

## **Helping Hands or Helicopter Parents? Literature Review**

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Growing up is hard to do, and a vast number of college age students need guidance and help making life decisions, but many colleges seem to cut parents out of the conversation. Is this to aid the student's independence and growth? Or is there a greater benefit for parents' involvement in their college age students' lives? There are benefits to both sides of this issue, but when multiple aspects of parent involvement are taken into account, the overall benefit to the student is really all that matters. There have not been many studies done on the impact that parent communication and involvement have on the academic achievement and social adjustment of college students, but the studies that have been recorded recently tend to hold engaged parents in a positive light.

FERPA sets a precedent for college students' autonomy in that it constructs boundaries between sharing information with parents once a student has turned eighteen. This not only forces a student to gain some independence from their parents' in decision making but also allows a student to seek academic achievement for their own benefit and not simply to please a parent. It also can remove anxiety from a student who has what many call "helicopter parents." Helicopter parents not only create anxiety for students who need to be learning confidence in their own abilities, but they can also create issues with the college. If students did not have this to protect their autonomy, they could be subject to parents choosing their schedule, their major, and making the student feel childish as well as powerless to control their own future. This can lead to a plethora of issues in determining the success of the student. It can create tension and resentment between the family, it can create a

loss of interest in the student, it can create a student who may have been academically successful but cannot be successful in the workplace because they do not know how to think critically and make their own decisions, and it can create tension in the college as well. How would a student services worker help a student choose a major if their parents were adamantly against it? Whose side would you take, the one who has to take the courses, or the one paying for them? The whole process could easily become based on the monetary gains for the university instead of the future of the student.

On the other hand, if the future of the student is truly all that matters, then parent involvement can be critical to success. In the idea of FERPA protecting students' autonomy, there is one major issue that affects a large number of students and parents. This is the question of who is financially responsible. If a parent is held or agrees to be financially responsible, they should at the very least have knowledge of the decisions being made. For example, after the first week of class complete refunds on dropped classes are not given, yet students can drop classes without the financially liable parent's consent or even knowledge. The student may have a valid reason for dropping, but in many cases, the reason may not be substantial and dropping simply adds to the total cost absorbed by the parents. With this in mind, if the parent is being completely responsible for all tuition, fees, housing, and books, then they should have a voice in what their money is paying for. Most parents who take on such an expense have their children's best future as the center of their desire and are looking out for this alone.

Parents also provide a much greater benefit to their students beyond their financial assistance. In fact, there is a tremendous benefit parents who cannot afford to be financially responsible can provide as well: support. "Research suggests that this engagement, encouragement, and support is associated with positive outcomes like adjustment to college, academic achievement, persistence, healthier parent-child interactions, decreased stress, emotional health and well-being, and higher educational expectations among college students" (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009, pp. 326-327). We tend to forget that only a short summer ago, most incoming students still had to ask permission to go to the restroom and now they are making decisions that will affect their future success. With the many avenues of communication available, connectedness has become much more convenient and efficient. A simple text message can provide valuable information or encouragement and can easily fit into a student's busy schedule. Also, not all support or influence given by parents has to do with academics. Parents are also involved with social development and can even help their students with appropriate separation and guiding them to figure out who they will choose to be as adults.

Most advisors, parents, and students desire the same thing: a successful college experience. "Secure parental attachment has been shown to facilitate the personal, social, and academic development of college students" (Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012, p.139). Secure should not be synonymous with controlling, but rather it should be associated with safety. When students have this type of relationship and contact with their parents, they are more likely to gain appropriate separation. This is a relationship that should be fostered and encouraged not simply when a parent is

financially responsible, but until there is no longer a clear benefit to the student. The research from Harper, Sax, and Wolf (2012) indicates that the amount of contact and involvement is greater during a freshman and sophomore year but begins to wane naturally as the student progresses. With this in mind, student services have the unique position to aid this natural separation by encouraging parents to be involved as well as encouraging students to involve their parents. Not only will this benefit student success, but it benefits family relationships as well.

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