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## **Impact of Communication on Parents' and First-Year College Students' Ratings of Student Academic, Emotional, and Social Adjustment**

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*Abstract.* This study explored the effects of parents' and students' communication patterns on students' social, emotional, and academic adjustment to college. It matched 118 pairs of parents and students ( $n = 236$ ) and asked them to report their frequency and mode of communication, as well as the first-year students' perceived adjustment to college. The results indicate that on average, parents and students communicate weekly, most often through text messaging. Parents tend to overestimate how well their student has adjusted to college, and asynchronous methods of communication such as texting or e-mail are more frequently positively associated with students' self-reported emotional and social adjustment, whereas real-time communication methods such as phone calls, video chats (Skype), and in-person visits are negatively associated with students' self-reported academic and social adjustment. Models of parent-reported student adjustment indicate that parents perceive their communication efforts as more instrumental to student adjustment than do students.

The transition from high school to college is a sea change for many adolescents. It is not only a critical time in a student's academic career but a life transition that creates a valuable opportunity for growth, change, and individuation from family of origin (Hicks & Heastie, 2008). As this transition occurs over a short period of time, it can be stressful and generate poor outcomes for many young adults.

For many students moving away from home, the transition to college reduces contact with family (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007), which in turn affects students' main source of support during a difficult process. Despite the fact that students acquire a new social network consisting mostly of their peers when they enter college, parents often remain a strong influence (Agliata & Renk, 2008). It therefore becomes critical to understand how parent-student communication associates with student adjustment.

The literature shows that some parenting processes and characteristics provide well-established protective factors. For example, White, Johnson, and Buyske (2000) found that adolescents whose parents communicate warmth and affection and set and reinforce consistent expectations for behavior, monitor where and with whom the adolescent is, and support them as they develop social skills and competencies prior to college, tend to start using alcohol at a later age and are less problematic drinkers. Although such parental involvement may be viable for a high school student, it could be socially undesirable and

potentially developmentally inappropriate for parents to heavily monitor their student's activities in college.

Retaining emotional closeness to parents would seem healthy; however, research on how this relationship is maintained and with what outcome is scarce. Liu, Sharkness, and Pryor (2008) reported 40% of first-year college students interacted with their families daily. This percentage is significantly higher than with young adults who do not attend college (Liu et al., 2008). Moreover, Hofer, Kenny, and Hurd (2006) measured the frequency of communication, topics of discussion, and the initiator of communication and reported that students communicated with parents on average 10 times per week, significantly more than expected. They found that parents initiated most of the contact and that the students were satisfied with communication patterns with their parents overall. A more recent study found that parents communicate with students 13 times a week on average (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, and McNamara (2008) suggest the importance of parent–student communication, as voluntary disclosure of activities by students has been associated with engaging in fewer at-risk behaviors.

Some communication patterns may signify maladaptive outcomes for college students (Gentzler, Oberhauser, Westerman, & Nadorff, 2011). Too little communication with family may signify student adjustment difficulties, as students who are lonelier use electronic communication less frequently with existing relationships (Sum, Mathews, Hughes, & Campbell, 2008; van den Eijnden, Meerkerk, Vermulst, Spijkerman, & Engels, 2008). On the other hand, students who have very frequent contact with their parents during college are less likely to be independent and make their own decisions (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Instead, they rely on their parents' advice, which hinders their development of autonomy. The term *helicopter parenting* emerged to highlight parents' tendency to hover over every aspect of their children's lives (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Despite media attention (Mueller, 2014) to the negative effects of helicopter parenting, however, few existing empirical studies support undesirable outcomes associated with hovering behaviors. In fact, extant research on the impact of parental involvement on student development reveals mixed results. While Odenweller, Booth-Butterfield, and Weber (2014) found helicopter parenting positively related to student neuroticism and interpersonal dependency, Fingerman et al. (2012) showed that frequent parental involvement, including a wide range of support, was associated with better well-being in young adults. These findings suggest a complex relationship and encourage further research. The right amount of parental communication is important for college students' development, and there is a need to better understand communication patterns, as they may reflect psychosocial adjustment of first-year college students (Ramsey, Gentzler, Morey, Oberhauser, & Westerman, 2013).

More insight into communication patterns and their impact on students' adjustment to college is especially important in light of rapid shifts in technology. Newer methods of

communication between parents and students, such as social network messaging or texting, have grown in popularity. However, there is minimal research on such communication's effectiveness in providing positive outcomes for first-year students (Ramsey et al., 2013). Conversely, traditional technology such as phone use has consistently been associated with higher quality parent–student relationships. For example, Ramsey et al. (2013) found that students who have more frequent phone communication with their parents reported greater relationship satisfaction, intimacy, and support. Some have theorized that the phone is richer than many other forms of communication because it gives the user instant feedback and multiple cues (Trevino, Daft, & Lengel, 1990).

A better understanding of communication patterns between students and their parents is needed for effective interventions, in turn facilitating better college adjustment and reducing dropout rates. To date, many studies have focused on students' self-reports to further investigate this issue. However, no known studies have asked parents of college students about their perceptions and then compared them to their students' reports.

This study helps fill this gap in the research by investigating communication patterns between first-year students and their parents from the perspective of both groups. The study examines students' and parents' reports on frequency and mode of contact. Based on previous findings (Hofer, et al., 2006; Hofer & Moore, 2010), it was hypothesized that students who communicated at least weekly with their parents would be more successful in college than students who communicated less frequently. Moreover, the study seeks to determine which modes of parent and student communication are most highly associated with college student success.

Furthermore, the study investigates the relationship between students' and parents' perceptions of the student's academic, emotional, and social adjustment to college. The results may be especially useful for college administrators who wish to give students and parents information about how frequency and modes of communication relate to first-year college adjustment.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The sampling frame for this study was first-year students entering a small, residential midwestern university for the 2013–2014 school year and their parents. Attempts were made to reach all parents and students within that timeframe. The university is private and religiously affiliated. The racial composition of the student body was Caucasian, non-Hispanic 75.6%; Hispanic 6.6%; African American 4.9%; Asian American 1.6%; non-resident alien 7.6%; and other 3.7%. More than half (52%) of the students were female.

The university enrolled 588 first-year students in 2013–2014, of which 258 parents completed useable surveys. Of the students involved, 118 completed useable surveys, each matching a parent survey. No incentives were offered to parents, but students who completed the survey were put into a drawing for twenty \$10 gift cards to local restaurants. The student sample was more White ( $n = 109$ , 92.4%) and female ( $n = 68$ , 57.6%) than the overall student body. Additionally, a majority of students reported growing up in a two-parent household ( $n = 109$ , 92.4%) and having a religious affiliation (91.5%). The matched-parent sample comprised predominately White ( $n = 113$ , 95.8%) females ( $n = 102$ , 86.4%) who earned a bachelor's degree ( $n = 52$ , 44.1%) and self-identified as having a socioeconomic status of middle class ( $n = 59$ , 50%) with family income ranging from \$75,000–\$150,000. As the data were collected at a residential university campus, it is not surprising that most students lived on campus ( $n = 108$ , 91.5%).

## Measures

**Communication.** Parents' and students' frequency of communication was measured via a self-report questionnaire adapted for this study and based on the University of Minnesota Parent Survey (Savage & Petree, 2010). All participants were asked how often they typically communicate with their student or parent, how frequently they initiated the communication, and through what modes they communicated (e.g., e-mail, text messaging, telephone).

**Helicopter parenting** was measured using Padilla-Walker and Nelson's (2012) five-item scale with a reliability rating of ( $\alpha = .87$ ) for student-reported mother rating and ( $\alpha = .84$ ) for student-reported father rating. Parent self-reported helicopter ratings were ( $\alpha = .77$ ) for mother and ( $\alpha = .78$ ) for father. Students and their parents answered questions on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all like me/him/her* to 5 = *a lot like me/him/her*. Items given to parents were slightly reworded to reflect how parents respond to their student.

**Actual and Perceived Student Academic, Social, and Emotional Adjustment.** To measure students' academic, social, and personal–emotional adjustment to college and parental perception of student adjustment, subscales of the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1984) were used. SACQ is a self-report measure of 67 items that participants rank on a 9-point scale, ranging from *applies very closely to me* to *does not apply to me*. The SACQ has high reliability and validity (Baker & Siryk, 1984) and is composed of four main subscales: academic, social, personal–emotional adjustment, and goal commitment/institutional attachment. The first three subscales are used in this study. The academic adjustment subscale consists of 24 items, including statements, such as “I have been keeping up to date on my academic work.” For the parent sample, items were reworded to reflect parents' perceptions; the previous statement was modified as “My student has been keeping up to date with his/her academic work,” for example. A Cronbach's alpha reliability

coefficient of .91 was found in the current sample, even though the questionnaire had not previously been used in this capacity.

The social adjustment scale consists of 20 items, such as “I am meeting as many people, and making as many friends as I would like in college.” In the current sample, the Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient was .93.

The personal–emotional adjustment scale consists of 24 items, including statements such as “I’ve been feeling tense or nervous lately” or “My student has been feeling tense or nervous lately” in the parent version of the questionnaire. A Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of .88 was found in the current sample.

### ***Procedure***

One of the study’s innovations was including responses from parents in addition to students. Parents were recruited during summer orientation visits. At a session exclusively for parents, two researchers briefly described the study and invited the parents to participate in the future. Interested parents signed a sheet in which they gave their names, e-mail addresses, and the names of their student(s).

Next, students of parents who consented were contacted by e-mail and invited to participate. The parents and students who gave consent were contacted in February to complete the survey online via web link. February was chosen because it allowed parents and students to report on established communication patterns and students’ levels of adjustment. In accordance with the approved IRB, the online study included informed consent that explained the study’s purpose and asked whether the parents were still willing to participate. Participants were assured that their data would not be disclosed to their student(s) and would only be used for research purposes.

### ***Data Analysis***

Communication patterns were analyzed via descriptive statistics, which included frequency of communication initiated by parents, frequency of communication initiated by students, and modes used by students and parents to communicate with each other. Participants’ reports about the overall frequency of their communication were then categorized into three general categories: daily, weekly, and monthly.

After the initial descriptive analysis, the academic, personal–emotional, and social subscales of the SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1984) were computed, and inferential statistics were used to examine the relationship between parent and student communication patterns on the level of student adjustment reported by each group. To compute these relationships, linear regression analyses were conducted.

## Results

### **Communication Patterns**

First, the frequency and mode of communication between students and parents were explored. There were no significant differences in parents' and students' reported communication frequency. On average, participants said they communicated with their student/parent one to three times a week (53.4%,  $n = 126$ ), with 31.4% ( $n = 74$ ) of the total sample reporting communication two to three times a week. However, a relatively high percentage of students and parents (30.9%,  $n = 73$ ) reported talking with their counterpart once a day.

Overall, frequency analysis indicated text messaging as the mode used most often by parents and students to stay connected, with 85.5% ( $n = 101$ ) of parents and 71.2% of students ( $n = 84$ ) using it at least once a week and 31.4% ( $n = 37$ ) of parents and 32.2% ( $n = 38$ ) of students using it daily or more than once a day. Telephone was the second most-used communication method, with 66.9% ( $n = 79$ ) of students and 57.5% ( $n = 68$ ) of parents using it at least once a week and 13.6% ( $n = 16$ ) of students and 11.9% ( $n = 14$ ) of parents using it daily or more than once a day. The third most-used communication method was e-mail, with 16.1% ( $n = 19$ ) of students and 27.8% ( $n = 33$ ) of parents using it at least once a week (see Table 1).

Because such a small percentage of students communicated less than weekly with their parents/caregivers, a meaningful analysis of variance on student adjustment scores and categories (monthly, weekly, daily) of communication was not possible. Therefore, *t*-tests were used to examine differences in adjustment scores between students who communicated one to three times a week versus those who communicated one to three times a day with their parents/caregivers. These tests showed no significant differences in adjustment scores between the two groups; however, the mean scores for those who communicated weekly were higher in all categories than for those who communicated daily.

### **Student Self-Report and Parents' Perception of Academic, Personal–Emotional, and Social Adjustment**

To investigate the difference between first-year student adjustment to college and parent perception of that adjustment, a paired-samples *t*-test was conducted. For each of the three SACQ subscales used in this study (academic, personal–emotional, social), parents reported significantly better student adjustment than students did. Parents' score for academic adjustment ( $M = 184.5$ ,  $SD = 21.6$ ) when compared with students' self-reported scores ( $M = 155.2$ ,  $SD = 25.2$ ) showed a significant difference ( $t[94] = 11.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Also, parents' score for personal–emotional adjustment ( $M = 97.5$ ,  $SD = 16$ ) was higher than students' scores ( $M = 76.3$ ,  $SD = 20.7$ ) and significantly different ( $t[96] = 10.1$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Social adjustment scores followed the same pattern. Parents' scores ( $M = 154$ ,  $SD = 21.4$ ) were higher than students' scores ( $M = 141.4$ ,  $SD = 22.3$ ) and statistically significant ( $t[94] = 5.8$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 1  
Methods and Frequencies of Student-Parent Communication

Mode of Communication	Student						Parent					
	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Daily		Weekly		Monthly	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Phone	13.6	16	53.4	63	16.1	19	11.9	14	45.8	54	36.4	43
E-mail	1.7	2	14.4	17	66.1	78	1.7	2	26.3	31	63.6	75
Regular mail	0	0	3.4	4	78.8	93	0	0	3.4	4	87.3	103
Text	32.2	38	39	46	11.9	14	31.4	37	54.2	64	11	13
Instant message	5.1	6	2.5	3	5.1	6	3.4	4	6.8	8	2.5	3
Video media	1.7	2	9.3	11	16.9	20	0.8	1	9.3	11	10.2	12
Social media	5.1	6	15.3	18	62.7	74	3.4	4	22.9	27	64.4	76



### ***Influence of Communication Frequency and Mode on Parents' and Students' Reports of Student Adjustment***

To examine the predictive validity of communication frequency and type on scores for student academic, social, and personal–emotional adjustment, multiple regression analyses were conducted. Only student–parent pairs in which each completed the SACQ measure were used in this analysis, so that direct comparisons could be made between a student's reported adjustment and the parent's perception of that adjustment.

**Academic adjustment.** Regression analysis revealed that communication variables did a better job of predicting a parent's view of their child's academic adjustment ( $\text{adj. } R^2 = .36$ ) than the student's self-reported academic adjustment ( $\text{adj. } R^2 = .28$ ). For students, four variables were significant, and all were negatively associated with academic adjustment: (a) increased levels of parent–student in-person communication, (b) parent-to-student communication via instant messaging, (c) student-to-parent communication via video media (Skype), and (d) students' ratings of their parents on the helicopter parenting scale (see Table 2).

Six variables were significant predictors of how parents scored their students' academic adjustment. The four variables negatively associated with parent perception of student academic adjustment were: increased student–parent communication via video media, student-to-parent communication via regular mail, parent-to-student communication via regular mail, and parents' self-ratings on the helicopter parenting scale. Communication variables positively associated with parent perception of student academic adjustment were increased parent-to-student communication via e-mail and Facebook (or social media).

**Social adjustment.** As was the case with academic adjustment, communication variables better explain parents' rating of student social adjustment ( $\text{adj. } R^2 = .55$ ) than students' self-reported social adjustment ( $\text{adj. } R^2 = .38$ ). The communication variables most positively associated with higher student social adjustment scores were student-to-parent communication via social media (Facebook) and parent-to-student communication via e-mail. The types of communication associated with decreased student scores for social adjustment were student-to-parent communication via instant messaging and video media (FaceTime/Skype) and parent-to-student in-person communication (see Table 3).

Parents' rating of students' social adjustment was influenced by many communication variables. Three variables with relatively high, positive, standardized coefficients were parent-to-student communication via telephone, text messaging, and instant messaging. The four variables that had a negative relationship with parents' rating of students' social adjustment were: parent-to-student communication in person, student-to-parent communication via phone and instant messaging, parents' reported helicopter scores, and parent-to-student overall frequency of communication via any method.

Thus, when parents communicate frequently with their students by the two most commonly used methods (phone and texting), they rate those students' social adjustment higher than

Table 2  
Results for Regression Analysis for Academic Adjustment

	<b>B</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
<i>Academic Adjustment (parent-reported)</i>			
Adjusted $r^2 = 0.36$ , $SE = 12.4$ , $p < .001$			
Constant	212.41	40.77	<.001
Student→ Parent Communication			
Video-based Media	-3.31	-3.10	.003
Regular Mail	-5.19	-3.00	.004
Parent→ Student Communication			
E-mail	3.01	3.31	.001
Video-based Media	-6.87	-3.45	.001
Instant Messaging	-1.94	-1.63	.106
Social Media (e.g., Facebook)	2.70	2.41	.018
Helicopter Parent (per parent)	-1.44	-3.12	.003
<i>Academic Adjustment (student-reported)</i>			
Adjusted $r^2 = 0.28$ , $SE = 19.51$ , $p < .001$			
Constant	191.30	31.43	<.001
Student→ Parent Communication			
Video-based Media	-4.15	-2.58	.012
Parent→ Student Communication			
In Person	-4.00	-2.80	.006
Instant Messaging	-4.73	-3.03	.003
Helicopter Parent (per parent)	-1.24	-2.23	.029

if they see themselves as communicating frequently via any other method—especially in person, if they rate themselves as a helicopter parent, and if their student frequently calls or sends them instant messages.

**Personal–Emotional Adjustment.** Unlike the previous two areas of adjustment, communication variables better predicted students' personal–emotional adjustment (adj.  $R^2 = .63$ ) than parents' perceived scores of student emotional adjustment (adj.  $R^2 = .55$ ). Both models are robust and illustrate the potentially negative effect of too much communication between parents and students on student adjustment to college.

For students, only two variables, student-to-parent communication via text or video media, were (weakly) associated with increased emotional adjustment. Several variables

Table 3  
*Regression Analysis for Social Adjustment*

	<b>B</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
<i>Social Adjustment (parent-reported)</i>			
Adjusted $r^2 = 0.55$ , $SE = 10.46$ , $p \leq .001$			
Constant	184.3	28.46	<.001
Student→ parent communication			
Phone	-3.95	1.16	.001
Instant messaging	-3.21	-3.58	.001
Parent→ student communication			
Overall	-4.83	-2.60	.012
In person	-5.68	-5.93	<.001
Phone	3.05	3.17	.002
Text messaging	3.19	2.53	.014
Instant messaging	3.49	3.83	<.001
Helicopter parent (per parent)	-0.89	-2.10	.040
Helicopter parent (per student)	0.62	1.82	.074
<i>Social Adjustment (student-reported)</i>			
Adjusted $r^2 = 0.38$ , $SE = 11.59$ , $p \leq .001$			
Constant	151.91	45.47	<.001
Student→ parent communication			
Video-based media	-3.00	-2.48	.015
Instant messaging	-3.68	-2.93	.005
Social networking (e.g., Facebook)	-3.69	3.32	.001
Parent→ student communication			
In person	-5.28	-5.81	<.001
E-mail	1.94	2.31	.024

were negatively associated with student self-reported emotional adjustment, with students' rating of their parents as helicopter parents being the most powerful (see Table 4).

Parents' assessment of their students' emotional adjustment was most positively associated with their frequency of communication with students via any mode and most negatively associated with students' frequency of communication with them via any mode. Other interesting indicators of parents' rating of student emotional adjustment were student-to-parent communication via phone and texting. Increased frequency of student-parent

calling (via phone) was negatively related to parents' rating, but increased frequency of student–parent texting was positively associated with parents' rating of students' emotional adjustment. Thus, it appears that parents rate their students' emotional adjustment highest when they are in frequent contact with their student and if students text rather than call them, provided the students do not communicate too frequently.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between parent–student communication patterns and college students' academic, social and personal–emotional adjustment to college. As predicted, the results indicate most parents initiated communication with their students on a weekly basis. However, a relatively high percentage of parents (30.9%) engaged in conversation with them daily or multiple times a day. The most popular mode of communication for parents and students was text messaging, followed by phone conversations. This finding is in line with results from Lee, Meszaros, and Colvin (2009), which suggested that students use their cellphones to build and maintain intimate personal relationships with their family members.

Parents' perceptions of student adjustment were compared to student reports and also to participants' communication patterns. The results showed parents perceived their students as doing better socially, emotionally, and academically than the students reported. Interestingly, this study also illustrates ways that changing technology may alter student–parent communication preferences and results. The measure most clearly demonstrating a generational difference was the regression analysis of students' social adjustment. In that model, one can see how newer communication modes are more positively associated with social adjustment than more traditional modes. The parent-to-student communication mode associated with higher student-reported scores on social adjustment was e-mail. The student-to-parent mode associated with higher student social adjustment scores was social media, such as Facebook.

Twenty years ago, it would not have been possible for students to share their social lives with their families so visibly, and social adjustment would have been communicated mostly via phone. Likewise, parents would have been less likely to e-mail their students a generation ago. Today, students who share their lives openly with their parents via Facebook or other social media may be the most comfortable and socially adjusted. Parents who e-mail their students more frequently rate their students higher on social adjustment. Thus, newer communication technologies that do not disrupt students' normal pattern of activities appear to be preferable and positively associated with student social adjustment.

Table 4  
Regression Analysis for Social Adjustment

	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Emotional Adjustment (parent-reported)</i>			
Adjusted $r^2 = 0.55$ , $SE = 9.86$ , $p < .001$			
Constant	124.83	18.96	<.001
Student→ Parent Communication			
Overall	-7.83	-5.03	<.001
Phone	-5.04	-3.82	<.001
Text Messaging	3.62	3.21	.002
Instant Messaging	-1.79	-2.06	.043
Parent→ Student Communication			
Overall	10.01	5.27	<.001
In Person	-2.72	-2.94	.005
Video-based Media	-3.73	-3.18	.002
Regular Mail	-3.20	-1.86	.068
Text Messaging	-4.25	-3.26	.002
Social Networking (e.g., Facebook)	2.36	2.79	.007
Helicopter Parent (per parent)	-1.06	-2.75	.008
Helicopter Parent (per student)	1.09	3.03	.003
<i>Emotional Adjustment (student-reported)</i>			
Adjusted $r^2 = 0.63$ , $SE = 9.97$ , $p < .001$			
Constant	132.32	23.88	<.001
Student→ Parent Communication			
Overall	-3.20	-2.76	.007
E-mail	-1.85	-2.12	.038
Video-based Media	1.80	1.70	.093
Regular Mail	-8.09	-4.65	<.001
Text Messaging	1.60	2.01	.049
Parent→ Student Communication			
Phone	-2.75	-3.52	.001
Social Networking (e.g., Facebook)	-1.83	-2.34	.022
Helicopter Parent (per student)	-1.86	-5.92	<.001

### ***Communication Patterns and Student-Reported Adjustment***

In general, the study results indicate that communication type and frequency are associated with student adjustment in multiple ways. Communication variables had little positive relationship with students' ratings of their adjustment. No communication variables were positively associated with academic adjustment; two student-initiated variables (student-to-parent video media and texting) were weakly ( $p < .10$ ) positively associated with emotional adjustment; and parent-to-student e-mail and student-parent social media (Facebook) were positively associated with social adjustment. Thus, three of the four positive variables were student-initiated and newer in form (i.e., texting, social media, video media). Most parent-initiated variables, with the exception of e-mail, were either neutral (no effect) or negatively related to student adjustment.

Some types of communication that involve hearing and seeing the respondent's actions may be more powerful than others. In this study, two such variables were in-person communication and communication via video media such as Skype or FaceTime. Students may also see helicopter parenting as an intense form of parent communication. Only these types of multidimensional communication were negatively related to multiple areas of student adjustment.

Three variables—helicopter parenting, frequent student-to-parent video media use, and frequent parent-to-student in-person communication—were negatively related to student academic adjustment. Of these, the latter two were related to lower social adjustment, and helicopter parenting was associated with lower student scores on personal-emotional adjustment. Frequent, intense communications in which students and parents see and hear each other are related to lower levels of adjustment. These types of communication may hinder the first-year student's successful adjustment to college, or they may occur because either the parent or student has not yet successfully adjusted to the student's transition to college.

### ***Communication Patterns and Parent-Reported Student Adjustment***

Whereas no communication variables were positively associated with students' reports of academic adjustment, two parent-initiated variables (parent-to-student e-mail and Facebook) were predictive of higher parent rating of student academic adjustment. Three parent-initiated variables (parent-to-student phone call, text, and instant messaging) were predictive of higher parent-reported student social adjustment. Finally, higher levels of parent communication via any mode and student-initiated contact with parents via text were predictive of higher levels of parent-reported student emotional adjustment. Thus, while the student models showed three of the four positive variables were student-initiated and many communication variables were either neutral (no effect) or negatively related to student adjustment, the parent models showed that six of the seven positive variables were

parent-initiated. The only variable showing a significantly positive effect for both the parent and student model of student emotional adjustment was student-to-parent texting.

Parents and students agreed slightly more about the communication variables that predicted lower levels of student adjustment. For each type of adjustment, parent and student models had at least one variable in common. Helicopter parenting was the variable negatively related to academic adjustment as reported by parents and students, implying that parents intensely monitor students whom they believe need more help. This may be true for social and emotional adjustment as well, but the results are less conclusive.

Social adjustment was negatively associated with increased parent-to-student in-person communication and student-to-parent instant messaging. And students and parents agreed that increased student-to-parent phone calls indicated lower emotional adjustment, implying that students who are less emotionally secure call home more frequently. Frequent calls home are seemingly understood by parents as an indicator that their child needs them and has not yet bonded with people on campus who can provide emotional support.

Parent models do not appear to be as heavily influenced by what we have characterized as more intense or multi-dimensional types of communication. Yet, parents do acknowledge that in-person communication, helicopter parenting, and the use of video media can negatively affect areas of adjustment. Parent and student models agree that helicopter parenting and student-initiated use of video media are related to lower levels of academic adjustment. But for social and emotional adjustment models, parents and students view one another's communication efforts differently.

The largest (negative) beta coefficient of student-reported emotional adjustment was students rating their fathers and mothers as helicopter parents, yet this variable was not a significant predictor for parents. The largest (positive) beta coefficient of parent-reported student emotional adjustment was overall frequency of parent-initiated communication via any mode; this variable was not a significant predictor for students. Parents also indicated a significant negative relationship between their in-person communication and student emotional adjustment, but the student model did not indicate this. In fact, for students, parent in-person communication showed a significant negative relationship to academic and social adjustment but not emotional adjustment. Parents likely see high levels of in-person communication as negatively affecting their students' emotional state, but students appear to be more affected in terms of their academic and social adjustment. Given that this sample has few commuter students (< 10%), students may have learned to anticipate and handle the emotional aspects of face-to-face conversation with their parents but find it socially awkward if their parents frequently come to campus or make them come home. Likewise, the disruption to normal student life caused by frequent parent visits or trips home may cause students to integrate less well socially or into academic life.

Because of the study design, causal relationship cannot be inferred. However, the findings provide a discussion point, as they may indicate issues that future studies should address. The findings indicate that parents believe more communication with their students is generally better for student adjustment, whereas students do not indicate that increased communication from parents helps them adjust to college. Further research should investigate student and parent preference and the need for communication with one another. Causation can be more clearly demonstrated with longitudinal data. Additionally, a longitudinal study should investigate whether the chosen mode of communication is dependent on the topic students and parents are discussing or on the level of student adjustment and maturity.

As the current literature indicates, parents continue to play an important role in students' psychological and psychosocial functioning (Fingerman et al., 2012; Mattanah, Lopez, & Govern, 2011). Therefore, it is important that they be aware of the challenges that students face, especially in their first year. College counselors can inform parents about the potential effects of their communication on students' academic, emotional, and social adjustment to college. They can help parents understand how stressful the first college year can be for students and encourage them to be available but not demanding of student contact.

### ***Limitations***

This study is somewhat limited by the parent–student response rate. Out of 482 recruited parents and students, slightly more than half of available parents completed the survey, which put the parent response rate at 53.53%. More concerning is student response rate: 24.38%. Parents and students who completed surveys for this study may be significantly different in their communication patterns and involvement with one another when compared to those who did not complete surveys. Moreover, the findings of this study depend on the accuracy of self-reported data, and the generalizability may be limited because of sample homogeneity.

### ***Implications***

These results may reflect shifts in the modes of communication that parents and students use as well as in the timing of events of young adulthood. Several studies (Arnett, 2007; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009) have documented the elongated period of emerging adulthood, yet student expectations regarding continued parental support are not known. Because student-to-parent relationships are governed by norms about appropriate behavior (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998), the findings of this study are useful in determining the appropriate norms of student–parent communication mode and frequency.

This study's research findings are important for college administrators, college counselors, and parents who would like to understand how to improve first-year students' adjustment to college. Findings could be used during student orientation with emphasis on the life changes that occur during college and how modes of communication can facilitate



parent–student communication with respect to the growing interdependence between both parties. Future studies should investigate whether the amount of communication parents initiate is detrimental to students' transition to college. Moreover, future studies should address the gap in the current data by looking at parent and student satisfaction with their communication quality and ability to express their needs, as well as how communication frequency and mode change over the course of a student's college experience.

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