Helping parents help their children successfully transition to college

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Origins of our Research

- The Team
  - Director of Student Orientation
  - Director of Student Engagement and Retention
  - Author of "Becoming a Learner"
  - Communication Studies Scholars
- What is Communication Studies?
  - Family Communication and Relationships Lab
    - Student adjustment cross-culturally
    - Homesickness

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Transitioning to College: Predictors of Success

- Cole, Kennedy, and Ben-Avie (2009) argue for the importance of PRE-COLLEGE information about:
  - Family environments
  - Interpersonal Skill
  - Social Support

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Family Communication Patterns

- Conversation Orientation
  - Open communication about a variety of topics
- Conformity Orientation
  - Homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs

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Communication Confidence/Apprehension

- Anxiety students experience surrounding real or anticipated communication with others serves as a barrier to students'
  - Academic achievement
  - Retention
  - Leadership
  - Adaptability
  - Multicultural appreciation

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Support

- Effective support is related to:
  - Improved self esteem
  - Mental well-being
  - Physical well-being
  - Reduces negative affect
  - Decreases feelings of loneliness
  - Increases feelings of optimism
- Social support from friends and family are particularly important

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Transitioning to College: Staying Ahead of the Curve

- Transitions create chronic uncertainty

- Reducing **concerns** can create more
  - Getting a job decreases financial uncertainty
  - Increases academic success uncertainty

- We were interested in what concerns students expressed DURING college instead of reasons they gave for leaving after-the-fact

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Participants

- Pre-test – January
  - 269 first-year students in second semester

- Time 1 – April-June
  - 2,252 students **about to start their first year** of college
  - Orientation sign up survey
  - 60.4% female, 88.5% White, 11% first generation students

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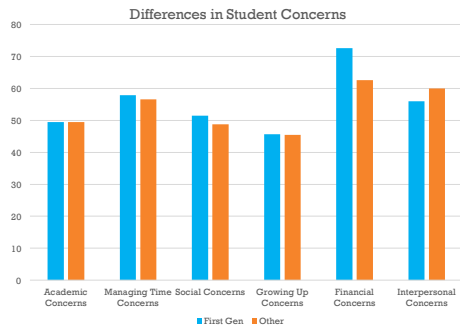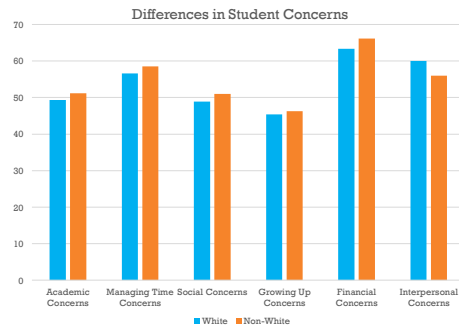| First-Year Student Stress Categories			
Label	Definition	Example	Frequency
Tests/ Homework	Concerns about grades, testing, and homework. Differences in class/test structure from high school, working on assignments outside of class	"The way classes and tests are structured is very different than the way I was used to in high school" "Figuring out how different professors test!"	204 (76%)
Time	Not enough time, concerns about being self-guided and motivated, finding a balance between school, social and work, prioritization.	"Time– I feel like I do not have enough time to do all the things I need to." "Trying to fit in social time, school time, work, and sleep."	138 (51%)
Friends	Not being able to find friends, not having people to go to campus/social events with, Finding your own group (anxiety associated with this), putting yourself out there	"I expected to make a lot of friends since I was living in the dorms but I've only really made friends with my roommates."	119 (44%)
Indepen-dence	Detaching yourself from your legal guardians, learning about yourself in a new environment, change in lifestyle and responsibility. Not living at home, having to grow up.	"Getting used to being on your own, you have to grow up and become your own person."	86 (32%)
Finances	Paying for school, employment status, not having enough money, navigating financial aid, paying for housing	"Probably expenses. I can handle classes and homework, but it's harder for me to balance paying for my schooling. I need to know when tuition is due, when to accept my scholarship, when to apply for FAFSA etc."	53 (20%)
Room-mates	Roommate conflict, not being accepted, negative living situation, having different moral/ethical standards from roommates.	"Difficult roommates who don't respect me, my stuff, or my privacy"	44 (16%)

Measures

- Student Concerns (Belle & Paul, 1989; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005)
  - Academic environment, academic performance, managing time, financial, and interpersonal concerns

- Family Communication Patterns (RFCP-SF, Wilson et al., 2014)
  - Conversation: "I can tell my parents almost anything"
  - Conformity: "My parents feel it is important to be the boss"

- Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley, 1988)
  - Family: "My family really tries to help me."

- Resilience (Smith et al., 2008)
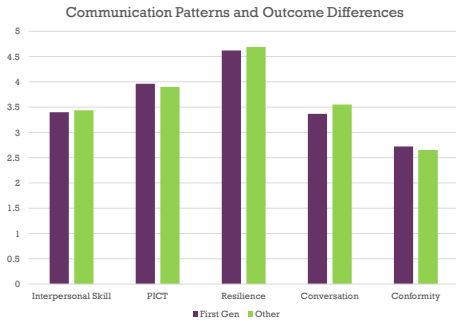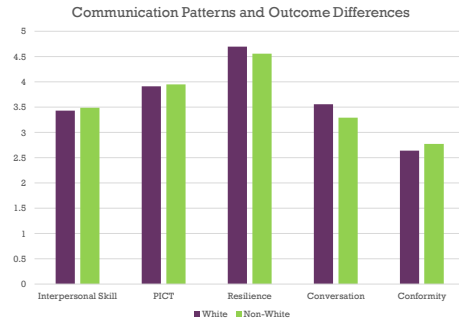 - "When I face a challenge I reach out to my social network for advice"

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First Generation Students

Differences in Student Concerns

Students of Color

Differences in Student Concerns

First Generation Students

Communication Patterns and Outcome Differences

Legend: First Gen, Other

Students of Color

Communication Patterns and Outcome Differences

Legend: White, Non-White

College Student Support and Resilience Results

Higher resilience → Lower concerns
Not true of family support

Higher conversation orientation → Lower academic concerns
Not true of conformity

Higher conversation orientation → higher family support
Higher conformity orientation → lower resilience

Conversation → higher resilience → lower student concerns
Conformity → lower resilience → higher concerns

Transitioning to College: Adjustment Outcomes

- Attitudes Matter
  - Success depends on how a person interprets that transition such that those who believe a transition will help them grow are more likely to be satisfied, develop more, and be ultimately more successful.
  - Attitudes are a better predictor of academic success when compared to skill or study habits

- Perceived Impact of the College Transition
  - Pre-College Students (N= 2,252)

Additional Measures

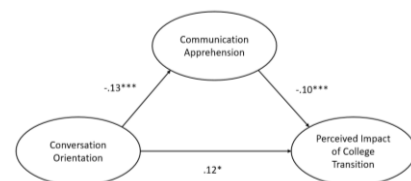- Communication Apprehension/Confidence (Wrench et al., 2008)
  - "I always feel anxious in social situations"

- Perceived Impact of the Transition (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998)
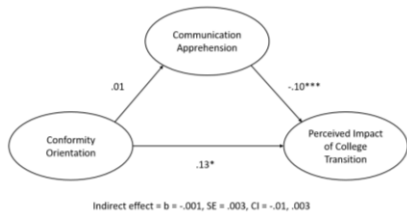 - "I think the transition to college will alter my general outlook on life"

Model Testing Results: Conversation Orientation

Indirect effect = b = .01, SE = .003, CI = .01, .02

Model Testing Results: Conformity Orientation

Indirect effect = b = -.001, SE = .003, CI = -.01, .003

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Adjustment Outcomes

- Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity
- More resilient people experience a variety of advantageous outcomes such as:
  - Overcoming mental health issues
  - Persistence in college
  - Ability to positively adapt to adversity in marriage
- Resilience
  - Students (n=436) across time

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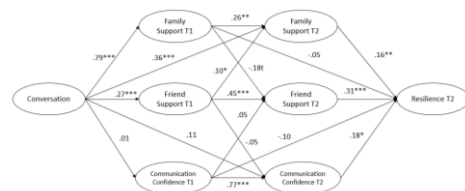& Relationships Lab

Additional Survey and Measures

- Time 2 – November
  - Follow up with first-year students in first semester
  - 436 students who completed T1 and T2
  - 65.1% female, 89.9% White, 7.3% first generation students
- Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley, 1988)
  - Friend: "I can count on my friends when things go wrong" (T1 & T2)

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Model of Transition Resilience

Paths not pictured: Conv → Friend Support T2 b = .36t, Communication Confidence T1 → Family Support T2 b = -.002, Family Support T1 → Communication Confidence T2 b = -.15*, Conversation → Resilience b = -.03, Friend Support T1 → Resilience b = -.132*
Note: All beta weights are standardized. Resilience at T1 was included as a covariate (not pictured).

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Implications for Student Affairs Professionals

- For Students
  - Communication apprehension interventions
    - Assess students' CA to raise awareness
    - Communication courses
    - Visualization intervention
  - Conflict workshop at USU
  - Social support training (for faculty, staff, parents)
- For Families
  - Parent orientation
  - Communicate openly about a wide variety of topics (tends to encourage lower communication apprehension)

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Conflict Workshop at USU: Addressing Communication Skill

- Matt Sanders, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University

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Social Support Training for First-Generation Mentors

- "Verbal and nonverbal behavior produced with the intention of providing assistance to others perceived as needing that aid"
    - (Mac George, Feng, & Burleson, 2011)
- We addressed:
    - Seeking Supportive Communication
    - Processing Supportive Communication
    - Providing Supportive Communication

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Social Support Training

- The Costs of Seeking Support
    - Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Costs
- Types of Social Support
    - Nurturant (Emotional, Esteem, & Network)
    - Action-Facilitating (Informational & Tangible)
    - Celebratory
    - Social Presence Support
- Matching Hypothesis

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Qualities of Good Providers

- High-Person Centeredness
    - Refers to how much the message behavior reflects an awareness of and adaptation to the subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts.
    - Explicitly recognize and legitimate other's feelings.
    - Empathetic
    - Good listener

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Parent Orientation Intervention

- Infographic/Fact sheet
    - Emerging adult transition and identity (re)negotiation
    - Conversation orientation - importance of open communication
        - With parents and other network members
        - Small talk and relational maintenance
    - Conformity – reinforcing the belief that college is important and worthwhile
    - MATCHING the support they need
    - Perceived support availability
- Helicopter parenting
    - Impact differs by culture

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Questions? Contact us!

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