

PARENT EXPECTATIONS
OF COLLEGIATE TEACHING AND CARING

by

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University of Nebraska, 2006

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This exploratory research determined parent expectations of their traditionally-aged student's postsecondary institution with an investigator developed and validated survey entitled the PECTAC (Parent Expectations of Collegiate Teaching and Caring). The PECTAC instrument was predicated upon a culling from relevant literature to reflect topics and issues related to the teaching and caring functions of a private and religiously-affiliated Midwestern university. Parent participants were asked to provide basic demographic information in addition to ranking each item based on perceived importance.

A web-based survey software package was used to collect data from 475 participants. Dependent variables of parent gender and first-time college parent status were used to investigate differences between and among various sub-populations.

The findings from the study allowed for claiming the following: female parents expected significantly more from the university with regard to caring and teaching functions; status as a first-time college parent was not perceived to be of notable importance; and parents considered the caring functions to be of greater importance than the teaching functions.

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PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The journey of a doctoral student could easily be described through countless analogies and creative examples—and as one who not only enjoys a good story, but takes joy in storytelling, please indulge me for a moment. In my journey, I continually remarked that my path was similar to a mountain climber embarking on the sport's greatest challenge: Everest. So it was fitting that I employed the use of that imagery in this acknowledgment.

As I began my Program of Studies at UNL, I often considered my advisor, Dr. Sheldon Stick, my wise and experienced outfitter. Indeed, Sheldon was the perfect, well-traveled guide, someone who knew where I could befall danger or take a rest and a deep breath. His support of me and challenge to me was distributed perfectly, balanced and yet comprehensive.

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But perhaps most important to a climb such as Everest, is the role of the porter. On Everest, a porter is often a member of the Sherpa, an ethnic group with original roots in Nepal. Sherpa serve as porters and guides to the climbers who venture up the mountain carrying climbers' extra gear, oxygen, and water into the highest of altitudes accessible to man. During my journey I often told those who asked that applying to a doctoral program, the coursework, and written exams were analogous to flying into base camp and meeting your Sherpa porter—the person who will be your most significant support and at times your lifeline. This dissertation, in my simple example, was the real climb, the real challenge. And my wife, Heather Young, was my porter. She shouldered my insecurities, listened to literally hundreds of updates on my progress, and carried the brunt of work at home more than I care to admit. I am blessed to have such a wonderful partner—someone I am thankful to share the journey with throughout my life.

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WWYJR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the higher education environment, academic administrators, faculty, and particularly student affairs administrators are presented with the challenges of assisting students and their parents with the selection of a college and the ensuing transition to collegiate life. Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, and Ward-Roof (2000) claimed that, “Parents are an important constituency for colleges...” and “...are a major influence as high school students select a college (2000, p. 31).” Turrentine, et al, referenced the work of Dubble (1995); Galotti and Mark (1994); Litten and Hall (1989); and McGinty (1992) to corroborate the positive influence parents have on the consumer end of selecting an institution. Howe and Strauss (2003) referred to such parental involvement in the college selection process as one that was consultative in nature or of a co-purchasing role.

This involvement or influence by parents also can be seen outside the co-purchasing role after a student has selected a school and begun the ensuing transition to college. During the mid-1970s many postsecondary institutions began orientation sessions or other initiatives to assist parents with the ensuing collegiate journey their student was embarking upon (Austin, 1987). Austin said that many schools conducted sessions for parents only to help provide information and assurance during this transitional time. Recognizing that it was a time of significant change for both student and parent, increased institutional attention was directed toward the event, and gradually a sensitivity grew regarding the role, needs, and interests of respective parents.

A Generational Shift in Parenting

Today's college student commonly is referred to as a 'millennial'. The term, 'Millennials', was coined by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and referred to any student born after 1982 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Howe and Strauss (2003) claimed such students "...make decisions jointly with parents..." and "...have very demanding parents (p. 4)." Furthermore, Millennials' parents had an unprecedented amount of involvement in their students' lives—involvement never seen in any previous generation of traditional-aged college-bound students (Howe & Strauss, 2003).

Scott and Daniel (2001) said parental influence did not stop at the point of selecting a college or university. "From the changing dynamics of families emerges the growing phenomenon of parental involvement in the college student's experience. Although institutions may resist, the parents of today's college students clearly expect to exercise that prerogative (Scott & Daniel, p. 83)." Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward (2006) claimed these parents never were out of touch with their college student and, "With the help of technology like cell phones and email communication, they are never far away (p. 6)."

Richard Mullendore, a University of Georgia professor and former vice president of student affairs, offered the humorous thought that cell phones on college campuses were 'the world's longest umbilical cords' (Shellenbarger, 2005). His reference was to the growth of mobile phone usage by college students since the late 1990s, while also indicating much greater intrusiveness by parents. Another perspective came from TIME magazine in February 2005. In that issue, TIME coined the phrase that parents hover over their young much like a 'helicopter' and thus Millennials' parents were often

identified as ‘helicopter’ parents. Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward expanded on that analogy when they wrote, “Their ‘helicopter’ parents are always hovering over campus ready and willing on a moment’s notice to become involved in the affairs of their son or daughter (2006, p. 6).”

Such a high level of parental involvement has had ripple effects on higher education. “Our sense is that parents are redefining the relationship between the institution and the student in ways that none of us yet understand because the behavior we are seeing is so recent (Jackson & Murphy, 2005, p. 54).” They further wrote, “College and university leaders must also understand that today’s parents want to play an important role in the continuing developmental and educational process of students enrolled in their institutions (p.54).”

Parents as Partners

Mullendore, Banahan, and Ramsey provided an additional perspective to the image of a ‘hovering’ parent. They wrote, “As parents continue to increase their level of involvement, we have the opportunity to think differently about the way we work with them to build an effective alliance (2005, p. 1).” Keppler, Mullendore, and Carey (2005) investigated the changing nature between the college and parent, and discussed the need to view parents as partners, while assisting them to understand the developmental issues for both the student and themselves, legal issues surrounding student confidentiality, and the processes related to matriculation. To accomplish such a goal led many postsecondary institutions to develop and provide orientation planning opportunities for parents with knowledgeable institutional personnel.

In 1993, Sandeen contended that, “When parents feel a real sense of involvement in the activities of their children’s university, they are more likely to be helpful participants (p. 306).” His intent was to encourage developing, creating, and nurturing dynamic and interdependent relationships on campus and throughout a local community. The thrust of the message was that colleges and universities needed to bring parents into the lives of their matriculating children and not hold them at arm’s length. Jackson and Murphy seemingly echoed Sandeen’s recommendation when they suggested that educators needed to, “Develop a personal understanding of how parents are now involving themselves in the lives of students on your campuses (2005, p. 58).” Jackson and Murphy’s suggestion implied parents would be involved in their child’s academic journey, whether it was through intentional developmental activities planned and carried forth by administrators and educators or whether it was left to the parent and student. Furthermore the authors said that if higher education took the time to understand parental involvement, administrators and educators might be able to more intentionally (and successfully) encourage parents to be helpful participants in their child’s collegiate journey. Thus, their recommendation was to include instead of exclude parents.

Statement of the Problem

“On campuses with significant numbers of traditional-age students, establishing strong ties to parents can be very helpful to student affairs (Sandeen, 1993, p. 306).” Working from the premise that higher education needed to work more collaboratively with parents of students, the issue of parental expectations arose. Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska is an institution where most of the students attending were of

traditional-age (18-24 years of age). Creighton, like many other postsecondary institutions, had no history of any academic or student services administrator, nor any faculty member having made the effort to ask parents what they expected from the university with regards to their matriculant. Understanding parents and their expectations had not been a Creighton University issue; nor had it been an issue for many other postsecondary institutions. Turrentine, et al, (2000), supported the earlier work of Habben (1997) who had determined that there was little in the way of research or writing on parents of college students.

More recently Forbes (2001) concluded, “Although a fair amount of research exists on the impact of parenting on college students, the literature contains virtually no information about what parents expect from the college experience (p. 15).” Forbes made that claim in her (2001) article, “Students and Parents: Where do campuses fit in?” In that article she detailed the legal end to *in loco parentis* encouraging higher education to adhere to a ‘facilitator’ model of operation, and mentioned a parent survey she had conducted with a colleague to further understand parent expectations. “The more striking results of the survey are in the area of parental expectations about when and for what reason the college would notify them about their child’s activities (p. 15).” Forbes quoted one of her parent participants as saying “In some cases, it is my son’s responsibility to inform us. Of course, if he did not, I would appreciate hearing from the school (p. 15).” That was a revealing statement and illustrated the profound problem higher education continues to face with its parent stakeholders. Parents want to be involved and if possible participatory. But, laws, regulations, and conventions often impede communication.

For parents to be helpful to student affairs and to the academic enterprise at Creighton University, the institution first had to establish stronger ties with its parents by seeking to understand what they expected from it, as suggested by Sandeen (1993), Forbes (2001), and Jackson and Murphy (2005). And while many studies may be of interest based on the questions they ask and the findings they report, a study can be enhanced if it tells a reader why and how something works versus being simply declarative (Bryant, 2004). Therefore, in this study, the investigator worked from the premise that when parents send their students to college they have a basic assumption of care—while also assuming a reasonable level of instruction and academic learning.

The basis for this belief is evidenced in the literature review chapter, and its main arguments are summarized here: (a) historical documents regarding the establishment of higher education in North America pointed to the view that institutions of higher education initially were to be paternal (Henderson & Henderson, 1974; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Bickel & Lake 1999; Honigman, 2003), (b) parents had a developmental need to remain in a caring stance with their emerging adult child (Erikson, 1959; Newman & Newman, 1992; Austin, 1993; Mullendore & Hatch, 2000; Arnett, 2000; Forbes, 2001), (c) there are observable behavior changes in tomorrow's college student and their parents when compared to previous generations, (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Forbes, 2001; Scott & Daniel, 2001), and (d) considerable study is needed on the parent partner and their expectations (Habben, 1997; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, & Ward-Roof, 2000; Forbes, 2001).

As Sandeen (1993) has suggested, campuses where student populations are overwhelmingly traditional-aged, such as Creighton University, must create stronger ties

with parents so that parents can be helpful to student affairs practitioners. Student affairs practitioners and faculty members should foster stronger ties with parents for two reasons. First, parents will be involved in their child's life during the higher education experience. So, the choice for an administrator becomes whether they wish to have that involvement be intentional, developmentally helpful, and proactive to the educational process or allow it to be haphazard and without guidance from knowledgeable University personnel. Second, as was asserted by Sandeen (1993) and Jackson and Murphy (2005), parents can be helpful participants during their child's collegiate journey if higher education works to intentionally involve them as partners. Creighton University's history of not seeking to learn the expectations of parents placed it in the position of not being able to establish a helpful parent-institution partnership for the very students it has decreed that it serves.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to learn parent expectations of their student's postsecondary institution using an instrument entitled the PECTAC (Parent Expectations of Collegiate Teaching and Caring). This non-experimental, explorative, quantitative study invited the parents of all first-year students accepted into the fall 2005 class at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, to report the importance parents placed on a private and religiously-oriented University's ability to teach and care for their son or daughter. The study's intent was to compare results from participants based on gender of a parent and status as a first-time college parent. Additionally, the investigator wanted to determine whether a university's teaching or caring functions were of greater importance to parents.

Research Site

This study was conducted on the campus of Creighton University, a Jesuit, Catholic, comprehensive university in the Midwest. Creighton University provides four-year undergraduate degrees through three undergraduate colleges as well as professional degrees in law, medicine, dentistry, and a number of health-related professions. The University provides learning opportunities to over 6,100 students and is one of the twenty-eight Jesuit, Catholic institutions of higher education in North America. Half of the total enrollment at Creighton is comprised of undergraduate students between 18 and 24 years-of-age.

Creighton University is an accredited institution of higher education as confirmed by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, and is listed as a Master's College and University in classification by the Carnegie Foundation for the advancement of teaching. A snapshot of the Fall 2005 entering freshmen class showed 972 students with a mean ACT score of 25.9; 42.1% were male and 57.9% were female; 60.7% were Catholic; 16.5% were Protestant; and 81.4% self-reported as Caucasian (Wernig, 2005 Report available on-line at <http://www.creighton.edu/Factbook>). That site was chosen for ease of discovery in the research process, need for the institution to acquire the information, as well as for its history of attracting students often considered the traditional college age.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question One:

Is there a significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to teach their student based on the gender of the parent? H1-A₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to teach their student based on the gender of the parent.

Research Question Two:

Is there a significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to teach their student based on whether a parent is a First-time College Parent? H2-A₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to teach their student based on whether a parent is a First-time College Parent.

Research Question Three:

Is there a significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to care for their student based on the gender of the parent? H3-A₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to care for their student based on the gender of the parent.

Research Question Four:

Is there a significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to care for their student based on whether a parent is a First-time College Parent? H4-A₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to care for their student based on whether a parent is a First-time College Parent.

Research Question Five:

Is there a significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to care for their student versus the importance parents place on a University's ability to teach their student? H5-A₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the importance parents place on a University's ability to care for their student versus the importance parents place on a University's ability to teach their student.

Method

To examine the research questions the investigator developed, piloted, and validated a survey instrument entitled the Parent Expectations of Collegiate Teaching and Caring (PECTAC). The goal was to gather specific data from parents of new, first-year students admitted to Creighton University. Chapter Three explains that this exploratory study asked parents to answer a number of demographic questions and to report the importance of various items related to a college or university's ability to teach and to care for their offspring. Parents were asked to individually complete the instrument via a secure website. Results and analyses from the demographic items as well as the teaching and caring items are reported later in Chapter Four.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this manuscript holding meanings related to this study are defined in the following section.

Applied Student:

An applied student was a prospective student who had fully completed a written or on-line application, had produced all information necessary for acceptance, and the material had been received by the University.

Accepted Student:

An accepted student was one who had applied and been granted formal acceptance into the University community.

Deposited Student:

A prospective student from whom the University had received a monetary deposit, which allowed the prospective student to register for classes, apply for university housing, and be assured a spot in the fall first-year class.

Expectation:

The relative importance a parent had on how a college taught or cared for students.

First-time College Parent:

Any parent who was sending their first offspring to a college or university. (The definition of a parent is presented later in this section.)

In Loco Parentis:

A legal concept developed in early English common law that referred to 'standing' or 'acting' in place of the parent.

Listwise Deletion:

Listwise deletion was a process used to handle missing data in a research study and involves removing those participants' scores who do not complete all items. While

Listwise deletion results in a decrease in the sample size that is available for analysis, it was assumed that missing data occurred randomly.

Mean:

The Mean is the arithmetic average (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000). It was derived by adding all the scores in a sequence or distribution and dividing that total by the number of items.

Median:

The Median is the score that divided the sequence or distribution approximately in half. It was determined in each case by examining the full range of scores and then finding the midway point of the distribution.

Mode:

The Mode is the score with the greatest frequency (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000). There can be more than one modal score in a distribution.

Null Hypothesis:

A hypothesis used to guide the investigator's study. A null hypothesis, for example, can be supported or rejected by a statistical analysis of the data collected in a study.

Parent(s):

A parent in this study was an adult who may be a mother, father, grandparent, aunt, uncle, legal guardian, or a person legally responsible for a student entering a college or university.

Principal Components Analysis:

A data reduction technique which identifies maximum variance in a data set by looking at the data in a manner whereby the data are rotated around certain assumed interrelated factors.

Reliability:

How well an instrument yielded the same information each time it was used with the same subjects, under the same conditions and without Type I or Type II errors involved.

Significance:

Significance refers to whether effects of a study were caused by chance. Determining significance was done by application of appropriate statistical tests.

Statistical Inference:

This term, "...involves using sample statistics to help answer questions about population parameters (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000, p. 369)."

T-test for Dependent Samples:

A t-test is a statistical method used to observe differences in the means between groups. A dependent samples t-test is a specific use of the t-test where the groups to be observed are within the same sample.

Type I Error:

A Type I Error occurs when an investigator rejects a null hypothesis when it actually was true. Gravetter and Wallnau (2000) wrote, "In a typical research situation, a Type I error means that the investigator concludes that a treatment does have an effect when in fact the treatment has no effect (p. 253)."