their history, support structure, and their moments of pride that supported them in gaining access to their new community. This idea that a students' past needs not be separated from their future, speaks to the aforementioned criticisms of the early work by Tinto and Chickering.

Finally, a best practice which supports all members of a community, particularly new members, fits into the category of identification and clarification of expectations. McInnis, James and Hartley (2000), Singer (2001) and others found that far too many students entered college with unrealistic expectations of life in higher education and as result of this mismatch, withdraw

rather than assimilate into the new community. One indicator that points to expectation rather than skill or even affordability as a primary driver of retention is the fact that between 28 and 35% of student attrition takes place in the first six weeks of the first semester of college (Bozick, 2007; Levitz, 1996; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2005). With regard to parent/college official expectations, researchers concluded that parents and college officials want many of the same goals for their students but may not meet each other's expectations on issues of who is responsible and how to go about achieving them (Coburn, 2006; Greene & Greene, 2002; Johnson, 2004).

Researchers determined that as individuals and groups enter a relationship they bring with them both expectations of self and others. This concept, according to Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998), is known as a "psychological contract" and is attributed to work by Argyris (1960) who examined relationships between a plant foreman and his employees. While the topic of psychological contracts has been well studied, there is no specific list of elements which comprise a psychological contract. However, in gleaning the work of Dasgupta (1988); Emerson (1962), Morrison & Robinson (1997), Smith (2013), Wartmen and Savage (2008), and others, certain elements emerged which form the basis of the contract and include: *Role*, referring to a person in ether a leadership or subordinate position; *Agreement*, which is the degree both parties are in alignment on an issue; *Fairness*, which includes elements of consistency and impartiality; and finally, *Demand*, referring to requirements being placed upon the individual or by the individual. Additionally, three important outcomes emerged from contracts which do meet expectations of both parties. These are: *Reciprocity; Trust*; and *Good Faith*.

| Elements of A Psychological Contract include | ➤ | Role, Agreement, Fairness, Demand |
| Potential Outcomes of honoring a Psychological Contract | ➤ | Reciprocity, Trust, Good Faith |
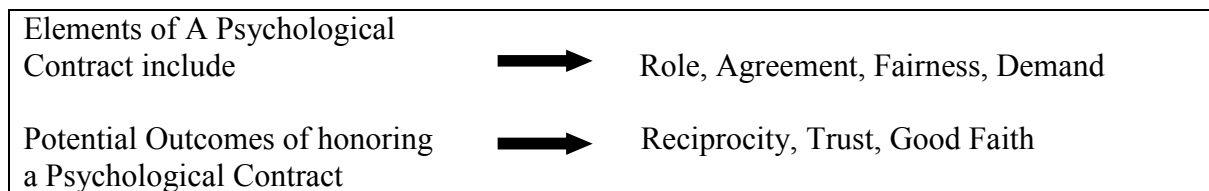
Figure 2. Psychological Contract

Summary

Researchers demonstrated the importance of college readiness, messaging and college orientation on student retention, especially in the first year of college. Further, it is evident that relationships between parents and their children as well as parents and college officials can have a significant impact on student outcomes. While college officials recognized the potential value of parental involvement and further, took measures to encourage their support, the research is lacking in examining what message is being conveyed to parents during the freshman onboarding process, or how the message may establish a foundation for their future relationship.

The literature identified the possibility that a dichotomy of directive and submissive behavior, known as a co-cultural relationship, may exist between college officials and parents. If so, this construct may have negative consequences on their interaction and support of student success. Also identified in the literature was a psychological contract which exists between all interacting individuals where roles and expectations are negotiated. The elements of a psychological contract included: Role, Agreement Fairness, and Demand have been shown to lead to potential positive outcomes of: Reciprocity; Trust; and Good Faith.

While the research is lacking on the power construct being developed between college officials and parents during freshman onboarding, the key elements of a psychological contract provide an opportunity to investigate this relationship and its potential impact on future relationships in support of college student success.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

Parents have emerged as vocal and influential stakeholders in college student success. This case study investigated how parents and college officials interpreted the early communication taking place during freshman onboarding at one university; and how that may impact the foundation from which the two stakeholders work in support of students success.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology, tools and rationale used to collect and analyze data related to the communication and messaging between parents and college officials at one university, assigned with the fictitious name Urban University to protect the college's anonymity. Table 4, below, is a consolidated snapshot of the research methods used in this study and timeline of data collection in this qualitative case study within a guiding framework of social constructivism.

The central question of this research study is:

What is the relationship being developed between parents and college officials through the freshman onboarding process?

To answer this central question, the investigation engaged parents and college officials in discussions around three sub-questions:

How does the communication and messaging during onboarding meet the intentions and expectations of parents of incoming college freshman?

How does the communication and messaging during onboarding meet the intentions and expectations of college officials?

How does the communication and messaging of onboarding impact college officials and parents of incoming freshman work in pursuit of student retention and degree completion?

Table 4

Case Study Research Method

DATA COLLECTION	DOCUMENT REVIEW	PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS
PARTCIPANT SELECTION	Select Public Documents	Stratified, Purposeful Sample of college officials in each of the two colleges and university at large
PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION	Any reference to institution name, identify removed	First names used during interviews and pseudonyms used in data analysis and findings
SAMPLE SIZE	10-15 documents/web pages	15-120 total interviews including parents and officials from two college and from university at large
TIMELINE	Upon Institutional, Dissertation Committee and IRB Approval	-Outreach on/after September 18, 2015 -Meetings between weeks 1-6 of fall term, 2015/16
ANALYSIS	-Coding -Researcher analysis	-Digital recording -Verbatim transcription -Researcher Analysis
ETHICAL STANDARDS	- IRB submission of plan -All references to institution and participants actual name removed and substituted with pseudonyms -All documents, notes, electronic files and transcripts held in secure password-protected computer accessible to researcher and honest broker -All participants assured their right to withdraw from study any time prior to meeting without fear of reprisal to self or student	

Research Design and Rationale

This case study brought together parents and college officials in their natural setting to examine their perceptions of messages sent and received during the freshman onboarding process

(Reason & Bradury, 2001). A case study approach was selected for this investigation as a strategy to explore a real life, contemporary issue bounded by a specific place and time (Creswell, 2013). According to Yin (2003), a case study approach to research enables the researcher to understand a complex social phenomena while maintaining the "holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p.2).

The study operated within a framework of social constructivism which guided the investigation in several distinct ways including: a focus on participant interaction; integration of social and historical perspective; and exploration of multiple plausible explanations rather than starting with a single theory (Creswell, 2013).

The study consisted of a qualitative case study with a sample of parents whose students are college freshmen and college officials who interacted with freshman and/or their parents. This case study examined the perception of the messages both offered and received between parents and college officials while onboarding their student. Further, this case study explored the potential effects of the messaging on the two parties' support of student success.

Site and Population

This section provides details regarding the site and population selected for this study. Specifically, it explains how the sample was selected and provides a rationale for the sample selection process. Additionally, the steps used to gain access to the site and population are discussed.

Population Descriptions

The target population for this study included two groups of stakeholders; parents of entering college freshmen; and college officials who interact with first year students and/or their parents.

Parent Population. The parent population was drawn from two of the fifteen colleges and schools on the main campus of the university. The first college, identified as Interdisciplinary College offered nineteen undergraduate degrees and twenty graduate programs. Interdisciplinary College had a total student population of 2,295, of which 86% were undergraduate students. The second college in this investigation, referred to as Business College, offered degrees in seven undergraduate and graduate majors. There were 1,620 students in the Business College, of which 82% were undergraduates. The confirmed freshman cohort for the fall of 2015 as of September 01, 2015 in both colleges was 1,210 students.

College Official Population. The university employed approximately 4,000 people, which according to the Pew Charitable Trust (2013) makes it one of the ten largest employers in that city. The university classifies employees into categories of: faculty, staff; union and non-union; tenured and non-tenured; full and part time employees. As demographic characteristics of faculty and staff vary widely throughout the university and potentially may influence their perspective, participant demographic profile included their designation as faculty or staff; tenured or non-tenured; and length of employment with each participant.

Site Descriptions

The site for this study is a large, private, urban university in northeastern United States. This study was conducted on the largest of the three regional campuses at this university which has been in continuous operation since 1891. The campus occupies 124 acres in a large city of over two million citizens who live or work in this racially and socioeconomically mixed, metropolitan region (United States Census, 2010). The campus is easily accessible by highways and mass-transit systems and is within walking distance of the city's historical, cultural and business districts. According to the local Chamber of Commerce there were approximately 90

colleges in the region, with more than 360,000 enrolled college students among private, public, nonprofit and for profit institutions.

The regionally accredited university in this study is authorized to confer degrees in more than 200 undergraduate and professional degree programs. There were approximately 26,000 students; of which16, 000 were undergraduate students. The university in this study is a tuition driven, high research institution which relies on student tuition revenue in order to pay for the cost of operation (Carnegie Foundation, 2014; Fincher, 2002).

Site Access

As a fifteen year employee of the university, the researcher had access to data and stakeholders in the normal course of business. However, access to the site and data for this study relied on permission from the Deans at both colleges as well as the Senior Vice President of Enrollment and Student Success. The Senior Vice President noted that the findings of this study are of interest to the university.

Research Methods

Description of Each Method

Consistent with characteristics of a case study, the investigation gathered data from multiple sources, including document review and in-depth interviews with parent and college officials who are primary stakeholders of student success.

Document Review. Upon approval of the university, the doctoral committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the investigator began to collect print and electronic documents which were publically available to parents of onboarding freshman. Strauss and Corbin (1990) described the document review process as an opportunity to elicit meaning and develop empirical knowledge about the topic of the investigation. In this study, documents

served as supplemental material used during the interpretation phase of the study to clarify and corroborate participant data (Merriman, 1998).

Interviews. The investigation consisted of seventeen one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with parents and college officials from two colleges as well as officials who engage with first year freshman and/or their parents from the university at large. Nunkoosing (2005) recommended one-on-one interviews as a data collection method to give participants an opportunity to express their experience and understanding of the topic.

Participant Selection. The investigator assembled a stratified purposeful list of potential parent and college official volunteers to participate in this case study. As Mertens (2005) explained, a stratified purposeful sample is used when the researcher wants to ensure that subgroups within the larger pool of participants are represented. Further, Mertens (2005) offered that it is not necessary to seek the same number of participants from each subgroup if/when these groups are disproportionate in the pool.

For parent participants, this study disproportionately selected volunteer parents of varying backgrounds including: gender, ethnicity, and geographic origin. The investigator had access to this data through the application for entrance data and sought permission from the College Deans, Senior Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Success, the Institutional Review Board and Dissertation Committee to access this data. First names only were used during each parent interviews and pseudonyms were assigned during the data analysis phase to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

Purposefully excluded from the parent participant sample were parents of international students who may have had a very different experience with their students' primary educational institution than parents whose child was educated within the norms and culture of the United

States. The study purposefully did not exclude parents who may have or had another student at this or any university, or parents who may themselves be alum of the institution in the study, or parents who may be an employee of the university because their interpretations and expectations of messaging were potentially relevant to this investigation.

For college official interviews, a disproportionate sample was sought to include participants who communicated with parents during the freshman onboarding process and whose backgrounds included varying lengths of employment with the university. The investigator had access to university employee data as a member of same university community and obtained permission from the College Deans, Senior Vice-President of Enrollment Management and Student Success, Institutional Review Board and Dissertation Committee to contact potential participants. First names only were used during each interview and pseudonyms were assigned during the data analysis phase to protect the confidentiality of all participants. Purposefully excluded from the college official pool were those persons who are directly involved in this investigation.

The study engaged an honest broker to introduce prospective parents to the study and invite them to participate in the research investigation. An honest broker, a term introduced by Pielke (2007), seeks to reduce a researchers' choice of study participants based on personal perceptions and values. Additionally, the honest broker protects the anonymity of the study participants from the investigator (SAPC, 2011). The decision to use an honest broker in this case study was due to the influential position of the researcher with students in the university, although not typically with students in the colleges in this study. The honest broker in this case study contacted parents though email beginning on September 18, 2015 following parent participation in welcome week activities. A copy of the letter of invitation is identified in

Appendix A of this research study. Potential participants were contacted in groups of fifty from each college to introduce the study, assure the protection of volunteer rights, and secure a sample of up to eight parent volunteers from each college to participate in this investigation. Once the participants were assembled, no further parents were contacted.

The investigator directly outreached to potential college official participants as the majority were already familiar with the investigator by virtue of previous interactions as fellow employees. Upon the acceptance of college officials from each college and officials from the university, the researcher did not contact any additional college officials regarding this study.

Data Collection. All interviews took place between weeks one and five of the fall term, 2015/16 academic year. To allow for participation regardless of time or location, interviews with parents were conducted on the telephone at a time of volunteer choosing. All college official interviews were conducted in-person, on the university campus, at a time and location of their choosing.

Interviews were scheduled to be approximately one hour in length, with semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to gain insight into participant experience and perception of communication and messaging that transpired during freshman onboarding. Scripts which served to guide the interviewer are identified as Appendix B, at the end of this study. Interviews were recorded using MP3 digital format.

Electronic recordings were sent to a third party for verbatim transcription. Any inadvertent mention of names of persons or university were removed and all seventeen individual transcripts were renamed as Business Parent 1-4; Interdisciplinary Parent 1-4; Business Official1-3; Interdisciplinary Official 1-3; and University Official 1-3, with the numbers representing the order in which they participated in interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures. Coding and analyzing the data was conducted over a period of six weeks underwent three distinct stages of analysis. In the first stage, line by line responses to the investigators questions were transferred to an spreadsheet and placed into themes beginning with three initial themes of Reciprocity, Trust and Good Faith, which are the outcomes sought in a psychological contract (Levinson, Price, Munden, Mandl & Solley, 1962; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; Scholtz, 2013). Additional codes were added and others eliminated as they emerged from the data (Leech & Onwuegebuzie, 2007). At the conclusion of the first round of coding, 221 codes had emerged from the 556 lines of participant data.

In the second stage of analysis, participant statements from round one were transferred into themes that participants wanted to express. For example, both parents and college officials wanted to speak about trust (Theme 2) where they used code words such as: new; rise; it's his; developed; care; trust; confident choice; let them; mutual respect; trusted me; good hands; and honest. Additionally, participants wanted to share moments during onboarding in which they believed that trust was undermined (Theme 4) and expressed this with code words of: disempowered, not entirely open; not particularly upfront; not forthcoming; reminded; responded to student email; in reading student's email; and only trying to help. In total, participants offered fifty-five topics which they wanted to speak about or questions they wanted to pose.

In the third stage of analysis, data from the first two rounds were merged together into another spreadsheet yielding fifty-two concepts, topics, questions and keywords brought forth by participants during the course of this investigation. Participant statements were then considered as to what the participant stated and who made the statement; Table 5 below details the sixteen comparisons that were made as part of data analysis.

Table 5

Data Analysis

College Officials	Parents
Message College Officials wanted to send	Message parents received
College Officials' hope for students	Parents' hopes for students
College Officials' expectations of students	Parents' expectations of students
College Officials' expectations of self	Parents' expectations of self
College Officials' think parents would say about goals	Parents' said about goals
College Officials' expectations of parents	Parents' expectations of self
Parents expectation of self	Parents' expectations of college
College Officials expects of parents	Expectation mismatch: Parents/College/Student
Msg. College Officials wanted to send about camps visit	Msg. parents wanted to send about campus visit
Expectation mismatch : College Officials	Msg. parents received about collateral materials
Statements about retention and completion	Statements about retention and completion
Msg. College Officials wanted to send with collateral materials	Feelings about college (so far)

At the recommendation of the investigators doctoral committee, the researcher kept a log of his research analysis along with the emerging codes and themes uncovered in each round of analysis. The purpose of keeping such a log was to allow the investigator and his committee to ensure that raw data was not manipulated to fit a prescribed viewpoint, but rather, to allow meanings and messages to emerge from the data. This data log, along with the three spreadsheets of coding rounds were sent to the investigator's doctoral committee for review, consideration and feedback.

Ethical Considerations

There are important ethical considerations addressed in this study. In accordance with institutional and research protocols, their review and approval were obtained prior to conducting

the research study. Appropriate steps were taken to assure the anonymity of all participants, students, and university. An honest broker was employed to assure that there was no undue influence or potential for influence among participants who choose to participate or decline in this investigation. Participants were notified of their rights to withdraw from this study at any time and assured that there will be no intentional ramifications for participation or non-participation in the research study.

Participant confidentially was assured at all times before, during and after the conclusion of the study. All participants were asked to use only their first names, which were replaced by pseudonyms during data analysis phase of the study. Any reference to the university was removed and replaced with the pseudonym "Urban University". All interview data, raw and electronic, is held by the investigator in a secure computer at Urban University, accessible only to the researcher and honest broker and the IRB upon request. All participant materials shall be destroyed three years after the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings, Results and Interpretations

Introduction

This research study investigated how parents and college officials interpreted the communication and messaging that transpired during freshman onboarding at one university and assessed the potential impact of participant interpretations on building a foundation from which the stakeholders work in support of student success and degree completion.

The researcher's findings and results of participant perceptions of freshman onboarding were captured through qualitative investigatory techniques of personal interviews and document review. Parents and college officials participated in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews during the first five weeks of the fall term, a period identified as a critical period in which students make their decision to stay or leave a college (ACT, 2008; Bozick, 2007; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2005). Participants' interpretation of their experiences during freshman onboarding were recorded and transcribed and are presented in alignment with current literature, theories and practices.

Study Participants. Participants from two colleges, which are part of a university comprised of fifteen colleges and schools, were selected to take part in the study. From a pool of 1,210 parents whose children were matriculating freshmen, an honest broker contacted a stratified purposeful sample of 290 individuals to introduce the study and invite them to participate in either a focus group or a one-on-one interview. A total of eight parents, four from each college agreed to take part in individual one hour telephone interviews, a method preferred by participants due to ease in scheduling around their busy day.

In addition to parent participants, the investigator directly outreached to a stratified purposeful sample of college officials who work within one of the two colleges in the

investigation or who work as university-wide administrators who support freshman and/or their parents. From an identified pool of forty-five potential participants, fifteen college officials were invited to engage in one-on-one interviews to be conducted on campus at a convenient time and location of their choosing. Nine college officials agreed to take part in the investigation; three from each college and three from the university at-large.

The investigator sought to include in the study a sample of parents whose gender, educational backgrounds, geographic origins and ethnicities vary as to ensure participants with these potentially influential perspectives were included. Along with these purposeful selections, there are additional unique factors noted about the parent participants which may play a role in their interpretations and opinions including: marital status; career; familiarity with the university; and experience with other college-going children. Table 6 below depicts parent participant backgrounds followed by discussions about these individuals.

Table 6

Select Parent Profiles

Parent	Parent Gender	Student Gender	Origin	Education	Additional Characteristics
Interdisciplinary Parent 1	Female	Female	Within Region	College Degree	Urban University Alumna Student is Liberty Scholar
Interdisciplinary Parent 2	Female	Female	Within Region	High School Degree	Resides in same city as Urban Student is Liberty Scholar
Interdisciplinary Parent 3	Female	Male	Outside Region	College Degree	Profession is clinical psychologist
Interdisciplinary Parent 4	Female	Male	Outside Region	High School Degree	Profession supports children with no parent supervision
Business Parent 1	Female	Female	Outside Region	College Degree	Profession: College English Professor as is her husband (student's step father)
Business Parent 2	Male	Male	Outside Region	College Degree	Raised and college educated in region; moved to warmer climate before starting family
Business Parent 3	Female	Female	Outside Region	College Degree	Participant focused on mothers concern about rodent in residence hall.
Business Parent 4	Female	Female	Outside Region	College Degree	Raised in Germany went to University in United States

In addition to parents of onboarding students, the investigator sought to include a sample of college official participants whose backgrounds vary based on: gender; college affiliation; role at the university; length of service; and tenure status. Table7 is a composite of potentially influential factors regarding these participants and is followed by deep background discussions with these individuals.

Table 7

Select College Official Profiles

School Official	Gender	Faculty or Staff	Employment at Urban University	Additional Characteristics
Interdisciplinary Official 1	Male	Staff	Over 30 years	First Generation College Raised in Rural area
Interdisciplinary Official 2	Male	Staff	14 years	Now the same age as many parents of college students
Interdisciplinary Official 3	Female	Faculty	28 years	Tenured Professor Last year before retirement
Business Official 1	Female	Faculty	15 year	Non-Tenured Professor Alumni of Urban University Freshman son at another University
Business Official 2	Female	Staff	Less than 5 years	First job in Higher Education
Business Official 3	Male	Staff	Over 10 years	Is investigating/visiting colleges with his high school aged daughter
University Official 1	Male	Faculty & Staff	Over 20 years	Has daughter attending Urban University
University Official 2	Female	Staff	Over 20 years	Routinely supports students/parents in distress
University Official 3	Male	Staff	Less than 10 years	Also faculty at another university Recently promoted to Director level position

Despite three requests for participation, once by the honest broker and twice by the investigator, the parent sample in this study is disproportionately represented by gender, geographic origin and ethnicity as compared to the overall population of students at the university as depicted in Table 8 below. Because the sample population is disproportionate to the population, the subgroup sample disproportionately represents the potential views of women, who reside outside of the region of the university. Further, because no persons who identify as Hispanic volunteered to participate in the study, the findings and conclusions cannot be said to be representative of persons of that ethnicity.

While the parent participant backgrounds in this study are disproportionate to the overall student population, Mertens (2005) found that it is not necessary to obtain precise parity between subgroups and the larger population if the subgroups are disproportionate in the pool. Further, based on the assertion of Kaufman (1989, 1994), capturing a variety of perspectives in this study: gender; geographic origin; education; and ethnic backgrounds of participants who shared the same or similar experience, is sufficient to permit evaluation within a group. Based on the findings of these researchers the diversity of this pool while lacking, is sufficient to yield findings about participants shared experience of freshman onboarding with the possible exception of persons not represented in the sample.

Table 8

Select Participant Demographic Data

Demographic Profile	Parent Participant	College Official Participant	Representation of Urban University Student Population
Participant Gender: Female	6 participants (75%)	4 Participants	47%
Participant Gender: Male	2 participants (25%)	5 participants	53%
Parent Geographic Origin	75% of participants reside outside region	Not Applicable	56% of students hail from outside region
Participant Ethnicity: White	5 participants (62.5%)	7 participants	53%
Participant Ethnicity: Asian	2 participants (25%)	0 participants (0%)	15.7%
Participant Ethnicity: Black or African American	1 participant (12.5%)	2 participants (18%)	5.5%
Participant Ethnicity: Hispanic	0 participants (0%)	0 participants (0%)	5.6%

Urban University (2016) and College Factaul.com (2016)

Interdisciplinary College Parent Participants. Parent participants from the

Interdisciplinary College, all mothers, are identified as Interdisciplinary Parents 1 through 4 to

protect their anonymity and represent the order in which they engaged in interviews. Two

participants, Interdisciplinary Parent 1 and Interdisciplinary Parent 2, had daughters entering the

college, both of whom were recipients of the university's prestigious Liberty Scholars Program.

This program annually selects fifty students from its onboarding class of low-income families

and provides them with full tuition, excluding room and board. Eligibility for the scholarship

requires that the student be high achieving as measured by GPA, SAT and class rank; and had

attended public, private, or charter high school in the same city as Urban University.

Interdisciplinary Parent 1 is Asian-American and an alumna of Urban University.

Interdisciplinary Parent2 is an African-American married mother of five children whose ages

range from 3 to 23. These two participants share similar backgrounds in that they both live in the same city as the college; benefit from financial assistance to support their children's college education; and have daughters who are achieving at or near the top of their high school peers.

Interdisciplinary Parents 3 and 4 whose sons joined the college, reside in states outside that of Urban University and are both sending their first child to college. Interdisciplinary Parent 3, a Korean-American and clinical psychologist, described the college search process as a partnership between herself, her husband, their son and his high school counseling office, which she credits as potentially having a greater influence on the process than the parents. Interdisciplinary Parent4, a single, white, mother of one, lives in a neighboring state where she works for a non-profit organization that cares for children who have no parent support at home. While these two women have different ethnic and professional backgrounds, both share similar attributes of supporting their first child to transition from home to attend a university outside of the state in which they raised their children and continue to live. In addition to parents whose students are entering the Interdisciplinary College, the study also included college officials who directly work within the college, to gain their insight into the communication taking place during the freshman onboarding process.

Interdisciplinary College Official Participants. A sample of three college officials who work for the Interdisciplinary College of Urban University participated in the investigation and are referred to as Interdisciplinary Officials 1 through 3. These participants include two male staff and one female, tenured faculty member, all of whom have worked for the college for more than ten years and have direct experience working with college freshmen and their parents. Interdisciplinary Official 1, a twenty year member of the college described his work with parents as rewarding. He said that he tries to put parents at ease during students' transition from home to

college by reminding them that they taught their child good values and judgment, and they should feel confident that their child will bring those values with them to college. Interdisciplinary Official 2, a fourteen year member of the college, explained that his perspective has changed with regard to parent participation now that he is the same age as many of the parents of his students. He, like the parents he engages with is very concerned about campus security and student safety. Interdisciplinary Official 3, a tenured professor with the college for the past twenty-eight years, estimated that about 5% of freshmen parents contact her each year, typically through email. She recalled one instance where, after the student authorized permission to speak with his parents, she and the father exchanged emails every week throughout the semester. She perceived the interactions to be beneficial in that, when the student ultimately failed the course, the father was not surprised and already had a "plan B" in place for his son. All three of the officials from Interdisciplinary College bring experience and expressed empathy when they interact with parents of college students.

Combined, the perspectives of seven individuals, four parents and three college officials associated with the Interdisciplinary College shared their experiences, observations and assessments of the communication and messaging that transpired during freshman onboarding. To ensure that the messages were not limited to the perspective of one college, the perspectives of participants associated with a second college, Business College was also included in this investigation.

Business College Parent Participants. Four parents whose children matriculated into the business college, participated in the investigation. All four parents are white, college educated, men and women who reside more than 500 miles away from Urban University. Business Parent 1 is a college English professor who is remarried to a fellow professor, and

wanted to send her daughter to an Ivy League university. She recalled her first encounter with Urban University which took place while she and her daughter were visiting an Ivy League university directly next to the Urban University. She stated "we started looking a little closer at (Urban University) because it's right next to (Ivy University) and shares a lot of the same facilities and focuses on stuff she wants to do." Business Parent 3 spoke of her disappointment that her daughter was not accepted to her or her daughter's first choice university. She said that even after attending their summer preparatory camp between her junior and senior year of high school and earning all A's in the program, she was not among the freshman applicants accepted for admissions there. Likewise, Business Parent 4, a woman who was born in Germany and attended undergraduate and graduate school in the United States, spoke about her preference for an Ivy League institution for her daughter. She shared her opinion about the university her daughter selected to join:

> I am not saying (Urban University) doesn't have very great standards but compared to some schools she was looking at and got into, she probably could have gone higher (sic) as far as harder to get into schools I guess; but she really leaned towards the idea of going to (Urban University).

In each of these instances, Business Parents 1, 3, and 4 spoke about the disappointment for both themselves and for their student in not being admitted into their first choice university

Unlike the disappointment expressed by the other business parents, Business Parent 2 shared a different experience about his son's college selection process. He and his wife were familiar with many of the schools in the region, including Urban University as they grew up and attend university in the region before moving out of state. Their son, like the children of

Business Parents 1, 2, and 4 had multiple offers of acceptance, but unlike them, he selected Urban University as his first choice.

In addition to parents whose children entered the Business College, the perspectives of a sample of college officials who are associated with the same college also participated in the case study.

Business College Official Participants. Three Business College officials participated in the investigation. These participants included one male and one female member of the college staff and one female faculty member. Business Official 1 has been a professor of freshman-level courses for the past sixteen years and is also an alumna of the Business College at Urban University. While her experience with parents is "limited", she occasionally interacts with parents and she is also the parent of a freshmen onboarding to another university. Business Official 2, is a comparatively new, three year member of the college advising office, who works exclusively with college freshman and their parents, to which she added also their "aunts, uncles, and grandparents". She referred to the multitude of student guardians as "helicopter parents" who are doing the legwork that the student is not doing. Business Official 3 is a college staff member who has worked in the college for thirteen years and whose job intersects with freshmen and parents at college-sponsored activities such as "Accepted Student Day". He is also the parent of a high school student preparing to go to college, and described parent involvement as being a valid and necessary way to "champion their student's needs".

Each of the three business officials in this investigation bring varying levels of experience in working with parents ranging from limited to exclusive interactions with freshmen

and their parents. Two of the three participants also offer perspectives through the lens of being

both a college official and a parent of children onboarding to college.

There were a total of seven participants from the Business College who shared their

experiences and perspectives regarding the communication taking place during freshman

onboarding. In addition to the views and observations from participants directly linked to two

colleges, the case study also includes a sample of participants who are not associated with a

single college, but are associated with the student body across all fifteen colleges at Urban

University.

University-wide Official Participants. Three Urban University officials who supervise

offices which interact with students and/or parents in all fifteen colleges at the university agreed

to participate in the investigation. University Official 1 is both a tenured professor and staff

member who has worked at Urban University for more than thirty years in combined roles. He

interacts with freshman and their parents at university-sponsored events and in one-on-one

meetings as issues arise that require his input. When asked to describe his impressions of

interactions with parents he responded that he finds parents to be enthusiastic and hopeful about

their student's decision to attend Urban University, and he encourages them to give their children

the freedom to make their own decisions while in college. University Official 2, a member of

the University for over twenty years, believes that some parents expect the same level of

emotional support that was provided to the child at home. She explains to parents that baring an

emergency, her office expects students to take the initiative to contact her for support, not their

parents. The final study participant, is a relatively new, three year member of the university who

along with the other two university officials had earned his doctoral degree. University Official

3 described early interactions with parents as favorable, but believes that deadlines and decisions

bring out either "really positive or really negative reactions from parents. "He would like parents to see themselves as partners who work with the university as opposed to working in opposition. During open-house events, he shares with parents the process and procedures of his office; however, he often finds it necessary to respond to their complaints rather than communicating as the partners he hopes them to be. All three of these university officials hold jobs that directly interface with freshmen and parents, and through their interactions, attempt to convey the protocols of their office with regard to working with students and parents.

To capture an array of perspectives, this case study purposefully selected a sample of participants who both represent the larger population of the parent/student and university official; and also bring a variety of diverse backgrounds and experiences to the investigation. Parent participants include both mothers and fathers, some with college degrees and some without; some who reside within the region of Urban University and some who live more than 500 miles from the campus where their child has matriculated.

In addition to these purposefully selected factors, other elements of participant backgrounds are noted which may inform their views and interpretations. For instance, when a participant spoke about their marital status, career, or familiarity with Urban University these were noted to provide a richer insight into the background of the individual sharing their perspective.

College officials too were purposefully selected to capture a diversity of perspectives and also represent the larger population at the university based on gender, college affiliation, role at the university, length of service, and tenure status. If a participant stated a personal factor that may provide deeper insight into their background and possibly their viewpoint, these factors are

noted. For example, two college officials spoke about their experiences with their own children preparing for college and another indicated that she was an alumna of the same university and college where she has been teaching for sixteen years.

While there were deliberate attempts to include in the sub-group sample population a representation of the larger population, this case study disproportionally represents the population of the university, and is more representative of women, who live outside of the region of Urban University. As there are no representatives in the sample who purport to be of Hispanic heritage, the findings, results and conclusions of this investigation cannot be said to be representative of that ethnic group, although they are represented in the larger pool of students attending the university.

Findings

The findings of this research study represent the lived-experiences of parents and college officials who participated in the onboarding of college freshmen at one university. Based on a framework of social constructivism, the investigator captured the complexity of views of human interaction by purposefully engaging seventeen participants hailing from varied ethnic, geographic and experiential backgrounds in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Line by line analysis of transcribed interviews resulted in an initial 221 codes and 55 themes. Further refinement over a period of six weeks with input from the researcher's doctoral committee resulted in the following five themes and twelve sub-findings. Figure 3 illustrates a graphic representation of the themes and sub-findings that emerged from the investigation. This is then followed by a deep analysis and verbatim statements made by participants which form the basis of the themes.
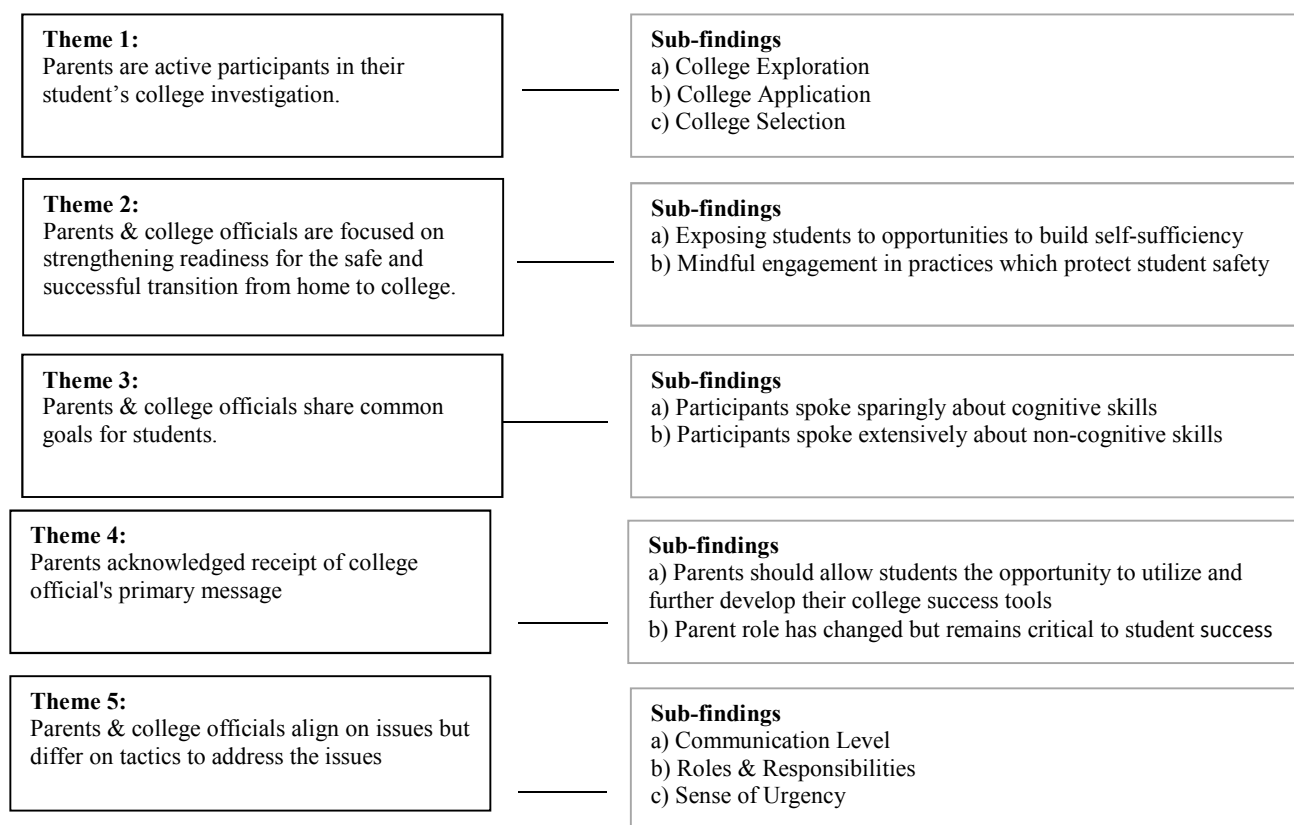
Theme 1: Parents are active participants in their student's college investigation.	**Sub-findings** a) College Exploration b) College Application c) College Selection
Theme 2: Parents & college officials are focused on strengthening readiness for the safe and successful transition from home to college.	**Sub-findings** a) Exposing students to opportunities to build self-sufficiency b) Mindful engagement in practices which protect student safety
Theme 3: Parents & college officials share common goals for students.	**Sub-findings** a) Participants spoke sparingly about cognitive skills b) Participants spoke extensively about non-cognitive skills
Theme 4: Parents acknowledged receipt of college official's primary message	**Sub-findings** a) Parents should allow students the opportunity to utilize and further develop their college success tools b) Parent role has changed but remains critical to student success
Theme 5: Parents & college officials align on issues but differ on tactics to address the issues	**Sub-findings** a) Communication Level b) Roles & Responsibilities c) Sense of Urgency

Figure 3: Major Themes and Sub-Findings.

Theme 1: Parents were active participants in their students' college investigation.

Students who enrolled in Urban University were presented with multiple college options to explore and consider for their post-secondary education. Additionally, these students encountered specific processes, deadlines and obstacles on their path to making their college selection. Parents spoke about their role in supporting their children through this process which is described in three sub findings: (a) College Exploration; (b) College Application; and (c) College Selection.

College Exploration. Discussions with parents began with their recollection of the initial contact that transpired between their family and potential colleges. Interdisciplinary Parent 3 believed that initial outreach from the colleges began when her son completed the SAT college

entrance test. She stated that "Schools acquire lists, which likely comes from SAT scores or whatever" and this began an inundation of direct mail sent to the family home and addressed to both prospective students and their parents. Six of the eight parents, including all four parents from the Interdisciplinary College, spoke about high volume of direct mail they and their child had received in the form of post cards, letters, email and brochures. Interdisciplinary Parent 3 viewed the mail as "promotional materials…", and in describing the value of the materials she said "I don't remember being impressed." Interdisciplinary Parent 4 commented that his son "was constantly receiving postcards, all different shapes of postcards….there was a stack that I threw out after he made his decisions and figured out where he was going; there was a good ten inch stack." Business Parent 4 also recalled the receipt of numerous pieces of collateral material from prospective colleges which she and her daughter reviewed together, and viewed it as a good way to introduce them to colleges they had not previously been familiar with and also to "kind of narrow it down" to which colleges they may want to apply.

The term collateral materials is a marketing industry term that has entered the mainstream to represent unsolicited documents of all types and delivery methods. Urban University, like its peers sends collateral materials to students and parents through multiple means, but primarily through email. Among the numerous pieces of collateral materials that Urban University sends to prospective students and parents are invitations to apply for admission; reminders about application deadlines; and invitations to tour the campus or to attend an Open House. In the event the student or parent registered for an event but failed to attend, a standardized letter was sent to the student and/or parent that states: "We noticed that you registered for (event) but did not attend...were getting in touch to let you know that we missed you, but there are still plenty of chances to visit (Urban) and get to know us better." Through collateral material, Urban

University and others are introducing themselves to families who may be unfamiliar with the college, encouraging them to take a closer look at their programs, and guiding them through the application and matriculation processes.

If parents were unimpressed with the collateral materials they received from colleges, the opposite can be said about their personal visits to college campuses; particularly their visits to Urban University's campus. Interdisciplinary Parent 3 and her son attended an Urban University sponsored open-house and commented about the visit "We didn't get to go to all of the meetings that we wanted to, but we certainly got a good sense of the school." She added "it was fantastic; really from start-to-finish." Likewise, Interdisciplinary Parent 4 joined her son at an Urban University event, entitled, "Accepted-Students Day", which is intended to be a celebratory event for students and their parents who have confirmed their decision to join the college. Recollecting her experience at the event, she said that she "was floored by the efficiency; just everything was so organized. Students were out there directing, it was amazing." Both she and her son, as well as Interdisciplinary Parent 3 and her son, found the college sponsored events to be valuable in shaping their overall impression of the college, and affirmed their decision to join the college.

Business Parent 4 spoke about trips that she and her daughter made to colleges throughout the United States east coast during spring breaks in the daughter's junior and senior years of high school. She believed that this experience, in addition to being a good bonding opportunity, was a good way for her daughter to identify attributes of a college that her child found appealing, as well as those characteristics which were unappealing. In speaking directly about their visit to Urban University, she said "We didn't actually do the tour of (Urban University). We had hit up so many schools we, you know, kind of, just drive in and walk around a little bit; we felt like it was a good fit. " By conducting their own self-guided tour,

Business Parent 4 and her daughter had the flexibility to set their own timeframe for their visit and also focus on areas that they wanted to see, potentially bypassing the places and messages the university had wanted to highlight.

This approach to visiting colleges where families "dropped in" without a formal tour was stated by three of eight parents in this study and speaks to the value of personal visits to college campuses, but not necessarily formal visits. Business Parent 1 found this experience to be very satisfying for her and her daughter and in recalling their visit and the impact it had on her daughter she said:

> As far as (Urban University) goes, we went when the school was still operating and there were students out. That's really what did it for her because it's very multicultural, a lot of different backgrounds, ethnicities. She liked the vibe on campus.

> Interdisciplinary Parent 2, who lives in the same city as Urban University also shared her thoughts on their visit to campus:

> Yeah, we actually live in (city). We never bothered to go visit. Not that we hadn't been to the campus, but we hadn't really taken a visit to the campus as a perspective student until after she was accepted. But than once we went, they were very welcoming.

In each of these instances, parents and prospective students found value in visiting college campuses, regardless of their previous familiarity with the college. Additionally, for reasons of convenience or possibly seeking their own unfiltered message about the campus these participants' preferred self-guided tours over university sponsored tours.

One common goal that parents and prospective students had during their visits to campus, was to find "fit" or a sense that their child would integrate with the culture and values of the

community. For instance, after Business Parent 3 and her daughter visited Urban University she expressed her impression that the college was a "good fit" because she and her daughter determined that the university was both part of a large metropolitan city and "still kind of like its own campus." A similar goal of fit was sought by Interdisciplinary Parent 3 as she, her husband, and her son explored colleges. She explained that although she and her husband "had some ideas of schools for him" they encouraged him to look at a variety of colleges: large and small; urban and rural, with the goal of selecting one that would be a good fit for him. The topic of fit reemerges in Theme 3 as one of the primary goals that parents and college officials seek for students as an outcome of the college experience.

College officials' efforts to introduce themselves to prospective students and their parents through collateral material was met with mixed degrees of success ranging from unimpressed to good. A more successful method of helping students to identify an environment where they might see themselves was through campus visits. Participants spoke about the value of participation in formal, college sponsored events as well as informal, self-guided walks through campus both before and after their children submitted their applications for admissions.

College Application. During their senior year of high school, students submit their applications to colleges which were under consideration. All eight of the parents in the study mentioned that their child completed applications for admissions to multiple colleges. Three participants, all from the Interdisciplinary College, spoke about their role in supporting their student through the application process. Interdisciplinary Parent 1, an alumna of Urban University, spoke about the relative ease in which her daughter had navigated the application process. She did not recall the precise number of colleges to which her daughter had applied; she did however, recall two instances that stood out for her. In one instance, her daughter applied to a

college that she "found on the internet" and was "not previously on her radar". She applied to the

college because the application was free and the process was completed by the ease of email.

Speaking about a second college which her daughter had applied, a small college in Oregon, she

said that the college took a "very personal" approach to the application process. Immediately

after applying for admission, the student received back a handwritten birthday card from a

college admission representative. Initially the parent thought the note was thoughtful; however,

when she continued to receive holiday cards and personal notes even after she told them she was

not enrolling, she found the notes to be "a little creepy." Urban University too send holiday

messages to prospective and current students and in one example sent a holiday card entitled

"From Our Home to Yours" which read, in part:

> The holidays are a wonderful time to gather in the spirit of joy, celebration, and spend
>
> time with those you hold dear. All of us at (Urban) University's Office of Admissions
>
> wish you a season filled with laughter, cheer, and prosperity that continues on throughout
>
> the coming year.

The sentiment of wishing the community well during the holiday may be appropriate for

those who are associated with the college, but once a person indicates their decision to withdraw

their application, the continued outreach has been found to be unwelcome by some participants.

Where Interdisciplinary Parent 1 described an easy process for her child in applying to

colleges, Interdisciplinary Parent 3 described a very different experience. She, her husband, and

their son's high school counseling office had to "push him" to complete the application process.

She said that while her son was always determined to go to college, he "needed reminders" about

following through with the process and completing applications by the deadlines. Recalling her

son's decision to apply to Urban University, Interdisciplinary Parent 3 commented that it was

ironic, that "it wasn't my husband or me who put (Urban University) on the list, demonstrating that the child was able to make some decisions independent of the parents prodding.

Interdisciplinary Parent 2 also spoke about the necessity of having to watch over her daughter's progress in completing the college application process. She stated...as much as I wanted to stand back, she needed me and she needed support and as we went through the process, I discovered that she needed a lot more support than I initially thought she would..."

In all three instances, Interdisciplinary parents 1, 2 and 3 spoke about trying to maintain a balance between giving their children the independence to complete the applications on their own, while simultaneously standing ready to guide and support where they deemed it necessary. A similar approach toward balance was evidenced during the selection of which university to join.

College Selection. All eight of the students associated with this study had applied for admissions to more than one university. As an outcome, five parents, including all four from the Business College, indicated that their children received multiple offers of acceptance. Several parents spoke about how their child came to choose Urban University, as well as their role in guiding the student through the decision process.

Business Parent 1 said she was interested in her child enrolling in an Ivy League university. She particularly liked (Ivy University) because it was the alma mater of her cousin and uncle "so it's sort of in the family." She and her daughter visited the Ivy League university even though she received a wait-list notification. Wait-listing is a process by which the college neither accepts nor denies a student for admissions but instead defers their decision while other students, who were made offers, make their selections. While visiting the Ivy League University of choice, the student and her mother came upon Urban University due to its close geographic

proximity. They submitted her application to Urban University and received an immediate offer of admission. Meeting the daughter's desire for a large university in an urban setting and with an offer of acceptance in hand, allowed the parent and daughter to "stop worrying about the Ivy League prestige issues and start looking at where she really would fit in well."

In recounting the college selection process with her daughter, Business Parent 4 said that her daughter applied to a range of colleges, some of which she described as "kind of high end." In total, her daughter had submitted seven college applications and received offers of admissions from five of them. For this family, as well as the family of Interdisciplinary Parent 2, choosing which college to join ultimately was made based on comparisons of the college that offered the best financial-aid package.

Business Parent 2, whose son was searching colleges that allowed him to pursue his interest in playing ice hockey, also had several colleges to choose from. The father and son visited a few colleges together along the east coast during his senior year of high school, and the son received offers of scholarship from some of those universities. Ultimately the family supported the student's first choice, Urban University, even though they did not offer a sports scholarship. The decision for Urban University was made in part because the student would have family nearby, they felt comfortable in the region, and the student could continue to pursue his passion for his sport while earning his college degree.

Parents articulated the steps by which their children progressed through the college exploration, application and selection process. They shared moments in which their student struggled with a processes or a decision and articulated how they helped to guide the student to making informed decisions. Parents spoke about specific factors that influenced and at times, redirected their decisions; and finally, parents spoke about their adaptive role as need arose to

support their student throughout the process. In the next theme parents spoke about their goals and support toward strengthening the skills they believe to be necessary for their children to successfully transition from home to university.

Theme 2: Parents and college officials are focused on strengthening readiness for the safe and successful transition from home to college.

Parents played a supportive and influential role in their children's quest to select a college where they would find comfort and fit within the community's culture. To further support the student during the transition from high school to college, both parents and college officials focused their attention on two primary areas of college readiness: (a) exposing students to opportunities to build self-sufficiency; and (b) mindful engagement in practices which protect the student's safety on safety.

Exposing students to opportunities to build self-sufficiency. Several parents in this study described their children as having achieved a high level of intellectual and emotional acuity prior to entering college. When describing their child's cognitive skills, parents did not directly refer to any specific subject matter strength such as English, math or language, instead they spoke in general terms about their child's intellect. For example, Business Parent 1 stated that her daughter "had an aptitude for academics very early", and points to her performance on high school exams as evidence of her conviction. Interdisciplinary Parent 4, who did not attend college, spoke highly about her son's intellectual ability to navigate the complex college application and financial-aid processes. When speaking about how her son managed these steps she said "my son, he's just so smart and on it" suggesting that he was both capable and motivated to address the details involved in these processes. In another example, when Interdisciplinary Parent 2 was asked to describe her impressions of her visit to the college campus she instead, redirected the conversation to speak about her daughter's background stating that she had

attended a high school for performing arts, was a musician, "...and can I add she was a straight A student..." thereby redirecting the conversation to one about the student's cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Additional descriptions parents used to state their students non-cognitive attributes included pronouncements including: "mature" and "determined" (Interdisciplinary Parent 3); "Independent" (Business Parent 1); and "driven and very competitive" (Business Parent 4) also adding "whatever she does, it's like, pretty full-force." Reiterating the importance of student non-cognitive readiness for challenges of college life, Business Official 1 stated that for students to be successful at college, they need to be "self-motivated, self-directed and self-guided." Together, these comments by parents and college officials denote a focus on students' development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills as a precursor to entering college.

When discussing where and how students acquired their cognitive and non-cognitive skills, two participants, one parent and one college official raised concerns about the educational quality in the K-12 educational system in preparing students for college success. Business Parent 1, who raised her daughter in Louisiana, about 1,200 miles from Urban University, was concerned about her child's level of college readiness compared to other students entering the university. She stated "So we quickly found out that one of the problems that was going to handicap her was Louisiana; because Louisiana is, I think 49th in the nation for education." In a more general rebuke of K-12 education in preparing students for college, University Official 1 said "So, one of the problems with education that we cannot fix is K-12, and that transition is hard."

Regardless of the quality of the education children received in school, parents and college officials from both colleges spoke about extra-curricular endeavors they endorsed in order to further develop students' college readiness skills. For example, Business Official 2 said she was

a proponent of a recent trend in which high school students take courses at their local community college as a part of their high school curriculum. Similarly, Business Parent 2 spoke about affording her daughter financial and emotional support to spend a summer between her junior and senior years taking classes at a residential college that she was considering enrolling after graduation from high school. Urban University, like many of its peer universities, invites prospective students to participate in a summer program between junior and senior year of high school. In Appendix D at the end of this study is an invitation that Urban University officials sent to prospective college freshmen in 2015 to encourage them to participate in their "Summer Institute". Providing an explanation why students should join their program a college official wrote "College is about more than just classes. At (Urban) University's Summer Institute you'll make new friends, experience the life of an undergrad campus, and explore the historic city. "If the goal of this summer immersion program is to build students' college readiness skills in both cognitive and non-cognitive areas, it is worth noting that nowhere in the invitation is any reference to work or cognitive skill building.

In addition to dual attendance at high school and college, another model of supporting student's readiness for college was discussed by two parents who spoke about benefits their children received from independent travel opportunities. Interdisciplinary Parent 3 described an experience in which her son received a grant which provided opportunity for him to travel to Seoul, South Korea for a month while he was in high school. During this excursion, the parent said that her son "was pretty much the only one there; he had to figure a lot of things out". As a result of this experience, Interdisciplinary Parent 3 believed that her son and his parents "had more of a sense of his ability to be on his own this year in college…." A similar example of student benefiting from travel was shared by Business Parent 3, who spoke about his son's senior

year when he took classes online so he could participate in an intramural ice-hockey program in an east coast city about 1,200 miles from the family home. He found that as a result of this experience, the student developed a sense of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility which enabled him to "take the lead (sic)" on his college investigation. Further, because the students' travels enabled him to spend time in the city where Urban University is located "he knows what he's getting into" with regard to weather and living a substantial distance from his immediate family.

In addition to exposing incoming students to their responsibilities as independent adults, two college officials with the Business College spoke about the importance of introducing them to the cultural differences between high school and college. One example of a very basic cultural difference was described by Business Official 1 in her remarks, "I think I had a student today, again…asking am I allowed to go to the bathroom?" The professor had to explain to this freshman that in college, at least at Urban University, students are not expected to ask permission to leave the room. In concluding this scenario, Business Official 1 added "obviously the seniors here would never ask to go to the bathroom!"

A second example, also expressed by Business Official 1, referred to an incident with a freshman from a previous cohort where the student chose to spend her time in class "making friends" and "playing on Facebook" rather than engaging in the class discussion. When the student earned a failing grade on her first exam she came to the professor upset with her grade. The professor explained to the student that as an adult she is allowed to decide how to spend her time but if she wants to be successful in college "you need to be in class when you're in class" referring to the need to fully participate in the class not simply show up for the class.

While students are given the freedom and responsibility that comes with independence, there is also an expectation that in college, students should not make excuses for their decisions. Business Official 2 said that she occasionally has to let students know that they shouldn't bring a doctor's note to a professor, in an attempt to have an absence excused or extended time on an assignment. She stated in-part "this isn't high school…unfortunately it doesn't work that way here", indicating that is always the student's responsibility to stay current with their work, regardless of the reason for their absence from class.

Another cultural difference between high school and college which emerged in the discussion centers on relationships between faculty and students. Three college officials, Business Officials 1 and 2 as well as Interdisciplinary Official 3, all made references about students being treated as adults "because they are adults"(Business Official 1). Along with college officials, three parents indicated that they had received that same message from college officials during freshman welcome events. Interdisciplinary Parent 2 said that she participated in an Urban University hosted online chat during which she recalled being told "these kids are gonna to start school soon and they're gonna become adults." Likewise, Interdisciplinary Parent 1 recalled the same message which stated, "Your child is an adult, they need to make their own decisions." Additionally, Interdisciplinary Parent 4 shared an experience that stood out for her when participating in "Accepted Students Day" at Urban University. She recalled an exchange between her son and the "head honcho in psychology":

> (The professor) didn't talk over him; he really let (student) explain what they were doing there. And I think the one big thing that I wasn't expecting was that he said he is absolutely available and there for my child.

By describing these personal experiences and observations, parents affirmed that in

college, a transition takes place where students are treated as adults and are expected to perform accordingly. Further, parents and college officials communicated their support for preparing onboarding freshman for the expectations and cultural mores of college. In addition to sharing expectations of onboarding students, participants shared their perspectives on the role of the college in promoting a safe environment for the community to work.

Mindful engagement in practices which protect student safety. In addition to preparing the students for their acclimation to college, participants also spoke about the necessity for the university to prepare for oversight of the student's safety while in their care. Interdisciplinary Parent 2, who lives and raised her daughter in the same city as Urban University stated, "...I need to know that that the university is really mindful in what they're doing to make sure that our kids are safe." This sentiment was reiterated by several college officials, including Interdisciplinary Official1 who said that parent concerns about student safety are well-founded and as such, "You don't want to sugar coat that because that is a legitimate concern." Interdisciplinary Official 2 said that parents regularly ask him for details about their child's schedule; specifically they are concerned about their children taking evening classes and walking through the campus after dark. Business Official 3, who in addition to working with college freshmen and their parents, is also the parent of a junior in high school currently visiting potential colleges, also shared his concern about ensuring that children are safe, not just in college but in all public environments.

> ...and I guess it's the world that we live in, it's so much craziness going on. It's like high school. I mean, if you can send them to high school, you can definitely send them to college, because high schools are just as crazy. Malls are crazy. Everywhere is crazy, and I think you just have to say, "All right, they're growing up. I gotta take a step back,"

and that's the hard part.

This remark by a father and college official with 10 years of experience at Urban University demonstrates the pervasiveness of the issue and need for vigilant focus on security regardless of whether the student is attending college in a small town or large city.

With regard to the location of Urban University, situated in a large metropolitan city, four parents, two from each college specifically raised this topic as a primary impetus in their child's decision to attend Urban University. Business Parent 1 said that one of the governing decisions in her daughter's selection of the university was the opportunity to attend "a good school in an urban setting". Business Parent 4 said that her daughter found Urban University "very appealing" due to its "urban location". Using the same words to describe their visit to the campus, Interdisciplinary Parent 1 said that her child found "the urban environment was very appealing." Finally, Interdisciplinary Parent 3 said that he thought the urban environment seemed to be a good choice for his son "and certainly something that emerged as a preference of his." Interdisciplinary Official 1, who grew up in a rural setting but has been living and working in the city for the past 20 years, affirmed the connection between the location of Urban University and the need for added vigilance in his remark "It's a big city; it's fast paced; it's no nonsense; it's go, go, go…"

While city life is indeed an opportunity for rich experiences, the events that transpired during this case study were extraordinary and may in part, be shaping the discussion about student safety. Following the official "move-in day", which represents a campus-wide celebration of the day all freshman and their families converge onto campus, Urban University locked its doors in preparation for what the United States Secret Service called, "the largest event ever undertaken" by their agency (Urban University website, 2015). The event, entitled the

"World Meeting of Families", was an international convention which brought more than one million visitors to the city and included multiple dignitaries including Pope Frances, who presided over an outdoor mass, less than a mile from campus. College officials encouraged students and faculty to attend this event, as evidenced by the message posted on the Urban University's website:

> If you are interested in attending the Papal Mass on the Parkway, please meet the Newman Center group in the parking lot of the (building). Students will then walk to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway where the Papal Mass will be celebrated.

> Three days following the conclusion of the historic visit of by the head of the Catholic Church, world attention shifted to a mass shooting that occurred on a college campus in Oregon and resulted in the death of nine people. Immediately following this act of violence, a credible threat was posted on social media targeting an unnamed university in the city of this study. Urban University responded again with a message to the college community on their website, which read:

> Since the shooting last week at a community college in Oregon, the FBI has seen similar social media postings throughout the country. Although there is no specific threat to a particular college or university, we are taking this very seriously and are taking extra precautions to protect the (university) community.

Interdisciplinary Parent 2 spoke about the events which occurred during her daughter's transition to college and voiced her concern that under these unique circumstances college officials did not communicate directly with parents about the steps being taken to secure the campus.

I have to say that considering the events that occurred in the last few weeks...they never could have predicted what could have happened yesterday... And the fact with how they didn't communicate with parents at all really bothered me.

This comment by Interdisciplinary Parent 1, along with those expressed by other parents and college officials illustrates the deep concern that participants have for children's safety at all times and especially in these days of escalating threats of violence on college campuses. Additionally, Interdisciplinary Parent 1 gave voice to the difficult transition from a period when parents and schools communicated about students to a period where colleges communicate directly with students.

Along with concerns about students' physical safety, participants also raised concerns about student's psycho-emotional health and safety. In one instance, Business Parent 4 who resides more than 2,600 miles from Urban University, voiced a concern about her daughter leaving the emotional supports that were in-place for her at home in California. She said "I wish she had gone to school here; at least on the west coast she'd probably know some of her classmates from high school..." This concern was not limited to parents who live outside of the region, as demonstrated by the concern raised by Business Official 1, whose son entered his freshman year at another nearby university. She expressed relief in knowing that he was involved in sports on campus because "you worry that they're going to hold-up in their dorm room."

Aside from what she believes to be typical issues of adjustment to a new environment, University Official 2 raised concerns about students requiring mental health services beyond the normal standard of care which she has witnessed in her twenty years with the university "...It's

not just home-sickness anymore, it's not like that, it's not simple adjustment issues; we haven't even seen those students yet. That'll come in maybe second, third week of the term." She continued to press the issue stating "But now it's suicidality; it's needing to make sure that they have their psychiatrist lined up, wanting to know where the crisis support is..." Along with these remarks, University Official 2 shared her professional opinion of what she and her colleagues believe to be a growing population of students who require and expect acute care, currently not within the purview of care provided by the university.

In this and previously cited statements, participants spoke fervently and found common agreement about the need to ensure students physical and emotional safety as they make their transition from home to college. Participants shared the significance of the location of the campus in their child's decision to attend the university and acknowledge that while unique and extraordinary, the demand for attention to security is required at any college campus and public arena.

The third theme of the investigation focuses on areas of agreement between parents and college officials as goals of the college experience.

Theme 3: Parents and college officials share common goals for students.

Where Theme 2 revealed participants' goals related to the student's transition from home to college, Theme 3 focuses on common goals that parents and college officials seek for their child/student as an outcome of the college experience.

One of the open-ended questions asked of all seventeen participants was, "What is college success?" The purpose of this query was to gain insight into how parents and college

officials determine if the experience of college is/was beneficial in meeting their expectations.

The results of this inquiry, depicted in Table 9 and fully explored in the preceding discussion

reveals that parents and college officials share many common goals for students and are

particularly focused on goals related to non-cognitive skill acquisition.

Table 9
Measurement of College Success

GOALS CITED	TIMES CITED IN STUDY (least to most)	# OF COLLEGE OFFICIALS WHO CITED	# OF PARENTS WHO CITED
Respect for others	1	1	0
Engaged	1	1	0
Balance	2	0	2
Opportunity	2	1	1
Financial Reward	2	1	1
Relationships	2	1	1
Happy	3	1	2
Employment	3	1	2
Fit	3	2	1
Grades/GPA	4	2	2
Graduate	4	3	1
Cognitive Skill Development	4	2	2
Grit	5	4	1
Self-Assess	18	6	3
Self- Advocate	26	8	6

A close examination of Table 9 along with a deeper analysis of responses in "Shared

Goals with Participant Identification, located in Appendix C, reveals that combined, parents and

college officials cited fifteen unique goals they would like for their students to attain as an

outcome of attending college. Of the fifteen goals identified, there were twelve instances in

which parents and college officials found varying levels of agreement. Additionally, there were

two instances in which a goal was referenced only once. The goals of "respect for others" and

"engaged "were stated by only one participant; however, that does not necessarily mean that

there is disagreement on the goals, or that the goals are unimportant to other participants. To

further illustrate this point, referring to the one reference to the goal of respect, Interdisciplinary Official 1 stated that he would like students to develop an appreciation for those people who had "helped them (sic) along the way" toward reaching their goals. While no other college official or parent identified this as a goal, it may very well be a shared goal, simply unstated.

In contrast, there is an example in which participants differed over a specific goal as seen in the discussion about "financial reward". In this instance, one parent and one college official each spoke about financial reward but with two different perspectives on the goal. Interdisciplinary Parent 2 said that she hopes her daughter will "be able to make a good living and support herself." Business Official 1 also spoke about the goal of money but declared that "success isn't always monetary..." She continued her thought by comparing what she believed to this generation of students' view of money to that of "children growing up in the 1980's." when she graduated from Urban University and entered the workforce. Shifting from the goals that garnered limited agreement, a review of the goals that were stated multiple times revealed a steep increase in the number of references to student acquisition of non-cognitive skills compared to goals cited relative to cognitive skills. Based on participants' comparatively pronounced focus on non-cognitive skills, a deeper analysis of participant statements about these two skill sets was warranted.

Participants spoke sparingly about cognitive goals. Earlier in this chapter, parent statements were identified indicating that their student possessed advanced cognitive skills by using descriptive words including: "aptitude" (Business Parent2); "straight A student"; ((Interdisciplinary Parent 1), and "smart" (Interdisciplinary Parent 4) to describe their children's' intellectual abilities. An examination of parent and college official goals for students as an outcome of the college experience reveals four additional references to cognitive skills as an

intended outcome of college attendance. On each of the four instances where statements were made about the importance of cognitive skills, the participant always coupled the statement with remarks about non-cognitive skill. To illustrate this point, Business Parent 4, voiced her goal for her daughter, saying, "I think what I would see as success for her would be being able to maintain and have a social life there; like she wants, but also do well in her studies", demonstrating a coupling of both cognitive and non-cognitive goals in the same thought. Interdisciplinary Official 2 spoke about specific cognitive skills that he hopes the students will acquire including, learning to read, write, and orally present arguments critically, but in the same thought added, "Those credentials, but I really think it's about them becoming a mature adult."

Similar to the previous example, this college official recognized the importance of cognitive skill development but also coupled it with non-cognitive skills. Two participants discussed the goal for students to develop cognitive skills and attempted to quantify what they believed to be an appropriate balance between cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Business Parent 3 said "College success is probably three quarters academic success and one quarter life enrichment…" Business Official 3 also spoke about balance between students' development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills but in this instance, he succinctly placed the value of non-cognitive skills over those of cognitive skills. He stated, "I don't want to measure success by grades; I don't want to measure success by placement after graduation; I want to measure success by the growth of that student throughout the process."

The messages voiced by participants that cognitive skills may be important, but perhaps not at the same level as non-cognitive skills, was further demonstrated in a widely distributed letter sent to the Urban University community during the course of this investigation. The university official, who was not a participant in this study, expressed his appreciation to all who

had participated in "Welcome Week", the first annual, week-long event established to acclimate students to the community. In his remarks, the senior official recognized participants who took part in several events that week: community service; tours of cultural sites; sporting events; yoga classes; improvisation exercises; and tips for academic success. Of six events identified, five may be considered to be non-cognitive skill building activities designed to enhance the social experience of onboarding freshman. In each of these examples cited, participants coupled both cognitive and non-cognitive goals together and arguably sent a message as to the degree of balance placed on those goals.

With regard to the topic of graduation broached by Business Official 3, there were three additional participants who shared their views on this topic, two college officials, and one parent of an onboarding freshman. University Official 2 shared his position as "We don't want to graduate a business person, or a dancer, or a musician; we want to graduate a competent adult." This message implies that individual career skills or degree focus is less important than developing a functioning adult. Another statement about graduation was made by University Official 3 whose views were referenced earlier in this finding but bear restating as he clearly articulated his goal of graduation with his words that "college success may not be degree attainment... it may just be college experience." Finally, the single instance where a parent in this study mentioned the word or goal of graduation was expressed by Interdisciplinary Parent 1, who herself did not graduate from college stated "I guess success would be completion of their goals, their degree", a concise statement offered about the measurement of college success stated without elaboration.

In the context of this case study with seventeen stakeholders of college student success, these four statements about graduation along with the qualified statements about cognitive skills,

reveals limited importance placed on these goals during the freshman onboarding process. In contrast, participants offered several goals and definitive agreement on the goals of students' acquisition of non-cognitive skills during freshmen onboarding.

Participants spoke extensively about non-cognitive goals. Having exhausted the instances in which participants spoke about cognitive skill development as a goal for students, the analysis shifts to investigation of participants substantial discussions about the goal of further development of students' non-cognitive goals.

One of the non-cognitive goals that parents and college officials spoke about as a measurement of college success was that of fit. This topic, previously discussed in Theme 1 as a goal in the college selection process, reemerged in the discussion as a goal achieved through attending college. Business Parent 4, who previously spoke about seeking fit for her daughter in the college selection process, again used this term when she discussed goals for her daughter to achieve in college. She said that already, even though she just arrived on campus her daughter had decided to join a women in business club at the college. As a result of this decision, she commented "I can see where it has real fit for what she wants to do", thereby linking the concept of fit with a measurement college success.

In addition to the single reference by a parent on fit as a goal of college two college officials also spoke about the goal of students finding fit in college. Interdisciplinary Official 3 explained that incoming college freshmen at Urban University are required to select a field of study. Despite this requirement and student's initial declaration, she encourages her students to investigate other majors offered throughout the university and to remain "open and explore where you may fit better." In a similar suggestion, University Administrator 2 encourages

students to seek out classmates who are outside of their immediate cultural group because "every time you're in a relationship, you have an opportunity to define even better for yourself where you fit best..." These statements about fit are reflective of these participants shared goal for students to stretch beyond their initial views and seek new, previously unexplored opportunities for fit as part of their college experience.

Overwhelmingly, the most often expressed goal that parents and college officials want for their college student is the further development of students' self-skills, particularly those of self-assessment and self-advocacy. When referring to self-assessment, participants spoke about the student's individual determination of his/her own goals; whereas self-advocacy speaks to the goal that the student bear the responsibility of executing the steps necessary to achieve the desired outcome. Together, these two goals were expressed forty-four times in this investigation with six college officials and three parents united on self-assessment; and eight college officials and six parents finding agreement on the goal of self-advocacy. While the two goals received greater agreement among college officials than among parents, based on the number of times these goals were discussed along with the overwhelming agreement on the goal of self-advocacy, a deeper analysis of participant statements was conducted in order to understand participant views on the topics.

Analysis of participants' disposition on self-skill development, specifically self-assessment, begins with three statements by one college official and two parents. University Official 3 said that college success is achieved when "A student is able to obtain what they want to get from their college experience; in its most pure form." Interdisciplinary Parent 2 expressed a similar accord when she said that she will consider her child's college experience to be successful when she is "... able to fulfill the process that she envisioned and that she is able to do

the things that she wants to do." Finally, Business Parent 1also deferred to her daughter's vision of success, to which she added "…this is not my journey, this is hers..." In each of these statements participants set aside their own views on college success and embraced the notion that students 'should determine their own goals of a college education.

The second related self-development goal is for students to develop their ability to advocate for themselves. This goal does not means that the student is expected to proceed completely on their own without any support it does, however mean that the student is responsible for taking the lead on the effort, and accepting the consequences associated with the outcome. College officials spoke about their role in supporting the student in their effort and specifically spoke about the importance of supporting onboarding freshmen. Interdisciplinary Official 2, who has been advising students for more than fifteen years, said that when he meets with students, he discusses options, but purposefully provides "minimal direction" whereby he challenges them to select their own path to achieving their intended outcome. In a similar note, Interdisciplinary Official 1 said that Urban University has an obligation to provide transparency to students and "put it all on the table." With regard to supporting freshmen with developing their self-advocacy skills, Interdisciplinary Parent 2 asserted that "an 18 year old might be different than a 21 year old", suggesting that age and experience plays a factor in the degree to which a student is expected to take the lead on self-development.

The findings surrounding the goals of student self-assessment and self-advocacy culminates with participant expressed views regarding possible outcomes of the student's effort to achieve their goals. University Official 2 referred to the student's effort as a "developmental necessity" regardless of outcome. She said "whether it comes out good, bad or indifferent, it doesn't matter"; she argued the true value of their effort is found in the lesson students learned

about their own strengths to persevere, which she called "resilience". Further, she implores that students learn to "suck it up…and you keep going; and that's okay, there is no flaw in that. It doesn't mean that you're a bad person or terrible because you failed." One additional view expressed on the importance of effort over outcome was stated by University Official 3. He argued that failing to complete college may not be failure at all. He stated:

It may not be degree; it may just be college experience. It may just be classroom experience. It may be social opportunities and connections. I'm not one that says that just because you go to college, the end intention should always be degree attainment.

In addition to college officials acceptance of the student's potential for failure, there was one parent who verbalized this same viewpoint as gleaned by the statement shared by Business Parent 1, who is both a college professor at another university in addition to being a parent of an onboarding freshman at Urban University: "Learning is a process that includes failure. You register for the wrong class, you end up with a professor that you don't gel very well with and you have to learn how to deal with that yourself."

These three statements by participants, two college officials and one parent place a high value on the lessons achieved through effort, irrespective of outcome. The potential outcome in the examples cited by this parent leads to, at worst, discomfort for a short period as the student completes the unwanted class and moves on to the next. In the scenarios expressed by the college officials, the risk of outcome have a far greater potential impact, including the stated possibility of the student dropping out or being dismissed from college.

Given the opportunity to express their goals for freshman at the precipice of entering college, parents and college officials found varying levels of agreement on twelve of the fifteen

goals they identified as measurements of college success. Participants spoke about both cognitive and non-cognitive goals for students, with the majority of the discussions focused on the development of students' non-cognitive, self-skills. Finally, a limited number of participants expressed the view that students will reap the benefits of their effort even if that outcome is not positive.

In the next theme, the investigation shifts from goals that parents and college officials seek for their student, to uncovering the messages that college officials endeavored to send to parents during freshmen onboarding.

Theme 4: Parents acknowledged receipt of college officials' primary messages.

The preceding theme examined shared goals that parents and college officials want for onboarding freshmen. Theme 4 examines two goals that college officials have for the parents of onboarding students and includes parents' views on those goals. The two primary goals that college officials have endeavored to communicate to parents are: (a) Parents should allow students the opportunity to utilize and further develop their college success tools; and (b) The parent role has changed, but remains a critical element to student success. These messages, examined below, were delivered through multiple platforms including direct interaction with college officials, participation in campus events, and second-hand reports from students.

Parents should allow students the opportunity to utilize and further develop their college success tools. All nine college officials who participated in the case study spoke about the importance of allowing students the opportunity to work through their obstacles independent of parent intervention. Table 10 below encapsulates the statements that college officials made regarding their conviction followed by analysis of the context surrounding those messages.

Table 10

Messages Sent and Delivered

College Official Messages about Student Independence	
Business Official 1	I think you need to lay off...you've got me on tape for this advice
Business Official 2	(1)... Let the students grow. I can't plant a seed and put a paper over top of it; the plant won't grow up, won't grow. (2)I expect them, or I would hope that they would allow the student to do it for themselves
Business Official 3	I know it's tough being a parent, to let your son or daughter make mistakes...let them go through the process. I think when they come out the other end, they'll be that much better for it.
Interdisciplinary Official 1	I'm sure you've taught your child good values and good judgment... then you have to feel confident that they're going to take those values with them to college
Interdisciplinary Official 2	I would hope that they give them the tools and not do it for them."
Interdisciplinary Official 3	I hope that you brought your son or daughter up to be an independent person and be ready to help the students when they fall down
University Official 1	The other message to parents is if there are any issues, have the student be the first advocate
University Official 2	Give them the chance to become the person that they can become, independent of you. You know, let them grow and develop to be whoever they need to be. You know? They'll love you, they'll be there with you forever, but give them an opportunity. ..
University Official 3	I also want parents to realize that just because your student calls and vents, doesn't mean they want you to solve...
Parents Acknowledged Receipt of College Official Message	
Business Parent 1	I didn't get any email from (Urban University) I really appreciated it that way. You get a feeling that your parents aren't going to school too
Business Parent 4	...I know with college that's the whole point. They want the kids to have their freedom...
Interdisciplinary Parent 1	Part of each college says this, your child is an adult, they need to make their own decisions, and all this stuff. . I'm like yeah, but again, parents are also feeling there paying. We're still making a payment for a type of service; that was fairly interesting to think about.
Interdisciplinary Parent 2	(1)They said you know how the kids are gonna start school soon and they're gonna become adults...we want you to know that you did your job ... (2)We didn't get to stay for Welcome Week, but I've heard lots from my son
Interdisciplinary Parent 3	(1)Letting this really be his experience. … (2)I'm sitting back and trying to be okay with the very brief reports I get

One strategy that college officials used to convey their message of the importance of student independence was to remind parents that students have learned the lessons they have been imparting. For example, Interdisciplinary Official 1 said that he tries to reassure parents that students are ready for the challenges that lay ahead by saying "I'm sure you've taught your child good values and good judgment..." To this he adds "...then you have to feel confident that they're going to take those values with them to college." Interdisciplinary Official 2 offers a similar message about student preparedness for the challenges ahead but with a lesser degree of certainty in his conviction. He says to parents "I would hope that they give them the tools and not do it for them." In a similar accord, Interdisciplinary Official 3 tries to say to parents "I hope that you brought your son or daughter up to be an independent person" and reminds them to they stand ready to "help the students when they fall down."

Another adept way that some college officials tried to convey their message was an attempt to help parents see the benefits of the student's independence. University Official 2 urges parents to allow students to "become that person that they can become" by giving them the freedom to make their own choices. In a more philosophical message, Business Official 2 asks parents to "let the student grow" and adds an explanation of "I can't plant a seed and put a paper over top of it; the plant won't grow up, won't grow." A slightly different message is conveyed by University Official 3, who tries to let parents know that their student will likely call home with a complaint or frustration and when they do call " it doesn't mean they want you to solve it"; they may simply be calling for advice or to vent. Business Official 3, adds an element of recognition that sitting on the sideline and watching students make mistakes is difficult but he tries to assure parents "when they come out on other end, they'll be much better for it."

The third and final way that some college officials phrased their message to parents was with direct statements such as the comment by University Official 1 who said "if there are any issues, have the student be the first advocate." If that message is not clear, there is no mistaking the message by Business Official 1 who said "I think you need to lay off...you've got me on tape for this advice."

With all of these approaches and voices sending the same or similar messages, it is not surprising to have found that at least half of the eight parent participants received the message. Business Parent 1 commented that he noticed and appreciated that Urban University did not directly outreach to him because by their directly communicating with his child, there was a message that "parents aren't going to school too". In a more direct acknowledgement of the message, Business Parent 4 was discussing her extensive role in her daughter's high school PTA; to which she acknowledged that when her daughter enters college, she heard that her direct role would be limited. She stated"...I know with college that's the whole point. They want the kids to have their freedom..." Interdisciplinary Parents 1 and 2 also acknowledged hearing the message from Urban University officials that their children are adults now, and expected to make decisions independent of their parents. After acknowledging the university's message Interdisciplinary Parent 1 added her own response to the message by saying"…Were still making a payment for a type of service." With this remark, Interdisciplinary Parent 1 is both indicating that she heard the message but wants the university to know that she has a role in the process. The final parent to speak about the message about student independence came from Interdisciplinary Parent 3 who also said that she had received and accepts the messages that tell her she should let the student take control of his college experience but she too added an addendum of sorts by adding that she is "sitting back and trying to be ok with the very brief

reports" she receives from her son.

The Parent role has changed but remains critical to student success. College officials sent clear and deliberate messages to parents that upon entering college, the student is expected to take the lead and responsibility for their collegiate pursuit. Coupled with this message, college officials tried to send a second, perhaps less verbose message that the parent role, while changing as the student matriculates to college, remains critical to student success.

University Official 1, said that based on his role as a senior administrator at Urban University and also a parent of two children in college, that he has found the parent transition from active to passive participant can be a difficult one. When meeting with parents he urges them to "take a step back" and allow the student to take the lead on their collegiate pursuit. Further, he recommends that parents "keep an eye on their student, but keep some distance as well." Two additional college officials also spoke about the evolving parent role from their perspective of college official and parent. Business Official 3 said that he has been an active participant in his daughter's college exploration and as a result of the options, processes, and decisions that have to be made "his head is swimming". He tries to guide parents whose students enter the Business College to find a new balance, where they can remain involved and supportive, "without going over that balance" by making decisions that now belong to the student. Business Official 1 also spoke about her role as faculty member and mother of child who recently enrolled in his freshmen year of college. She said that as a result of her 15 years of experience in working with freshman, she and her husband deliberately decided to drop their son off a college and leave at 11:30 a.m. instead of taking advantage of visiting hours extended until 6:00 p.m. that evening. She explained that she feels that it's important "for parents and children to separate at the point of college entry as quickly and painless as possible." She went on to say

"You don't want to push them away, but it's like all of a sudden, the less you give, after they're used to having so much, the more that they will rise to the occasion." All three of these college officials shared similar suggestions to parents to make deliberate decisions to separate themselves from their student and give them the freedom that college affords them. Their suggestions are based on their experience as Urban University employees and parents who have sent or who are planning to send their child to college.

With regard to how parents can be of support to their college-going student, several college officials suggested the parents could help their student to think through their issues and options by serving as a "sounding board" (Interdisciplinary Official 3). He explained that in this role, they could listen to the student's issue and follow by asking thought provoking questions back to the student such as "that sounds like a really big challenge. What do you intend to do about it?" To this sometimes difficult conversations, Business Official 2 similarly recommends that after the student has vocalized their options, the parent may want to reinforce that the student knows what and how to address the issue. The next step is to tell the student, "now go do it". University Official 2 adds that sometimes these conversations can be emotional and as such, reminds parents that "if they cry, maybe that's okay. It's like, okay, so they talked to you, they feel better." The goal according to both University Official 2 and Interdisciplinary Official 2 is to let the student know that you have faith in their ability to address issues but you are always there to support and even step into the issue after they have exhausted their own resources.

The suggestions made by college officials very closely mirror the goals and plans that parents try to convey to their children. Business Parent 1 said that she and her husband, both of whom are college professors, purposefully "strive to avoid intervening on our daughter's decision making" based on over-dependence her students have on their parents for "even the

smallest decisions." Business Parent 3 said he feels his role is to listen to his son and help to guide him in the right direction. He added that he when he did need to become involved in the financial-aid process he had his son provide the correct contact person at Urban University to reach out to. A similar accord that Interdisciplinary Parent 3 wants is to allow this to be his experience to the extent possible but added that she hopes "there's nothing negative that would have to pull us in as parents to figure out…" And finally, Interdisciplinary Parent 2 who said that she received the university message that "you're gonna have to sit back and let your kids become independent adults…" but like, Interdisciplinary Parent 3 and others have said, she intends to keep abreast of her daughter's progress, offer support and be prepared to enter the discussion with the university when necessary.

This theme represents the two primary messages that college officials hoped to send to parents of onboarding freshman regarding the students' responsibility in taking the lead in their college experience and parents assuming a new and important advisory role in guiding their student making decisions. Additionally, this theme analyzed parent statements which demonstrate parent acknowledgment of college officials' message and wide spread agreement with the plan to support their children as they onboard and attend this next phase in their personal and professional development. In a slightly different analysis, Theme 5 identifies areas where parents and college officials agree on issues of significance, but disagree on how to address those issues.

Theme 5: Parents and college officials align on issues, but differ on tactics to address the issues.

The last theme uncovered in this case study indicated that while parents and college officials agreed on issues that demand vigilance, there were instances of disagreement on the

methodology to address to those issues. These issues are distributed among three sub-findings

of: (a) Communication Level; (b) Roles and Responsibilities; and (c) Sense of Urgency.

Communication Level. College officials expressed their opinions and provided

examples of what they believed to be reasonable and unreasonable requests from parents with

regard to communications between themselves and parents of college students. Business Official

2 welcomes parent interaction to the extent that when they have a specific question about

university operation or policy, they call her, ask a question, and that interaction is concluded.

While in other instances, she interacts with some parents who are constantly calling, "I know

them by name, first name." Additionally she spoke about the communication that she is

experiencing this year with parents and extended family members during the onboarding process:

> I actually think this year I've had more parent involvement. It's not just traditional
>
> mom/dad I'm talking about. I hear from uncles, and I hear from grandpa, things like that.
>
> It may just be that's their guardian. Who knows? But there is a sense of ... I'm not sure if
>
> it was helicopter parenting, or if it's something totally different, because they are very
>
> involved in..., I hear from their parents before I even know who the student is.

The observation expressed by Business Official 2 reflects a valuable insight into the larger scope

of parenting that extends beyond that of the traditional mother and father. In her experience,

there are instance in which other care-givers also play a crucial role in the freshman's

onboarding process. Further, Business Official 2 used the vernacular "helicopter parent" which

is found to be mainstream term for parents who are overly involved in their children's lives, but

was seldom used by any parent or college official in this study.

Two additional college officials recounted past instances where they felt parents had

overstepped reasonable levels of communication with the college and thereby usurping the

student's role. Interdisciplinary Official 1 shared an example in which parents of one of his students would want to be involved in meetings that their son was having with university officials so they would "fly up from Florida just to have sessions with me and their student".

University Official 2 spoke about a parent who openly disagreed with a communication strategy, she recalled:

> I've had a parent challenge me. She wanted to know why I couldn't go to the classroom and take her son, her daughter, it was a daughter, out of the classroom to bring her in. You know, I had to explain this isn't high school. Yeah, they're not being obstinate per se, they're just not understanding.

> By sharing these two examples, Interdisciplinary Official 1 and University Official 2, who each have over twenty years' experience at Urban University, expressed what they believe to be instances where parents had exceed the normal and acceptable communication discourse with parents. Further, it may be relevant to note that in each of these scenarios the college officials were referring to incidents that took place with previous cohorts of students and not current onboarding freshman and their parents. It may be that no recent negative incidents have taken place and/or it may be indication of past behavior influencing current perspective about parents.

One additional comment shared by Interdisciplinary Parent 1 is reflective of past actions reflecting on current perspective. When she was discussing her expectation about communication with officials at Urban University, she said "if I have a question or a problem I would like to have an answer." She added to this comment "I have an expectation from the university the same way I had from my experiences with the elementary, middle and high school." This statement clearly demonstrates an expectation about the future based on past

experience and may represent a disconnect between cultural norms at one level not being not out of step with the expectations at university.

Another related and important topic about communication differences between high school and college is related to the protection of college student's records and academic information. Unlike, high school, where parents may have had unfettered access to student information, colleges are held to the federal laws, known as FERPA which prohibit the sharing of student information without their authorized consent. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, previously introduced in Chapter 1, is outlined in a letter sent to every onboarding freshman at Urban University and found in Appendix E of this study. The letter explains that the protection of privacy is extended to all students who attend post-secondary education regardless of their age. Further, the law requires student's written consent indicating persons being granted limited or full access to the student records. Also embedded within the letter is a link to additional information about the policy including instructions for authorization or revocation of access to the information.

Three college officials in the case study spoke about student privacy rights. University Official 1 said that while he wants students to "have as much freedom as possible" he also encourages them to sign the FERPA form and grant their parents access so the student, so that parents and college official can engage in dialogue. Interdisciplinary Official 3 said that after a student signed the FERPA waiver, she "emailed back and forth almost every week" with the student's father. Business Official 1, made a vague reference to FERPA when she said that her communication with parents is limited in part because she believes the university discourages faculty from speaking with parents and "I think there are laws against that in some regard."

Each of these statements by experienced college officials highlight varying interpretations, applications and understanding of the protocols that guide communication between college officials and parents. Another point of disparity between the two parties relates to their respective roles and responsibilities in supporting the student.

Roles and Responsibility. Several college officials described experiences they had with parents which they believe represents parents overstepping their role and assuming responsibilities that are intended for the student to attend to.

Business Official 2 described what she believed to be a typical and appropriate interaction with parents who call her and ask a question about university policy. She answers their questions and "they say okay, thanks for letting me know, they hang up and that's it." While in other instances, she said that some parents are constantly calling her and exceeding the scope of normal inquiry and wanting to insert themselves into the student experience. She said that she knows these parents by their first name, and communicates with them more than she speaks with their child/student. In a more invasive example of parents overstepping their role, Business Official 2 said that some parents contact her and say, "Hey, I saw the email that you sent (student) or something like that", indicating that the parent has crossed a privacy boundary and is accessing and reading the college student's emails.

Interdisciplinary Officials 1 and 3 spoke of similar instances where they believed that parent had assumed responsibility that was meant to be addressed by the student. Interdisciplinary Official 3 described a process whereby she sends select incoming freshman a personal invitations to join her fall class. At times, instead of the student responding, she will receive a response from a parent who wants to register their child for the class. In those instances she redirects the parent and says "No, we need an email from your son or daughter; a

personal email." Describing a similar situation where parents attempt to handle the student's business, Interdisciplinary Official 1 recalled a parent who was "in touch with him right from day 1" and continued to intervene on her daughter's behalf throughout the first term. He said that he followed the training he received from his national association of advisors and instead of "pushing them aside" he tried to help them understand their level of involvement was "a bit excessive" while also "trying to understand where they were coming from."

University Official 2 said that she too has interacted with parents who intervene on issues instead of allowing the student to attend to their responsibilities. She raised a concern that when parents overstep their students they may be sending a message that says "you can't do this; I have to do this for you" and are thereby usurping the power and faith in the student's ability to manage themselves. She recalled an instance where a parent had overstepped her authority and also asked the university official to do the same when the parent called and asked to meet with the administrator and student. To facilitate this meeting, she asked the college official to identify what class the student was in at the moment, take him out of the class, and bring him to the official's office for the meeting. The University Official explained to the parent that it is not her role to remove students from a class and as an alternative, suggested that the parent ask the student to schedule a meeting with her office. When describing this incident, University Official 2 explained her belief that parents are "not being obstinate *per se*, they're just not understanding" their new role in the parent/student/university dichotomy.

A final example of a circumstance where a parent had inserted himself into the conversation between a student and the university is described by Business Official 2. She recalled an incident that took place two weeks prior to her interview for this study when she was working with a student to build his fall term schedule. The student was comfortable with the

plan however the parent contacted the supervisor of Business Official 2 and said "I'm not pleased, I'm reading his email" and proceeded to demand an alternative class for his child. Following the exchange involving the student, his parent, a college officials and his supervisor the student sent a letter of apologized to the college official saying "I'm not sure what's going on with my father. I think he's making a bigger deal than it needs to be." This incident reflects a parent who is not only intrusively reading an email intended for the student, but also demonstrates some friction between parent and student as they go about the process of reshaping their role dynamic.

Parents who participated in this case study did not speak about any confusion regarding their role in the student's college experience. Parents did however, provide insight into the influences that formed their opinion of their role and this may be beneficial in understanding the possible disconnect between themselves and some college officials. Interdisciplinary Parent 1 said that she was "very active" in her during K-12 education and as a result of her previous experience, she had the same expectation of involvement with Urban University officials. Three parents from the Business College indicated that they received messages from Urban University that their involvement was welcome if not expected. Business Parent 1 said that based on the volume of information and the fact that information was addressed directly to her and her husband, they perceived Urban University to be "very pro parental involvement." A similar message was gleaned by Business Parent 2 who said she was "irritated" that the university had reached out to her so frequently when she believed this to be her daughter's college experience. Business Parent 2 also spoke about the information being directed toward him as an Urban University parent. One day following his interview for the case study, he forwarded an email that he received from Urban University inviting him to participate in a parent event entitled

"Global Night of Networking" with other parents. The document, found in Appendix F, was sent

by the Urban Alumni Association and invited all parents to meet in-person at one of 30 sites

around the world or join the celebration through a virtual connection. Business Parent 3

expressed his excitement about this opportunity to meet with other Urban University parents and

voiced a degree of surprise that the university invites parents to this type of event, as judged by

his comment "I think it's really cool that you guys allow parents to do this."

Another email was sent to all parents of onboarding freshman reflects a similar message

of inclusion. This email, located in Appendix G is entitled "Give Yourself a Hand" states in

part:

> We just wanted to take a minute to let you know that your child isn't the only one we've
>
> accepted into (Urban University). We know your years of hard work as a parent and a
>
> role model are a big part of the reason your child was accepted to our university, so take a
>
> minute to give yourself a hand. You're part of (Urban) now too. Congratulations.

These two letters sent to every parent of an onboarding freshman was a clear message inviting

parents to become involved members of the Urban University community. The potential point of

confusion between college officials and parents lies in the degree of involvement expected.

Another divergence between parents and college officials was found in the degree of urgency on

addressing issues.

Sense of Urgency. Two participants who oversee departments that interact with students

and parents throughout Urban University raised concerns about what they believe to be a divide

between themselves and parents on the degree of urgency and level of response warranted on

some issues.

University Official 2 provided two examples where she has had disagreements with parents on how and when to address student issues. In the first instance, she recalled a parent calling her upset because her daughter was not responding to his phone messages or emails. The father did not believe that the child was in danger but was ignoring his messages. He asked the University Official to contact his child because he thought that contact from the university might generate a response, where contact from the father was not. A second instance, which took place on Thanksgiving Day of the previous year, was a phone call from a parent to the emergency on-call number. The mother and College Official had previous conversations about the student's request for privacy but on this day she called to say "It's Thanksgiving and the family is here and were really upset" because we don't know what is going on with our child. In this and the previous situation, the college official reiterated what she says to families at open house events. The university follow a strict assessment protocol whereby if they determine that the student is in danger they dispatch university security, local police and they also "drop everything and do what they have to do" to protect the student and community. The college official in these instances ascertained that the students were safe and that an emergency response was unwarranted and did not rise to a level of their immediate intervention by the university.

University Official 3 also relayed two examples of circumstances in which there were disagreements between his office and parents with regard to degrees of urgency. In the first, more general example, he said that some parents react too quickly to their student's call home to share a frustrating experience. He believes that because these parents are leaders in their vocation they feel compelled to step in and assume "management mode, problem solver" on issues that the student wanted to convey and not necessarily want solved for them. In a second example of an issue that was unfolding during the time of this interview, University Official 3

spoke about a bedbug infestation in one of the residence halls. He explained that while not a

common occurrence, his office has a protocol for addressing these types of issues. While he

explains the process for addressing dorm issues at university hosted events he finds that this plan

does not always satisfy them. In his experience, there are two types of parents: those who

appreciate and understand the process for addressing issues; and a second type who "think the

issue can and should be fully remedied at midnight on the day of occurrence."

Coincidently, Business Parent 2, whose interview took place two days prior, spoke about

a similar situation in which her daughter spotted mice in her residence hall. After the student

spoke with her mother, the parent, who lives outside of the region of the university, contacted

University Official 3 and demanded immediate action. She followed her phone call with a

barrage of messages on social media, she said: "Me and a whole bunch of other parents did a

twitter-bomb on the housing department about a week ago: emails, twitter, Facebook."

The instances described in this and the previous examples demonstrate a clear divergence

of opinion over what justifies an elevated level of urgency and further, what the appropriate

response time on addressing issues should be. In the case of the rodent problem, after her

address to social media, the parent said that Urban University was "very responsive" to her

demand for urgent action.

The finding in this theme demonstrated that parents and college officials corroborated on

the importance of major issues but found disparity on approaches and degrees of urgency to

address the issues. Specifically, there were three areas where parents and college officials

departed: communication levels roles and responsibilities; and sense of urgency in addressing

issues. A comprehensive examinations of transcribed interviews with seventeen participants:

eight parents of onboarding freshmen and nine college officials at the same university, exposed 5

major themes arising from interaction between these two influential stakeholders. The major themes of this investigation are: (a) Parents are active participants in their student's college investigation; (b) Parents and college officials are focused on strengthening readiness for the safe and successful transition from home to college; (c) Parents and college officials share common goals for student; (d) Parents acknowledged receipt of College Officials' primary messages; and (e) Parents and College Officials align on issues but differ on tactics to address the issues. Based on the five themes which emerged from this investigation, the final section of this chapter presents the conclusions and interpretations of this investigation.

Results and Interpretations

A sample of parents and college officials described their historical backgrounds, goals and interpretations of messages being sent during freshman onboarding at one university. Five major themes emerged as a result of deep analysis of participant experience and have led to the formation of three results based on those themes. The three major results from the findings are: (a) Parents and college officials are focused and united on their goal of developing students' non-cognitive skills; (b) Parent and college officials place a low priority on critical measures of college student success; and (c) Parents and college officials have begun to develop a foundation from which they can work together in support of student success. Each of these results, which align with the current literature, form the basis for the recommendations offered in the final chapter of this research study.

Result 1: Parents and college officials are focused and united on their goal of developing students' non-cognitive skills.

Three of the five themes have led to the result that while participants speak about the importance of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, they are primarily focused on the continued development of non-cognitive skills during the onboarding process.

In Theme 2, parents spoke highly about the cognitive and non-cognitive skills that their child had acquired, in part, as a result of their formal education but also stemming from their innate intellectual capability. Although parents indicated that their children were both cognitively and non-cognitively competent, they, as well as college officials spoke about the benefits of further building their skills in preparation for college. Participants discussed opportunities for the student to attend college either in the summers or simultaneously in their junior and senior years of high school. Participants did not mention any cognitive skills acquired during these and other extra-curricular events, but they did speak extensively about the development of the student's maturity, cultural awareness, and self-sufficiency; all of which are important, non-cognitive skills. Analysis of Urban University's invitation to students to join their own summer immersion program also spoke at length about the non-cognitive benefits of joining their program, with no mention of the classes designed to strengthen the student's cognitive capabilities.

The discussions in Theme 3 also played a crucial role in the formation of the conclusion that parents and college officials are focused on students' acquisition of non-cognitive skills over cognitive skills. Displayed graphically in Table 9, and followed by in-depth analysis of participant statements, it was evident that participants had a strong commitment toward the continued development of students' non-cognitive goals while in college and as a measurement of college success. In this theme, it was revealed that parents and college officials discussed several topics associated with the non-cognitive goal, but specifically, the further development of

self-assessment and self-advocacy on forty-four occasions, compared to a total of four

discussions on the further development of cognitive skills.

Finally, Theme 5, which drew attention to participants opposing views on methods and

timeliness in attending to issues of importance, demonstrated a clear focus on issues of non-

cognitive relevance. For example, participants surfaced concerns about an infestation-free

residence hall, but brought forth no issues relating to cognitive skills or supports for their

development. While researchers who are focused on addressing the low college student retention

and persistence rates of 65 and 40.3% respectively argue that a multi-faceted approach is

recommended, this study has demonstrated that parents and college officials at Urban University

are disproportionately focused on non-cognitive issues and skill (Berge & Huang, 2004; Comley

& French 2014).

Result 2: Parents and college officials place a low priority on critical measures of college

student success.

The investigation produced findings which demonstrate that parents and college officials

do not place the topics of grades, retention, or college graduation among critical issues of

importance for freshmen to strive for as they onboard to Urban University.

This investigation uncovered instances where a students' academic achievement were an

integral part of the student's high school goals, and achievements may not be as important once

the student matriculates to college. For example, earlier in this chapter an examination of parent

profiles revealed that two of the eight parents in this study have children who earned the

designation of "Liberty Scholar." This recognition is granted to a student based in-part on the

student's academic achievements in high school, and results in a scholarship for the entire cost of

tuition as long as the student meets or exceeds a cumulative Grade Point Average of 2.75 (Urban University, 2016).

A second example which demonstrated the importance of academic achievement in high school was found in Theme 1 where two parents spoke about their goal for their children to attend Ivy League universities. Both of these parents, whose children joined the business college, articulated their goals for their daughters to attend an Ivy League university based on their children's academic performance in high school as well as their perception of the academic rigor of those categories of universities. When parents and college officials were invited to voice their hopes and goals for students to attain while in college, two participants, both college officials spoke about the goal of grades. In one of those statements, a faculty member from the business college stated that college success should not be measured by student grades.

Another measurement which is typically associated with college success is retention and graduation rates. The federal government holds these two measurements to be so critical that they require all colleges to annually assess and publish their retention and graduation rates for the community to see. Parents and college officials in this study were noticeably uncommunicative about their child/student retaining from freshman to sophomore year or remaining at Urban University to degree completion. In Theme 3 it was revealed that participants articulated their goals for students, and there were only four references about retention and/or graduation, twice mentioned by parents and twice by college officials. In one instance, a university official stated the college graduation does not need to be a measurement of college student success.

Communication is said to be a tool to influence the behavior of others (Argyle, 1975). Parents and college officials at Urban University are communicating academic performance, retention and graduation as low-level goals for students, based on the number of times the topics were cited and the veracity of their argument.

Result 3: The foundation has been established for a partnership between parents and college officials focused on student success.

Participant statements, made and discussed in the five themes of this study have led to the conclusion that parents and college officials have begun to build a foundation from which they can work together to support student success. Throughout this investigation, participants have exhibited clarity on their roles, alignment on goals, and recognition of the demands they place on each other.

There were multiple examples which denote that parents and college officials are experienced and capable in their roles of providing support to the child/student. For example, in Theme 1, Interdisciplinary Parent 3 described her role as supportive when her son expressed an interest to travel to Korea independent of the family. Later, when this parent noticed that her son was struggling to meet application deadlines, she spoke about having to assume a different role; one of authority figure, to ensure the process was completed in a timely manner. In a similar display of role adaptation, Interdisciplinary Parent 2 said that she would have preferred to have taken a passive role in her daughter's application process; however, when she saw her child struggling she stepped in to offer support and encouragement. Parents and their children have developed, over time, an intimate understanding of when to change roles based on circumstance.

College officials have also demonstrated their ability to recognize and adapt their role

based on the needs of their students. Business Official 2, with over fifteen years of college

teaching experience spoke in Theme 2 about her role in allowing a student to make mistakes and

then later, spoke with the student about another, potentially better way, for her to reach her goal.

Finally, there were instances in which a parent or college official spoke about their role in

relation to the other party. One example which illustrates the important role of both parent and

college official was brought forth in Theme 5 when Interdisciplinary Official 3 described a

circumstance in which the parent and college official exchanged weekly emails to discuss the

student's progress in class. While the result of their interaction did not alter the outcome for the

student, the parent/college official role and communication allowed the parent to formulate a

plan to support the student beyond that course.

In addition to role clarity, parents and college officials at Urban University have

demonstrated alignment on the majority of goals that each party believes to be important in

promoting and demonstrating student success. Evidence described in Results 1and 2 clearly

establish that parents and college officials enter their relationships with many of the same or

similar goals. Agreement on goals encourages participants to garner and direct resources toward

supporting student success.

When parties enter into a relationship, there are likely to be instances whereby one party

holds a topic to be of higher priority than the other party. In this case study, parents and college

officials have each brought forward issues that they deemed to be of great importance.

Additionally and potentially equally important, the other party in the relationship has verified

that the message has been heard. To illustrate this point, Table 10, located in Theme 4 of this

chapter represents all nine college officials' messages of commitment to the goal of students

taking over responsibility for their own successes/failures, and the parents' role becoming one

which supports the student's to response to the consequences of their decision. Alongside college official statements are six statements by parents indicating that the message had been received.

Parents too sent messages which reflected the level of importance they placed on issues. One pressing issue brought forward by parents was their demand that Urban University acknowledge and demonstrate commitment to caring for their student in their parent's absence. In the first theme, parents spoke about their demand that the university provide physical and emotional safeguards to protect their children. In Themes 2 and 5, college officials spoke about the messages they had received this year and in years past regarding students' physical and emotional safety needs. While college officials indicated their differences of opinion about levels of support the university should provide, they did acknowledge parent demands, speak about their protocols for emergency assessment, and demonstrate their ability to protect the campus community during recent challenges.

Parents and college officials have shown that they understand the important role they play in support of their student and further, have demonstrated adaptability in their roles based on need. Additionally, parents and college officials have demonstrated alignment on the majority of goals they want their college student to attain. And finally, parents and college officials have demonstrated their willingness to express their demands that each party places on the other and acknowledgement that the message has been heard. Based on the findings attained in this investigation it is concluded that parents and college officials have begun the process of developing a sound foundation in support of student success.

Summary

This chapter presented five major themes and their sub-findings which were borne out of interviews with seventeen parents and college officials who supported their student during freshmen onboarding. Participants' rich descriptions of their experiences as well their vocalization of shared goals, expectations and requirements were captured during one-on-one, semi-structured interviews over a period of five weeks at one university. Through systematic analysis and triangulation of an 221 codes and 556 lines of transcribed data, the following themes emerged: (a)parents are active participants in their student's college investigation; (b) parents and college officials are focused on strengthening readiness for the safe and successful transition from home to college; (c)parents and college officials share common goals for students; (d)parents acknowledged receipt of college official's primary messages; and (e)parents and college officials align on issues but differ on tactics to address the issues.

The findings from this case study yielded three results which were presented along with references to literature that support these results and interpretations. Through a framework of social constructivism which guided the investigator to a deeper understanding of the world in which he works, the three results of this study are: (a) parents and college officials are focused and united on their goal of developing students' non-cognitive, self-skills;(b) parent and college officials' place a low priority on critical measures of college student success; and (c) the foundation has been established for a partnership between parents and college officials focused on student success.

Based on the findings, results and interpretations ascertained from this investigation the final chapter presents recommendations to stakeholders at Urban University, as well to other college officials and education researchers who support student success.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to determine how parents and college officials at one university interpreted the communication and messaging presented during freshman onboarding. Additionally, this investigation sought to assess how communication between parents and college officials may impact the foundation from which the two stakeholders work in support student success and degree completion.

Chapter 5 presents conclusions of this study and recommendations for stakeholders of student success both within and beyond the scope of this investigation. Conclusions drawn from this investigation extend the current literature on freshmen onboarding, college retention, and college student success. The three results of this investigation are: (a) parents and college officials are focused and united on their goal of developing student's non-cognitive skills; (b) parents and college officials place a low priority on critical measures of college student success; and (c) the foundation has been established for a partnership between parents and college officials focused on student success.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this case study emerged through analysis of codes from interviews with a purposeful sample of parents and college officials who participated in freshman onboarding at one university. Their experience and perceptions are the basis for the conclusions presented as answers to the central question and three sub-questions which guided the investigation.

Central Question: What is the relationship being developed between parents and college officials through the freshman onboarding process?

The relationship being developed between parents and college officials as a result of having participated in the freshman onboarding process is one which demonstrates a strong foundation from which these two influential stakeholders can collaborate and build upon in support of college student success. Eight volunteer parents, whose children entered one of two colleges at a large, urban, tuition-driven university, engaged in semi-structured, one-on-one telephone interviews during the first five weeks of the fall term. Additionally, six college officials from the same two colleges, as well three officials from the university at-large, participated in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews during the same time period. The findings from this investigation are organized into five major themes: (a) parents are active participants in their student's college investigation ; (b) parents and college officials are focused on strengthening readiness for the safe and successful transition from home to college; (c) parents and college officials share common goals for students; (d) parents acknowledged receipt of college officials' primary message; (e) parents and college officials align on issues but differ on tactics to address the issues. These five themes yield ample evidence that during the freshman onboarding process, parents and college officials have demonstrated key factors which comprise a sound working relationship including: clarity of role; alignment on key issue, and; acknowledgement of each other's demands (Rousseau and Tijoriwala ,1998).

Themes 1 and 3 provide evidence that parents and college officials articulated and demonstrated the necessity that they adapt their roles, as circumstances warranted, to support students. For example in Theme 1, when a parent recognized that her child required help completing the college application, this parent determined that a "push" would be necessary to keep her son on track. In a similar instance, another parent also recognized that her daughter was struggling to complete the college application and, while she wanted to stand back, she

established her presence and willingness to guide her child by answering questions or proof-reading her applications.

Additional examples, which denote participants acceptance, if not complete comfort, toward their changing role was captured in Theme 3 where parents and college officials spoke about the potential ramifications of the student's newly established role as leader. College officials spoke about sharing best practices with students, but ultimately yielding control over to their students' even when their decision resulted in failure. There is also evidence that at least one parent believes the benefits achieved through student independence outweigh the desire to step in and shield the student from the negative consequences of their decisions.

Another indication that parents and college officials are beginning the development of a foundation of support for students was also found in Theme 3 which demonstrated alignment on issues deemed to be of importance. Theme 3 assembled a compilation of goals that both parents and college officials would like for the student to attain as outcomes of their college experience. The analysis of participant statements revealed fifteen goals for students and evidence of student success. Although there was not equal agreement between parents and college officials on each goal, there was evidence that twelve goals received some level of agreement between participants. For example, it was demonstrated that four participants, two parents and two college officials, expressed a goal that the student should further develop their cognitive skills in college. While other participants may also seek the same outcome for the student it was only stated four times in the interviews. In contrast, the stated goal that students acquire the skill of self-assessment, which refers to the student taking control of defining his/her own goals in college was stated by participants eighteen times; by six college officials and three parents.

The final indication that parents and college officials are developing a foundation for collaboration was uncovered in Theme 4 which focused on messages that college officials tried to send to parents of onboarding freshman. As a result of analyzing the transcripts and codes of all nine college officials, it was apparent that they were unified in their goal of encouraging parents to relinquish their authority over decisions and allow the college student to move further toward self-sufficiency. Further, in analyzing the transcripts and codes of all eight parents it was revealed that at least six of the participants had heard those messages and offered feedback which ranged from complete agreement to cautious acceptance. The ramification of this finding is that college officials were able to express an issue of importance, receive acknowledgement that their message was conveyed, and gain degrees of acceptance from parents on this message.

This investigation produced explicit and sufficient evidence to conclude that parents and college officials have begun to establish clarity of their role, alignment on a majority of issues, and recognition/acceptance of message that parties wanted to exchange with the other party. Based on these attributes, it is concluded that parents and college officials have begun to build a foundation from which they can work together in support of student success.

The conclusions reached in this study were guided, in part, by a focus on three sub-questions which guided the investigation during the interviews, the document review and the analysis of data. Each of these three questions is identified and addressed in detail and help to explain how the answer to the central question was attained. Further, the sub-questions uncovered and include additional findings that were not a part of the investigation, but hold potential value to the education community.

Sub-Question One: How does the communication and messaging during onboarding meet the intentions and expectations of parents of incoming college freshmen?

The research study revealed that communication and messaging expressed by college officials during freshmen onboarding predominately meet the intentions and expectations of parents of incoming freshman in two distinct ways: (a) college officials' communication and messaging demonstrated alignment with parents on issues identified as important to both parties; and (b) college officials communicated and demonstrated their responsiveness to address parent expectations.

College officials' communication and messaging demonstrated alignment with parents on issues identified as important to both parties. Parents whose children matriculated to Urban University, like all parties entering a relationship brought with them expectations of themselves and their counterparts. As a result of this case study, it has been determined that college officials' communications and messages demonstrated alignment with issues important to parents of onboarding freshmen. One message that reverberated throughout freshman onboarding was the importance that the student find "fit" within the university. During their visits to campus, parents and their children searched for a college that would comport with the student's background and goals. Likewise, college officials spoke about fit as a goal relative to the selection of a college major and selection of a peer group sharing similar current and/or emerging views.

Another example of alignment was demonstrated by parents and college officials' expression and support of the goal of students' immersion into the cultural mores of the college. College officials spoke about opportunities for the student to take part-time college classes while in their junior and senior years of high school, providing them the opportunity to gain insight into the college experience. The topic was also raised by parents who shared a concern that their child may not recognize the difference in work ethic required in college compared to that of high

school. A college official showed his agreement when he spoke about a past incident in which a college freshman learned through trial, the difference between high school and college class participation. These two examples of fit and culture demonstrate that college officials are aligned on issues which parents believe to be important.

College officials communicated and demonstrated their responsiveness to address parent expectations. In addition to alignment on issues, this case study found evidence that college officials have communicated and demonstrated their ability to meet the intentions and expectations of parents of incoming freshman.

As a result of participation in freshman onboarding, several parents indicated that Urban University has demonstrated their ability to support their student's integration into the campus community. During informal visits to campus with the children, three parents left with impressions that the university was a multi-cultural and welcoming environment and one that meets the goals and expectations of their children. Following formal college events of "Accepted Student Days" and "Welcome Week", four parents spoke about their impact. These parents, some of whom participated in the events and, others who recounted their child's account, were pleased with their children's assimilation and specifically, credited college officials for aiding in their child's synthesis into the community.

Another issue which found alignment and demonstrated responsiveness was on the topic of student safety on campus. Parents, regardless of whether they reside within or outside of the region of Urban University, articulated their demand that the university protect the physical and emotional well-being of their children. A parent, who resides more than 2,600 miles from Urban University, wanted to ensure that the university would meet her daughter's emotional needs since her support network of family and friends were so far away. Another parent who

raised her five children in the same city as Urban University, also wanted assurances that the university was taking steps to protect her child's safety on campus. College officials affiliated with both of the colleges shared their agreement on this issue and spoke about their deliberate intent to communicate this message to parents and students. A further demonstration of commitment and competence was gleaned from two unique and potentially threatening events that transpired during this investigation. Within days of freshmen moving on to the campus, the university participated in a city-wide celebration that welcomed over a million visitors and world leaders to an event that took place as close as two miles from campus. Immediately following this momentous occasion, an unnamed university in the same city received credible threats of violence. Both the celebration and the subsequent day of intimation passed without harm to the Urban University community. Actions taken by officials at Urban University demonstrated both the seriousness which the university places on student safety as well as their ability to marshal resources to meet those responsibilities.

Sub-Question Two: How does the communication and messaging during freshman onboarding meet the intentions and expectations of college officials?

College officials' intentions and expectations of their communication with parents of incoming freshmen were predominately met, although not in all instances, and not always through their effort to control the message and vehicle for delivery. Where the first sub-question addressed messages being received, this question focused on the vehicle for message delivery and the messages being conveyed as a result of that effort.

College officials established mechanisms by which they could communicate with incoming freshman and their parents and in doing so, afforded them an opportunity to tailor the message they wanted to send. Parents shared their thoughts on the efforts and outcomes of these

communication efforts and also discussed the messages they received from college officials as a result of communications precipitated through: (a) collateral material; and (b) campus visits.

Collateral Materials. Six of the eight parents in this students spoke about mail from prospective colleges which arrived in the form of post cards, letters, brochures and emails. Parents consistently remarked about the high volume of mail; some of which were addressed to the prospective student and others to their parents. Additionally, parents said that some college sent a single piece of mail, while others sent multiple mailings over a prolonged period of time.

Parents offered mixed reviews on the value of the materials they were receiving and the messages they were gleaning from the collateral materials. One parent indicated that the materials did not impress nor inspire them to investigate the university further. Another parent voiced her disappointment that some colleges' materials were being sent directly to her, giving her the message of the necessity of her involvement in what she believed was her daughter's investigation and decision. Finally, one further negative response to the collateral materials was expressed by a parent because her daughter continued to receive mail, including personalized holiday cards from a university, even after she had declined their invitation to join the university.

In contrast to those parents whose perceptions were either neutral or negative, two parents indicated that the materials were useful in their college exploration. One parent said that he kept the large quantity of materials until after his son had made his college decision, indicating that the materials may have been useful to some degree up to the point of college selection. Another parent said that she and her daughter found the materials helpful in streamlining all of the college options under consideration.

College officials who participated in the case study did not speak about collateral materials during their interviews however, materials sent by Urban University were collected and analyzed as a part of the investigation. Consistent with the views expressed by parents, Urban University sent multiple pieces, predominately in the form of email. Some of the letters, invitations and brochures were addressed to the prospective student and some were addressed to their parents. Also, like its peers, Urban University sent holiday greetings to prospective students although it is not determined if their contact information was removed from the mailing list if/when they declined the offer of admission.

Since college officials did not express their views on documents produced by Urban University, it cannot be determined if the materials were effective in communicating their intended message. Despite the insufficient information on message intent, it is the conclusion of this study that the materials sent by Urban University had a similar mixed message and value as described by parents. Some parents likely found the materials to be helpful in learning more about the university; some may have found them to be inappropriately addressed to parents; some may have found no particular value in guiding the student to their college selection. Finally, some parents likely found the profuse mailings and messages to be excessive.

Campus Visits. The message intent and outcome associated with collateral materials were vague at best. In contrast, the messages that college officials hoped to send to prospective students and their parents during campus visits were predominately clear and effective. Urban University, like other colleges, invited students and parents to attend formal events on campus both before and after their decision join the university. Some parents in this study spoke about their participation in these events, while others said they opted to join their children on informal, self-guided tours of the campus. Regardless of whether the university directed the message or

simply allowed the perspective students and parents to search on their own, the university was effective in delivering its intended messages.

Several college officials in this investigation spoke about their role in the events and the messages that they hoped to convey. For example, several college officials wanted students and parents to understand the operating structure of the university; from cultural, legal, and practical perspectives. To illustrate this, several college officials shared anecdotes from the current and previous cohorts of students where the student and/or parent didn't know or underestimated the differences between high school and college. More than one college official spoke about the privacy laws in place at college that did not exist in high school. Some officials spoke about the goal and potential ramifications associated with the new independence afforded to college students. Every college official who participated in the case study spoke about their goal of sending messages to parents of the imperative to allow students their independence to succeed or fail on their own accord.

In addition to communicating the expectations that college officials have for students and their parents, they also wanted to convey both recognition and competence in meeting the expectations of students and parents. For example, parents spoke about the need to ensure that the university was taking appropriate measures to support the physical and emotional security of their children. Several college officials also spoke about the importance of campus security and provided details about the protocols in place to meet those expectations. Additionally, Urban University demonstrated its ability to attend to details by delivering well-planned and professionally executed college events. They also demonstrated their ability to react and adequately protect the campus community in circumstances which went beyond standard security requirements for a college campus.

The investigation exposed instances of message confusion for both Urban University officials as well as some parents. For example, when speaking about federal laws in place to protect students' rights of privacy two officials said they encourage students to authorize communication between themselves and their parents; while one college official thought the university discouraged communication between parents and university employees. One other message that caused confusion for some parents was a pronounced message by Urban University about the inclusive role that parents play as newly onboarding parents in the university community. For some, this message was an indication that their direct input in student matters was welcome and encouraged. This may have been the goal of such messages, but lack of further clarification about degrees of inclusion left some parents confused about the message and practical application.

Urban University used two primary vehicles: collateral material and campus visits to communicate their intentions and expectations to college freshmen and their parents. Through participation in this case study, college officials conclusively affirmed that the messages they hoped to convey to parents were predominately delivered and understood by parents of incoming college freshman.

Sub-Question Three: How does the communication and messaging of onboarding impact college officials and parents of incoming freshman work in pursuit of student retention and degree completion?

The communication and messaging between parents and college officials in this investigation is not reflective of participant intent to work together in pursuit of student retention or persistence to degree. Further, it may be gleaned from this investigation that these outcomes may be undermined either by lack of attention and/or by outright statements about their unimportance discussed as: (a) lack of focus on retention and persistence; and (b) messages

indicating lack of importance of retention and persistence as outcomes of the college experience.

College retention and persistence are typically two outcomes that students and colleges aspire to achieve. Among seventeen participants in this study, the topics of retention and/or persistence were broached four times: three times by college officials; and once by a parent of an incoming freshman. The investigation indicates that participants' lack of focus on retention and persistence reflects parents' and college officials 'lack of conviction toward these outcomes. This assertion is based in part on the question which asked all participants to explain how they would determine whether the student has achieved college success. Participants articulated fifteen separate measures that they would use to gauge college student success including retention and persistence. In the order of times a topic was cited as important, graduation was ranked tenth, behind cognitive skills development, grit, fit' self-assess, and self-advocate. To further illustrate the importance of graduation compared to the most cited topic, self-advocacy, the topic of graduation was mentioned four times, while self-advocacy was cited on twenty-six occasions. The lack of attention on the topic of graduation demonstrates that at least during freshman onboarding, this topic is not important.

In addition to a lack of attention to retention and persistence as reflective of a commitment to the goal, this investigation demonstrates that in those instances where the topic was discussed, they were not reflective of a concerted effort to achieve the goal. In two instances where college officials spoke about graduation, they said that they would deem a student to be successful by measuring their personal growth after graduation. While, the word graduation is mentioned in their goal it appears that the actual measurement of success is not graduation, but something that takes place after graduation. The other college official who spoke about graduation was very direct in his assertion that college graduation does not need to be a

measurement of success. He said that student success is the measurement of growth of the student, regardless of having earned a college degree. Finally, one parent, who herself did not complete college expressed an opinion that college graduation was probably a good measurement of college student success.

The first two chapters of this investigation cited the widely held assertion that college student success is often measured by student retention and graduation; and further, that college officials and students place a high value on these outcomes. The conclusions ascertained from this case study is that during freshmen onboarding at Urban University, college officials and parents of incoming freshman seldom discuss retention and graduation and the limited discussions that did take place were not necessarily reflected as a goal.

The central question, along with the three sub-questions, served as a guide in the investigation into how parents and college officials at one university interpreted the communication and messaging that were being delivered during freshmen onboarding. As a result of this investigation, it is concluded that these two primary stakeholders of student success, parents and college officials, have begun to develop a foundation from which they can continue to build and work together to support students. Based upon the findings, results and conclusions of this investigation, there are six recommendations to stakeholders of college student success.

Recommendations

The recommendations which follow are drawn from the findings, results and conclusions of this case study and are intended to improve processes and outcomes which support student success, retention, and degree completion. There are six recommendations: three specific to Urban University officials; and three to future researchers who seek to better support student

success and degree completion.

The three recommendations for parents and college officials at Urban University are: (a) increase focus on development of student cognitive skills during freshman onboarding;(b) establish intentional communication and messaging which promotes the goal of student retention and persistence to degree; and (c) strengthen the structure by which parents and college officials may communicate with each other.

Increase focus on development of student cognitive skills during freshman onboarding.

One result of this study was the determination that during freshman onboarding, participants placed a low priority on the importance of student cognitive skill development. As part of the strategy to improve student educational outcomes, including persistence, it is recommended that college officials promote habits that demonstrate Urban University officials are equally focused on cognitive skills and non-cognitive skill development. One way to accomplish this goal would be to stage displays of cognitive skill building taking place at Urban University so that parents and their students can view cognitive skill building as a priority as they participate in formal and self-guided tours of the campus. For example, student work can be displayed along with important concepts that the student mastered in order to achieve the outcome. Additionally, signs can be erected that identify specific courses and faculty members who support the student in mastering the cognitive skills necessary to produce the object, video, or performance. The result of this effort may positively influence student to enroll in and become engaged in Urban University by bringing like-minded people together (Senge, 1992). Further, the messages may demonstrate the importance that Urban University places on students advancing their cognitive skills which will enable them to retain from one academic year to the next and ultimately, to college degree.

Establish intentional communication and messaging which promotes the goal of student retention and persistence to degree.

Parents and college officials have an influential voice in guiding their child/student to toward goals. As this case study demonstrated, parents were influential in supporting students with college application and selection process, and college officials played an integral part in onboarding students to the cultural and academic expectations of the university. It is recommended that parents and college officials extend their influence by promoting the goal of retention degree completion as an outcome that incoming freshmen focus on. It is recommended that college officials create opportunities for incoming freshmen to become involved in mentorship programs, and that parents support the benefits of such a program. Urban University could identify upper-class men and women or alumni who can support the student with the struggles of the freshman year because they too have experienced and overcome their own struggles to succeed and persist. This technique referred to in the literature as "connecting peers with purpose," can enable the freshman to observe a peer or alumni who has obtained the skill levels and experience that they seek to attain (Fullen, 2008).

Strengthen the structure by which parents and college officials can communicate with each other.

This investigation found that all nine college officials voiced a unified message and the result was that parents acknowledged receipt of the message. What remains unknown is whether it required all nine college officials for the message to be heard and further, what valuable messages were potentially missed as a result of lesser degrees of communication. In addition to college officials, the investigation determined that parents were effective in communicating their

messages; however, in at least one instance parents resorted to using social media as a means to make their voice heard. For these reasons, it is recommended that Urban University establish a streamlined and dedicated mechanism by which messages between parents and college officials can be lodged. Urban University could achieve this recommendation by identifying designating a single point of contact, a direct phone line, and a web portal that connects these two influential stakeholders. This recommendation is in line with the literature which shows that 45% of the colleges that offer an office of parents have been established since 2007 (Savage, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Research.

Based on the finding, results and conclusions of this study, there are three recommendations for future research on the topic of freshman onboarding, student retention, and degree completion. The three recommendations include: (a) conduct similar studies with stakeholders at other colleges; (b) conduct studies with parents who hail from similar educational and cultural backgrounds; and (c) measure outcomes of efforts to focus on cognitive skill development, retention, and persistence to degree.

Conduct similar studies with stakeholders at other colleges.

The findings, results, and conclusions of this study are intended to be generalizable and transferrable to other colleges that offer the same or similar freshman onboarding model as Urban University (Wong, 2013). While research has determined that 95% of higher education institutions host freshman onboarding events, their content and modes of delivery may vary (Abraham, Nesbit & Ward-Roof, 2003; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986). For this reason, it is recommended that other colleges conduct their own research study to determine how communication and messaging are being interpreted by parents whose freshmen are onboarding to their university.

Conduct studies focused on parents who hail from homogenous educational and cultural backgrounds.

This case study purposefully included a stratified sample of participants who hail from varying demographic, ethnic and educational origins. The decision to engage parents from a heterogeneous population was to seek a variety of perspectives from participants whose backgrounds may produce findings shaped by their backgrounds (Creswell, 2013)

It is recommended that future researches examine the perspectives of parents whose backgrounds are similar and then compare homogenous groups to see if a pattern emerges. For example, it may be determined that parents who graduated from college perceive messages differently from parents whose student is a first generation college student. The results of such a finding may prove that college officials need to tailor their message based on the background of the parent.

Measure outcomes of efforts to focus on cognitive skill development, retention and persistence to degree.

Despite the findings in this case study that parents and college officials are not focused on retention or persistence during freshman onboarding, it is recommended that college officials measure the effectiveness of efforts such as those described earlier, to increase focus on improving retention and graduation outcomes.

An evaluation that measures the effect of increased focus on cognitive skill development, retention and persistence may be challenging. As the research on retention and degree completion demonstrates, a student's decision to retain or leave a university is multi-dimensional; so to isolate the effects of deliberate actions may prove to be challenge (Berg & Huang, 2004;

Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). Based on the importance of the potential outcomes for students, parents and college officials, it is recommended that future studies exemplify the curiosity, inquiry skills, and scholarly competencies needed to investigate retention and persistence to degree and transform their findings into meaningful action (Urban University, 2016).

Summary

This research study revealed that the freshman onboarding at Urban University is one which both communicates and demonstrates a preponderance of shared goals and expectations of parents and college officials. Further, as a result of their interactions during the freshman onboarding, parents and college officials have begun to establish a foundation from which they can continue and expand their work to support student success.

Parents and college officials who participated in this case study demonstrated multiple areas of agreement on important topics which include: college readiness; campus safety; and the important roles each party plays in support of student success. Participants endeavored to define elements of college success which focused on the students' development of non-cognitive skill self-skills; with noticeably little attention on cognitive skill development.

This case study added to the body of literature which seeks to understand the role of freshman onboarding programs to support college student success. Further, based on the findings, results, interpretations, and answers to the central question, the case study proposes six recommendations to strengthen the effort to support student success. Three recommendations to stakeholders at Urban University are: increase focus on cognitive skill development; strengthen the communication between parents and college officials; intentionally promote the goals of annual retention and persistence to degree. Additionally, there are three recommendations to

further the knowledge on college student success: conduct similar studies at other colleges to better understand outcomes of their freshman onboarding programs; determine if ethnicity, socioeconomics or demographics are relevant to the findings; and finally, measure the effects of programs which deliberately focus on student retention and persistence during the critical phase of freshman onboarding.

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APPENDIX A: Letters of Invitation to Participants
Letter of Invitation to Parents

Dear

On behalf of my colleague David, a doctoral student and staff member at University*, I am reaching out to invite you to participate in an interview to understand your perspective on the communication and messaging between yourself and college officials at (Urban University)

In addition to interviews with parents of onboarding freshman, he is also conducting interviews with college officials to ask them similar questions about communicating and messaging during college onboarding.

If you agree to participate in this 45 minute telephone interview, you, your student, and the researcher will remain confidential throughout the discussion and the dissertation. If you agree to participate in this discussion, simply <u>REPLY ALL</u> to this email and let me know that you are interested in joining the discussion. I will work to find a convenient time that fits your schedules for the call to take place between September 25th and October 24th.

David and I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study which will advance the knowledge of student retention and success by understanding the communication and messaging between parents and college officials.

If you have any questions, you may email me or the chair of this doctoral study, Dr. Allen Grant at acg48@drexel.edu.

Please let me know your interest before October 1 and I will immediately get to work on planning the call.

Sincerely,

* Parent name and college name with be retracted in dissertation.

Letter of Invitation to College Officials

Dear_____

      My name is David Feldman and in addition to being your colleague at University*, I am also a doctoral student in the School of Education. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in an interview to understand your perspective on the communication and messaging between yourself and the parents of onboarding college freshman.

      In addition to interviews with faculty and staff members, I am also conducting interviews with parents of onboarding freshman to ask them similar questions about communicating and messaging with college officials at universities they and their student have considered.

      If you agree to participate in this 45 minute one on one interview, your name and title will be anonymous throughout the study and published dissertation. If you agree to participate in this interview, please <u>REPLY ALL</u> to this email and let me know that you are willing to participate. I will reach out to you to schedule a time and location that is convenient for you to participate between Septembers 21st and October 24th.

      I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study which will advance the knowledge of student retention and success by understanding the communication and messaging between parents and college officials. For your comfort, I want to assure you that this study has been approved by the Deans of the schools in the study as well as the Vice President of Enrollment and Student Success.

If you have any questions, you may email me at dbf24@drexel.edu or the chair of this doctoral study, Dr. Allen Grant at acg48@drexel.edu.

Please let me know your interest before October 1 and I will immediately get to work on planning the meeting.

Sincerely,

David Feldman

*college official name and college name with be retracted in dissertation.

APPENDIX B: Parent and College Interview Scripts

Parent Interview Script

Introduction & Setting the Stage

- Name, doctoral student in college of education and 20 year career in higher education, 12 years at (university) working to support students to achieving their goals.

- Over the next 45 minutes to an hour, I'm going to ask you to engage in a discussion with me about the communication and messaging between yourself and the universities you explored.

- I am going to audio tape the conversation so I can review and deeply consider the discussion later. I am going to ask you to say your first name before engage in the discussion and if you mention your student, please only use their first name. No need to be concerned if you do say your name or your student name, I will change this to a pseudonym during editing.

- Your confidentiality is very important to me and the university. I am going to protect your right to privacy. I am go to secure your data so only I can access it. You can pass on any question you wish, ask any question you like. Do you have any questions at this time?

I am going to ask you questions about each phase of the college decision process:
- Exploratory Phase- where you and your student thought about attending college
- Serious Consideration Phase- where you and your student narrowed the field to a few colleges
- Transition Phase- when your student committed to join the school

Exploratory Phase
Q1 Tell me about your experiences with the various universities that you and your student explored? (SQ1)
Q2 How many colleges did you reach out to and how many contacted you? (SQ1)
Q3 What were your expectations of the colleges as you interacted with them at this early stage in the process? (SQ 1)
Q4 What were the kinds of messages that you were receiving about parent role during this time? (SQ 1)

Serious Consideration Phase
Q5 Tell me about an experience that stood out for you during this phase of exploration.

Q6 Please describe the interaction with the colleges that you had on your short list? (SQ1)

Q7 What kinds of information did the colleges share about themselves that stood out for you? (SQ 1 & SQ 3)

Q8   Was there any message that you received that was unexpected? If so, please share an example (SQ 1 & SQ 3)

<u>Transition Phase</u>
Q9   Was Drexel's messaging similar or different from other universities you explored (SQ1)

Q10   Was there any message about parent role that was unexpected? If so, please share an example (SQ 1 & SQ 3)

Q11   How would you define college student success? Do you think that the university feels that same way? How so? (SQ 1 & SQ 3)

Q12   What do you expect of Drexel University? Have they demonstrated their commitment to meeting these?(SQ 1 & SQ 3)

Q13   How do you imagine that your communication with you're the university may change now that your student is in college?(SQ 1 & SQ 3)

Q14   What message would you like to share with the university?(SQ 1 & SQ 3)

<u>Conclusion</u>
This concludes this interview. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about what we discussed today?

College Official Interview Script

Introduction &Setting the Stage

- Name, doctoral student in college of education and 20 year career in higher education, 12 years at (university) working to support students to achieving their goals.

- Over the next 45 minutes to an hour, going to ask you to engage in a discussion with me about the communication and messaging between the university and parents of onboarding freshman.

- Going to audio tape the conversation so I can review and deeply consider the discussion later. Going to ask you to say only use their first name in this discussion. No need to be concerned if you do say your name or the name of the university, I will change this to a pseudonym during editing.

- Your confidentiality is very important to me and the university. I am going to protect your right to privacy. I am go to secure your data so only I can access it. You can pass on any question you wish, ask any question you like. Do you have any questions at this time?

I am going to ask you question about your role in onboarding students and your relationship with their parents.

Q1   Tell me about your experience with freshman as they enter the university. (SQ 2)

Q2   Tell me about your experience with parents as their students enter the university (SQ 2 &SQ3)

Q3   In what ways did parents reach out to you? (Email, phone…multiple ways, multiple times?) (SQ 2 & SQ 3)

Q4   What were the kinds of messages that you were receiving from parent during this time? (SQ 2 & SQ 3)

Q5   Tell me about an experience that stood out for in your communicating with parents during freshman onboarding (SQ 2)

Q6   What were your expectations of parents as they brought their student to the university? (SQ 2 & SQ 3)

Q7   Did you expect a different level of interaction with parents? (SQ 2)

Q8   What kinds of information did the parents share that stood out for you? (SQ2 & SQ3)

Q9   Was there any message that you received that was unexpected? (SQ2 & SQ3)

Q10   What is college student success? Do you think that the parents feels that same way? How so? (SQ 2 & SQ 3)

Q11   What do you expect of Parents of onboarding freshman? Have they demonstrated their commitment to meeting these? (SQ 2 & SQ 3)

Q12   How do you imagine that your communication with your parents may change now that their student is a part of the university (SQ 2& SQ3)

Q13   What message would you like to share with parents of onboarding freshman (SQ2 & SQ3)

This concludes the interview. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about what we discussed today?

APPENDIX C: Shared Goals for Students

with Participant Identification

GOALS FOR STUDENT	TIMES CITED DURING INTERVIEWS *College Official* *Parent*	COLLEGE OFFICIAL WHO CITED	PARENT WHO CITED
Respect for others	College Official (1) Parent (0)	Interdisciplinary Official 1	None
Engaged	College Official (1) Parent (0)	Business Offiical 1	None
Balance	College Official (0) Parent (2)	None	Business Parent 2 Interdisciplinary Parent 3
Grades/GPA	College Official (2) Parent (2)	Business Offiical 2 Interdisciplinary Official 2	Interdisciplinary Parent 2 Interdisciplinary Parent 4
Opportunity	College Official (1) Parent (1)	Business Official 1	Business Parent 2
Happy	College Official (1) Parent (2)	Business Official 1	Interdisciplinary Parent 2 Interdisciplinary Parent 4
Employment	College Official (1) Parent (2)	Business Official 3	Interdisciplinary Parent 1 Business Parent 2
Financial Reward	College Official (1) Parent (1)	Business Offical 1	Interdisciplinary Parent 2
Relationships	College Official (1) Parent (0)	Business Official 1	Interdisciplinary Parent 2
Grit	College Official (4) Parent (2)	Business Official 1 Business Official 2 Interdisciplinary Official 3 University Official 1	Business Parent 4 Interdisciplinary Parent 3
Graduate	College Official (3) Parent (1)	Business Official 3 University Official 2 University Official 3	Interdisciplinary Parent 1
Cognitive Skill Development	College Official (2) Parent (2)	Business Official 3 Interdisciplinary Official 2	Business Parent 3 Business Parent 4
Fit	College Official (4) Parent (3)	Business Official 1 Interdisciplinary Official 1 Interdisciplinary Official 3 University Official 4	Business Parent 3 Business Parent 4 Interdisciplinary Parent 3
Self-Assess	College Official (14) Parent (4)	Business Official 1 Business Official 2 Interdisciplinary Official 1 University Official 1 University Official 2 University Official 3	Business Parent 1 Interdisciplinary Parent 2 Interdisciplinary Parent 3
Self- Advocate	College Official (17) Parent (9)	Business Official 1 Business Official 2 Business Official 3 Interdisciplinary Official 1 Interdisciplinary Official 2 University Official 1 University Official 2 University Official 3	Interdisciplinary Parent 2 Interdisciplinary Parent 3 Interdisciplinary Parent 4 Business Parent 1 Business Parent 3 Business Parent 4

Appendix D: Invitation to Summer Institute

Why Attend One of (Urban University's) Summer Institute Programs?

The Classes

At (Urban's) Summer Institutes, your classroom could be a state-of-the-art recording studio, a securities trading lab, a designer boutique, or a salt marsh. In other words, this is a different kind of school, and a different kind of summer vacation.

The Teachers

Summer Institutes programs are led by (Urban) University professors. Our faculty are successful artists, business leaders, practicing doctors, counseling professionals, lawyers, engineers, and expert scientists, and they're ready to teach you what they've learned from working in the real world.

The Campus and Beyond

College is about more than just classes. At (Urban's) Summer Institutes you'll make new friends, experience the life of an undergrad on campus, and explore the historic city. With residential and commuting options, and programs that range in length from one to five weeks, school could be the most exciting thing you do all summer.

For more information about Summer Institutes at (Urban) University, including a complete list of programs, dates, and application instructions, please visit our [Summer Institutes website](#).

APPENDIX E: Confidentiality Notice to Students

Dear (Student)

As an (Urban University student, you should know about the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (also known as FERPA) and how it affects your personal information. FERPA is a federal law that establishes protections for student education records. The law applies to students who are at least 18 years old, or who attend or have attended a post-secondary institution even if they have not reached age 18. You can go to http://XXXXX.edu/provost/policies/ferpa for (Urban) I University's full FERPA policy.

While this law protects the student's privacy and limits the University's ability to disclose educational records, a student may give access to parents, guardians, or other appropriate persons by completing a FERPA waiver on (Urban) One at http://one.XXX.edu/. This will give the person(s) named limited or complete access to your educational records. Information about completing a FERPA waiver and granting access is available at http://XXX.edu/drexelcentral/records/ferpa/granting-access/.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding FERPA, you can contact the University Registrar at 215.XXX-1050 or ferpa@XXXX.edu.

Sincerely,

(Urban University Official)

Appendix F: Global Night of Networking

Dear (Urban) Parent, Greetings from the (Urban) University Alumni Association!

We invite you to participate in the Alumni Association's 5th Annual (Urban) Alumni Global Night of Networking (GNN) on Oct. 7! The Global Night of Networking is a chance for the (Urban)l community to meet, engage, and celebrate our shared connection over hosted appetizers. There will be receptions in at least 30 cities around the world.

Click here for a full list of GNN receptions and register now to be part of the celebration.

If you are unable to attend a reception in person, consider logging-in to the GNN **Virtual Site** throughout the day on Oct. 7. This year's Site features talks, demonstrations, workshops and more from (Urban) alumni, faculty and professional staff. These are all exclusive, original programs that you won't find anywhere else, and all you need to participate is a computer or Wi-Fi connected mobile device.

The (Urban) Alumni Association – from the alumni community to the staff – is a resource for you and your family beyond the four, five or more years that your son or daughter is attending classes. You too, as (Urban) parents are an integral part of the community, and it is our pleasure to live our motto of "connecting (Urban) everywhere."

Please do not hesitate to contact us at **alumni@** or 1.888.xxx-xxxx if we can be of assistance.

The (Urban) University Alumni Association &
The (Urban) Alumni Relations Staff

Appendix G: Message to Parents of Onboarding Freshman

Give Yourself a Hand

We just wanted to take a minute to let you know that your child isn't the only one we've accepted into (Urban University). We know your years of hard work as a parent and a role model are a big part of the reason your child was accepted to our university, so take a minute to give yourself a hand. You're part of (Urban) now, too. Congratulations.

Now Let Us Give You a Hand

Maybe you and your child are just getting down to the business of deciding among all those offers; maybe your son or daughter has planned on coming to (Urban)l all along. Either way, there's plenty to do between now and move-in day. Over the next few months, we'll contact you periodically with information about (Urban) so you'll have all of the facts you need.

If you're more of a bricks-and-mortar type, schedule a campus visit. We've got events and Information Sessions that fit even the busiest schedules.

Have any questions? You can always contact us directly by calling (phone number deleted) or by emailing (web address deleted) or find your student territory manager here.

Congratulations again and welcome to (Urban).