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HELICOPTER PARENTS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS:
HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONALS
OPERATIONALLY DEFINE AND ADDRESS THIS PHENOMENON

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2014

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ABSTRACT

HELICOPTER PARENTS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS:
HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONALS
OPERATIONALLY DEFINE AND ADDRESS THIS PHENOMENON

Helen C. Hightower
Old Dominion University, 2014
Director: Dr. Dennis E. Gregory

This study examined whether the phenomenon of *parental over-involvement* occurred in the Virginia Community College System. Concern has been expressed in the popular and academic literature in recent years over the increased level of parental involvement at four year institutions whose student bodies consist almost exclusively of traditional-aged students. With a mix of traditional-aged and non-traditional students at community colleges, this study investigated whether or not community college employees expressed similar concerns as their counterparts at senior institutions.

The study was designed using a mixed methods approach and utilized a triangulation of results in order to answer four research questions. 1) How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement? 2) To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges? 3) How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents? And 4) how do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?

Results of the study led to the development of an operational definition of “helicopter parent” that has been absent in the literature. In addition, the study showed that over-involved, or helicopter, parents were an increasing presence at Virginia’s community colleges. College student services employees who participated in the study

indicated that their colleges had done very little to respond to this growing segment of involved parents and they were still learning how to work collaboratively with parents in order to ensure the best environment for student academic success and personal development. Student services employees expressed an interest in receiving systematic training and administrative support with respect to developing positive ways to work with students and their over-involved parents. The investigator developed a “Collaborative Student Support Model for Student Services Employees, Students, & Parents” as a suggestion on how to partner with parents to help support student academic success and psychosocial development.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, my partner, my very best friend, Bill Hightower. He has been with me every step of the way and this has not been the easiest journey. Having a disabled spouse takes its toll, but Bill deals with this with grace and rarely complains. I trust him more than anyone in this world.

Bill, I've finally crossed the finish line and you promised you'd take me on a long-overdue vacation. Don't forget the shoes this time!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing a doctoral program, and writing the dissertation, is a complex endeavor. For some, the process has been described as a dance, a long journey, a major accomplishment, etc. For me, the process could best be described as an obstacle course. In order to complete an obstacle course several things are required: preparation, stamina, persistence, agility, strength, intelligence, and knowing when to ask for and accept assistance.

I could not have completed my personal obstacle course without assistance from several individuals along the way. Assistance came in the form of content experts/survey reviewers (Dr. Ann Lastovica, Dr. Mirta Martin, and Dr. Maricel Quintana-Baker), pilot study participants (John Tyler Community College student services employees), and co-moderators (Dr. Joe Edenfield, Dr. Amanda Ellis-O'Quinn, Dr. Bill Hightower, Dr. Ben Kramer, and Dr. Jay Moore).

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the help I received from my dissertation committee members (Dr. Dennis Gregory, Dr. J. Worth Pickering, and Dr. Ted Raspiller) for their guidance and helpful comments as I developed my study and wrote the dissertation manuscript.

Of course, not everyone who helped me complete this obstacle course/dissertation is involved in the world of academe; family members are equally important. My biggest supporters include my 89 year old Aunt Mary, her daughter (my "sister") Jane, and Jane's husband, Bill. My mother read the prospectus and was supportive until Alzheimer's disorder took its toll on her mind. My father knew that I was in this program but died in

2005 before I completed my study. My husband's family members (Muriel, Jean, Colen, and Megan) were also supportive. Thanks to each and every one of you.

One of the biggest obstacles I had to overcome occurred in 2009 as I was in the process of conducting my study and collecting data – I suffered a near-fatal cerebral hemorrhage. Thank you, Michelle Tindall, for saving my life. Without you, and the efforts of my extensive medical team, I would not be here today. Thanks also to the many individuals across the Virginia Community College System and Old Dominion University who sent cards and email messages of support during my time of crisis and subsequent recovery period. Also, many individuals in Virginia and other states put me on their churches' prayer lists and I thank all of them for their support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Anecdotally, much has been written in the last few years in both the popular and scholarly literature about the concerns expressed by those in higher education regarding over-involved, or “helicopter” parents, yet comparatively little empirical research has been conducted to examine this phenomenon. According to the limited literature that does exist (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schifffrin, et al, 2013; Schwanz, et al, 2014; Somers & Settle, 2010a), several factors have contributed to the growing issue of increased parental involvement. These factors are addressed in greater detail throughout this dissertation, including:

- Increased numbers of students enrolling in postsecondary education as the millennial generation reaches college age (Howe & Strauss, 2000).
- Increased competitiveness and admission standards at 4-year colleges and universities (Baum, 2007).
- The expressed need for additional education and/or training beyond high school creating an extension of adolescence (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).
- Increased tuition costs and increased student debt contributing to a “consumer approach” to education (College Parents of America, 2007).
- Over-protective nature of Baby Boomer and GenXer parents (Howe & Strauss, 2000; VanFossen, 2005).
- Technological communication advances such as cell phones, email, and instant messaging allows parents to maintain constant contact (Tyler, 2007).

- Heightened awareness of safety issues following incidences of school violence and domestic terrorism (Leavitt, Gonzales, & Spellings, 2007).

There was growing evidence by the mid-1990's that parents considered it to be their responsibility to be involved in the education of their children at all levels (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), and thus their attitude influenced the attitudes of their children. Parents of today's traditional aged college students are more involved and connected with their children than any previous generation (College Parents of America, 2007; Howe, 2013; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). As millennial students enter college, not only are they comfortable with parental involvement generally, but they also seek more parental involvement in the college decision making process than did students of prior generations when decisions were made primarily by the student or with guidance from educational personnel (Hesel & Bartini, 2007; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lowery, 2004).

As a result, today's parents have more contact with student affairs divisions than in previous generations (Lowery, 2008). This increased level of parental participation has created both opportunities and concerns for higher education professionals (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001). According to Merriman (2006), the top three reasons parents gave for their increased contact with college personnel were (a) concern for the student, (b) efforts to resolve an issue, and (c) to complain.

Some institutions took a proactive approach to address the issue by developing programs to embrace, utilize, and strengthen parental support (Savage, 2006). Parents were viewed as important current and future constituents at these institutions (Young, 2006). With rising tuition costs, both public and private institutions expected parents to

be active participants in the investment of their children's education (Chopra, Hughes, & White-Mincarelli, 2011; Merriman, 2006; Young, 2006).

Other institutions developed reactionary methods to restrict the involvement of parents (Rainey, 2006; Sanoff, 2006; Wills, 2005). The two concerns expressed most frequently by student services staff and faculty were (a) the obstacles in the development of self-reliance and personal responsibility that occur when a student's parents are over-involved and (b) the legal limits imposed by the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* of 1974 (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99). Increasingly, unless additional staff members were hired primarily to work with parental concerns, student services staff were concerned with the decreased amount of time they spent working with students if more of their time was consumed in handling parents (Merriman, 2006). Student services practitioners also expressed concern about the interpretation of *FERPA* regulations, and what level and type of information may be shared with parents without placing the institution in a position of liability (Lowery, 2008).

Although they enroll nearly half of all undergraduate students (AACC, 2014a), community colleges represent the one segment of higher education about which very little research regarding college choice decisions has been published. In 1989, Smith and Bers studied parental influence and community college choice, which showed that parents played a significant role in the college choice decisions of their children. Subsequent research indicated that parental influence continued to play a role in students choosing to attend community colleges (Bers, 2005).

Safety concerns further illustrated the need to examine the role parents played in the lives of their college students. Responses within all segments of higher education in

the aftermath of the tragic Virginia Tech shootings of 2007 (the worst case of campus violence in United States history), and again in 2011, gave credence to parents' demanding assurances that their students were safe. Even as this study was conducted, changes to policies throughout the nation's institutions of higher education continued to evolve as incidences of campus violence were investigated and subsequent recommendations were made. However, it is reasonable to expect that other segments of higher education within the Commonwealth of Virginia, which share a collegial and geographic bond with Virginia Tech, wanted to have a voice in shaping, developing, and implementing institutional change toward best practices in providing improved security measures to address parental notification rights ("Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech," 2007; Matkin, Thompson-Stacy & Sam, 2008).

Although they differ in mission, demographics, and admission standards, changes and trends at four-year institutions had an impact on community colleges. As evidenced by the effort to reverse a 30-year national trend of declining numbers of transfer agreements, the Virginia Community College System's (VCCS) strengthened collaborative efforts with four-year institutions contributed to an overall improved perception of a community college education (Kraus, 2008;). Consequently, the community college has become the college of choice for more traditional-aged students whose ultimate educational goal is to achieve a bachelor's degree (Bauer, C. J., 2005).

It was therefore hypothesized that since more millennial students see the community college as their first or second postsecondary institution of choice, the concerns regarding the increasing number of over-involved parents as expressed by student affairs professionals at four-year institutions (Merriman, 2006; VanFossen, 2005),

also existed at community colleges. Evidence of similar concerns indicated a need for community colleges to conduct an examination of their own current student affairs policies and procedures. Such examinations showed the need to adopt best practices in addressing increased parental involvement and allowed community colleges to be proactive rather than reactive (Gassiot, 2012; Winegard, 2010). Best practices led to improved communication between student services staff, faculty, students, and parents. Improved communication led to realistic and consistent expectations with regard to the role of parents in a student's educational experience.

Significance of the Study

Although much of the research conducted showed that parental support contributed to greater student success at the compulsory levels (Jerome, 2006), researchers Schwanz, Palm, Hill-Chapman, and Broughton (2014) also addressed this concept at the postsecondary level. The research found that social support from parents did contribute to overall psychological adjustment in college students. Other research showed perceived parental involvement which contributed to student autonomy development predicted academic achievement at the postsecondary level (Ratelle, Larose, Guay, & Senecal, 2005), particularly in science curricula.

Recent years brought numerous generational, legal, and sociological changes that lead to an increased level of parental participation; some welcomed and some not welcomed. As a result, higher education perpetuated an identity crisis for parents and was inconsistent in its cultivation of, and its expectation for, the role parents played in the lives of students (Merriman, 2007). On the one hand, higher education encouraged parental involvement as a major influence to academic success and achievement. On the

other hand, higher education discouraged parental involvement when student development was hampered. At what point does parental involvement become over-involvement?

If concerns were expressed over the increased level of parental involvement at four-year institutions whose student bodies almost exclusively consist of traditional-aged students, and if enrollment of traditional-aged students was increasing at community colleges (Wyner, 2006), did student affairs staff at community colleges express similar concerns? If so, did this indicate a need to establish clear expectations for parental involvement? If the need was shown to exist, what changes were made, or should still be made, in student services policies and the services offered at community colleges?

Purpose of the Study

While much has been written in the last few years about the rising concerns colleges and universities have in dealing with excessive parental involvement (Cole, 2006; Jayson, 2007; Rainey, 2006), little empirical research has been conducted to establish the existence or pervasiveness of parental over-involvement in higher education and what, if any, effect parental over-involvement has on student services. The studies conducted have almost exclusively examined four-year institutions (Gassiot, 2012; Golonka, 2013; Merriman, 2006; Schiffrin, et al, 2013; Somers, 2007; Winegard, 2010). Current articles focused on concerns raised by admissions and student affairs employees at selective, residential colleges and universities (Merriman, 2007; Winegard, 2010) including graduate schools (Mahoney, 2012; Vinson, 2013). Virginia's community colleges are neither selective nor residential. The mission of a community college tends to be broad in scope in terms of what it offers, and who it serves (AACC, 2014; VCCS, 2014). Acknowledging

that differences exist, changes and trends at four-year institutions have an impact on community colleges.

In the fall of 2003, the chancellor of the Virginia Community College System unveiled *A Strategic Direction: Dateline 2009*; a strategic plan of seven measurable goals designed to meet the critical educational and workforce needs of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Three of the seven goals specifically addressed the anticipated increase in enrollment due to projected demographic changes and strategic marketing efforts aimed at heightening the awareness and benefits of a community college education. Specific goals that were expected to contribute to an increase in the number of traditional-aged students at community colleges in Virginia, included tripling the number of dual-enrolled students earning college credit while in high school, tripling the number of graduates who successfully transferred to four-year institutions, and maintaining low tuition costs not to exceed half of the average cost of attending a Virginia public four-year institution (VCCS). All of these goals led to increased enrollment of traditional-aged students in Virginia's community colleges. In November of 2009, the updated VCCS strategic plan, *Achieve 2015*, reaffirmed the importance of student access, affordability, and student success particularly for traditionally underrepresented student populations (VCCS, 2014c). Did the increased enrollment of traditional-aged students lead to increased parental over-involvement at community colleges in Virginia?

Research Questions

This study examined whether the phenomenon of parental over-involvement occurs at community colleges in Virginia, and if so, how it impacts the delivery of student services, and what, if any, programs have the colleges developed in response to

increased parental involvement. For the purposes of this study, the term “student services” was used even though many community colleges, like many senior institutions use the term “student affairs.” The purpose of using “student services” was to insure inclusion of all departments responsible for providing the *first points of contact* to students and by virtue of working with new students, potentially also have the most contact with parents. For example, many colleges within the VCCS have an institutional structure where the department of financial aid is not a component of the Division of Student Affairs, but undeniably provides a critical student service. Therefore, the term *student services* was used throughout this dissertation. Specific functional roles represented in student services will be discussed in a more in-depth manner in subsequent chapters.

The four major research questions addressed were:

1. *How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?*

Although the concept of “parental involvement” may seem to be intuitively obvious, it has been difficult to operationally define. Most often researchers defined it in ways that demonstrated various parental practices and behaviors such as parental authority or parenting style (VanFossen, 2005), or parental aspirations and attitudes (Young, 2006). Fan (2001) identified other types of parental involvement such as communication with school administration, volunteering, or involvement with the school and community.

If parental involvement lacked a consistent operational definition, then the construct of parental over-involvement was even less clearly defined. The term

“helicopter parent” has been used to describe the relatively new construct of parental over-involvement at the college level. While the terms parental over-involvement and helicopter parent are generally understood and accepted, they have not been operationally defined from a research perspective (Wawrzusin, 2012).

2. *To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges?*

Limited research had been conducted in the past few years to address the relatively new issue of parental over-involvement with college students attending residential colleges and universities. While it was accepted that differences exist between institutions that are (a) selective vs. open access, (b) residential vs. commuter, (c) four year vs. two year, and (d) private vs. public, many common issues and concerns existed at all institutions of higher education.

To date, it is believed that no research had been conducted at any community college that specifically addressed the question as to whether or not parental over-involvement existed at that level of higher education. This study established a baseline for an operational definition of parental over-involvement as defined by professionals who work in community colleges.

3. *How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?*

If the concept of parental over-involvement was found to exist at community colleges, then in what ways, if any, were community colleges responding to this situation? Had the trend created policy, procedure, or program changes in the way the college staff interacted with parents? If changes had not been made, did student services staff and administrators at community colleges believe that changes were warranted?

4. *How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?*

If parental over-involvement was considered negative and if collaborations with parents and community colleges were less than ideal, then how did community college professionals describe an ideal collaboration with parents? Had societal trends contributed to the need for community colleges to examine methods that would foster positive parental interactions?

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive, mixed methods design. The staff and administrators of student services departments at six community colleges were identified and asked to participate in either a survey or focus group. The quantitative phase of the study consisted of an on-line survey of Likert-type scaled and forced choice questions. The survey also contained several open-ended qualitative questions. The qualitative phase of the study consisted of a focus group conducted on-site at each college. The six colleges selected represented a purposeful sample of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). Findings from both quantitative and qualitative measures at the same institutions were triangulated to determine rich descriptions, emerging themes, and in-depth meaning of the phenomenon of helicopter parents and community college students.

Institutional characteristics, as outlined in Table 1, included (a) institution size, (b) community type, and (c) campus nature. Institutional size was categorized as either (a) small, (b) medium, or (c) large. Community type was categorized as either (d) rural, (e) suburban, or (f) urban. Campus nature referred to institutions, which were designated as either (g) single campus or (h) multi-campus colleges.

Table 1

College Characteristics

Characteristics	Colleges					
	COLLEGE A	COLLEGE B	COLLEGE C	COLLEGE D	COLLEGE E	COLLEGE F
Size ¹						
Small					X	
Medium	X	X		X		X
Large			X			
Community Type						
Rural	X	X	X	X	X	X
Suburban		X	X		X	
Urban			X			
Campus Nature						
Single	X			X		X
Campus						
Multi-		X(2)	X(3)		X(2)	
Campus						

¹ Small = Under 1800 FTES, Medium = 1800 – 4999 FTES, Large = 5000+ FTES (SCHEV, 2013)
 (n) = Denotes number of campuses of the institution within the variable category.

It should be noted the “institutional size” of community colleges in the VCCS was determined by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV, 2013) and was based on *full-time equivalent student* enrollment (FTES). This categorization differed from Carnegie classifications used nationally (Carnegie Foundation, 2007). It should also be noted that while all community colleges in the VCCS offer courses at off-campus sites or centers throughout their service regions, these offerings do not give a college a multi-campus distinction. Multi-campus designation must be approved by the State Board for Community Colleges and is determined not only by the quantity of courses or program offerings or student enrollment levels, but also by the replication of library holdings and other learning resources, physical facilities, and comprehensive student services such as admissions, counseling, and financial aid that are integral to the full range of campus functions.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following limitations may have had an impact on the study:

1. Although 23 community colleges (40 campuses) exist in the VCCS, only six community colleges were studied. The six colleges selected for the study included representation from small, medium, large, rural, suburban, urban, single campus, and multi-campus colleges and the various geographic regions of the Commonwealth. However, it may not be possible to generalize the findings to all community colleges.
2. The classification criteria used by the VCCS and SCHEV to determine institutional size, residential character, and service region make-up (such as rural, suburban, and urban) differed from the classifications determined by the highly

regarded independent policy and research center, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2007). Therefore, it may not be possible to generalize to specifically defined types of institutions across the nation as classified by the Carnegie Foundation. Carnegie classifies institutions as urban or suburban only if they are located within Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs) or Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), respectively, and with populations exceeding 500,000. Only one VCCS institution currently qualifies for the urban classification using this criterion.

3. The student, parental, and faculty perspectives were not addressed in this study.
4. Some colleges have significant enrollment at off-campus sites and centers where staffing is limited. Unless the staff at these centers specifically included student services staff, experiences with the students enrolled exclusively at off-campus sites and centers and their parents, was not captured in this study.

The delimitations of the study included:

1. The general demographics of the service regions of the six community colleges were identified and defined.
2. Only community college student services staff and administrators were surveyed or interviewed in a focus group.
3. The selected colleges were representative of eight institutional characteristics and the range of geographic locations across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Definition of Key Terms

Autonomy. “The capacity to take control over one’s own learning” (Benson, 2013, p. 10).

Boomer. A person of the “baby boom” generation born between the years 1943 – 1960.

Community College. An open access, public, two-year postsecondary educational institution that offers associate degrees and certificates.

Commuter Student. A student who commutes to college, does not live in residence on the college campus, and may live at home with parents.

Concurrent Student. A high school student who enrolls in college courses for which he/she does not earn high school credit.

Disability. As defined by the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990* (Pub. L. 101-336) which states: “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment,” (ADA, 1993).

Disability Services. Accommodations to which students, with a documented disability under the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* (42 U.S.C.A. § 12101) or *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (29 U.S.C. § 794(a)) are entitled that will enable them to participate in postsecondary educational programs.

Dual Credit. Coursework taken during high school, which enables a student to earn both high school and college credit simultaneously.

FERPA. *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) which limits the dissemination of a student’s educational record and information.

First-Generation College Student. A student whose parents have no educational experience beyond high school.

GenXer. A person born between 1961– 1981. In American society, it represents the thirteenth generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Helicopter Parent. The current definition is a person who is overly involved in the life of a child (Merriam-Webster, 2014). (*Note: This study operationally defined the term as it relates to higher education.*)

Higher Education. Any degree/certificate awarding institution of postsecondary education including but not limited to community colleges, technical colleges, junior colleges, and four-year colleges and universities.

Homeschooler. A child who is not enrolled in either public or private school and is often educated by his/her parents.

In Loco Parentis. Latin phrase that translates to “in the place of the parent.” In the context of education, usually refers to an institution serving in place of the parent.

Millennial Generation. The generation born between 1982– 2002. In American society, it represents the fourteenth generation (Howe & Strauss, 2001).

Non-traditional Student. A college student who is older than the typical age range for college students of 17-24 and who frequently has employment or family responsibilities not experienced by younger, traditional-aged students.

Parent. A biological parent, legal guardian, or other significant parental figure; may include grandparents.

Parental Involvement in Education. Any involvement, support, or influence provided by the parent(s) of a student in his/her educational matters and decisions.

Postsecondary Education. The formal education received after high school; usually referred to as “college,” but may include other formal educational entities.

Residential Student. A college student who lives on or near campus in residential housing such as a residence hall or fraternity/sorority house.

Social Capital. The deliberate process of building social networks to gain access to various resources not previously at one's disposal.

Student Affairs. The community college division that provides support services to students and usually includes admissions, enrollment services, records, counseling, advising, disability services, placement testing, academic tutoring, and may include financial aid, learning resources services, and dual credit.

Student Development. The integration of one's cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional growth that leads to becoming a more complex and mature individual.

Student Services. For the purposes of this research study, the preferred term to Student Affairs, which refers to the departments of the community college that are usually a student's first points of contact and are responsible for support services including admissions and records (or enrollment services), counseling, academic advising, disability services, placement testing, financial aid, student activities, and tutoring.

Traditional Student. A student, usually 17–24 years of age, who typically enrolls in an institution of higher education upon completion of high school.

Summary

Parents expect to be emotionally and financially involved throughout their children's education. Many parents plan and save for their children's college education for years with the realization that an education is a major investment. Combine rising tuition costs across all segments of postsecondary education with increasing concerns

related to campus safety and it is not surprising students and their parents have adopted a consumer approach. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect parental involvement to end on the day of their children's high school graduation. However, postsecondary institutions send mixed messages regarding parents' expected level of involvement. Colleges market their quality of educational programs, reputation, and merchandise to parents. Special orientation programs and weekend events are planned in an effort to welcome and include parents in the collegiate experience of their children. Parental information and signatures are required in both admission and financial aid processes for dependent students aged 17-23 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

At the same time, the rights to one's educational record belong to the student. Therefore, institutions are required by *FERPA* (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99), with some exceptions, to secure permission from a student in order to disseminate information about grades, attendance, and behavior to his/her parents. The communication of this requirement can result in confusion and frustration for parents, particularly if they have served as an advocate or are paying the expenses for their children's education (White, 2005).

The question developed, at what point does involvement become over-involvement? Student services staff are most often the *first points of contact* for both students and their parents. For the purposes of this study, *student services* refers to the departments responsible for the following student support processes and procedures (a) admissions and records, (b) academic advising, (c) counseling, (d) disability services, (e) financial aid, (f) placement testing, (g) student activities, (h) student affairs, and (i) tutoring. Therefore, student services staff from the six institutions selected for this study

were invited to participate in either an on-line survey or a focus group to share impressions and opinions about their interactions with parents. Concurrent with or subsequent to initial contact with student services staff; students (and some of their parents) progress to interacting with student services administrators, such as coordinators, directors, deans, and vice presidents. Therefore, student services administrators were also included as participants. This study examined if impressions of the traditional first points of contact, the staff, are similar to impressions of administrators who may have also experienced an increased level of direct parental interaction.

In the wake of the Virginia Tech slayings, postsecondary institutions across the nation immediately began a review of campus safety and parental notification policies and procedures (Leavitt, Gonzales, & Spellings, 2007). It is not known at this time the full extent to which policy revisions will be made or the extent of subsequent changes which will be made within student affairs departments at both community colleges and four-year institutions. As this study began, it was also unknown how much the Virginia Tech tragedy of April 16, 2007 would alter the responses given by student services staff and administrative participants. Contextually speaking, the reader should keep in mind this study took place at community colleges located in the Commonwealth of Virginia, which all have strong connections to Virginia Tech.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Parental involvement, to the extent of intrusion, has become a concern of those who work in higher education. The headlines in popular media (LeTrent, 2013; Rochman, 2013) and in educational publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Galsky & Shotick, 2012; Levine & Dean, 2012), *The Journal of Higher Education Management* (Mahoney, 2012), and *The Journal of Educational Research* (Schwanz, et al, 2014) have addressed the phenomenon of “helicopter parenting” as it is often now referred. The topic has even been reviewed from the legal perspective in the *Georgia State University Law Review* (Vinson, 2013). The growing research that has been conducted has shown that at senior residential institutions an increased level of parental over-involvement does exist and thus has created a need for colleges and universities to examine policies and best practices for addressing the change. Although there may be general consensus that all types of institutions of higher education will share some similar challenges, other issues may be unique for particular forms of higher education, thus preventing one from generalizing research findings across the spectrum of higher education.

To date there has been almost no research conducted at community colleges to determine if this level of higher education is experiencing problems with parental over-involvement as expressed by colleagues at senior institutions. It is important to recognize community colleges serve approximately 45% of all undergraduate students (AACC, 2014a), including a growing number of traditional-aged students, and thus a lack of

research on community college students represents a large gap in the literature. Before conducting research to determine whether this phenomenon exists at Virginia's non-residential community colleges and what, if any, problems it has created, it will first be necessary to conduct a thorough literature review that examines the history of college parental involvement, the sociological factors that have contributed to the changes in the level of parental involvement, characteristics of today's students, specific characteristics of students in the Virginia Community College System, and the findings of the limited studies that have been conducted at senior institutions regarding parental involvement.

Parental Involvement in Education

Introduction. The notion of parental involvement in education is nothing new. Before the mandate of compulsory education, parents were, and continue to be, the first and often primary educators in the lives of their children (VanFossen, 2005; Whitfield, 2006). Research has repeatedly shown appropriate and supportive parental involvement in the lives of children improves academic success (Jerome, 2006) and consequently educators and legislators bemoan the problems that arise when parents are absent or marginally involved in the education of their school-aged children. The value of parental involvement is so accepted that many scholastic and social programs are developed and funded in an effort to compensate for when parental involvement is lacking or hostile in nature (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Whitfield, 2006). Further evidence of the benefits of parental involvement is its inclusion in federal educational legislation and programs, such as *the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (Pub. L. No. 101-476, 104 Stat. 1142), Title I (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq), and *Head Start* (reauthorization Pub. L. No. 110-

134), where parental involvement is a component of the program mandate (Jerome, 2006; Head Start Act, 1994).

Also indicative of the expectation of, and return to, increased parental involvement in the education process are the increases in the numbers of homeschooled students and students with disabilities. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, the 2007 National Household Education Survey estimated the number of homeschooled children at over 1.5 million – representing almost 3% of the total number of school-aged children (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). In addition, the number of children who are served under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), increased from 10% of the total enrollment of students in 1980-1981 to a peak level of almost 14% of the total enrollment in 2004-2005, but has been slowly dropping each year and was slightly below 13% in 2011-2012 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013a). Still, 13% of the student body represents a significant number of prospective college students, and parents of school-aged children with disabilities are expected to be involved and are expected to serve as their child's primary advocate as evidenced by the inclusion of parental rights in the language of the IDEA legislation (Jerome, 2006; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2011) and in the inclusion of the parents in the development of the child's individual educational plan (IEP). Not only are parents often the driving force in ensuring services for their special needs children, but they also help strengthen the school's programs and services through their involvement (Jerome, 2006) and set a precedent for increased parental involvement.

Federally funded pre-collegiate programs such as Talent Search, Upward Bound (TRIO, 2014), and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness through Undergraduate Preparation / GEAR-UP, (2014) have provided disadvantaged high school students with early intervention opportunities to develop practical skills and cultural exposure necessary for college survival and success (Jerome, 2006). A general consensus among administrators of college preparation programs is that parental involvement plays a vital role in student success and is an integral component of the mission and structure of such pre-collegiate programs (Schwanz, et al, 2014).

While societal and generational changes certainly contribute to attitudinal changes, as will be discussed in depth later in this dissertation, research has shown parental involvement is correlated with positive attributes such as (a) higher grades (Jerome, 2006), (b) lower dropout rates (Schwanz, et al, 2014), (c) increased college aspirations, (Sil, 2007) (d) increased college enrollment (Perna & Titus, 2005), and (e) college persistence (Schwanz, et al, 2014). Parents, educators, agencies, and legislators seem to have heard the message that parental involvement is vital (Sil, 2007).

Higher education and in loco parentis. As the level of parental involvement has changed for many sectors of students at the elementary and secondary levels of education, the level of parental involvement, institutional responsibility, and personal responsibility of students has changed over the years for college-aged students. In his article “The curious life of *in loco parentis* at American universities,” Lee (2011) outlined the historical roots of educational institutions serving “in the place of a parent” and the changes in this practice over the past five decades. Primarily enforced by student affairs divisions for residential college students on college campuses throughout the

nation, the practice of institutions serving in place of parents, dates back to the mid-1800's. The social changes of the 1960's changed the way institutions viewed the student and the role of the department of student affairs. Demonstrations involving civil rights and anti-war concerns resulted in both the empowerment of students as responsible adults and a decrease in parental involvement and institutional responsibility (*Dixon v. Alabama*, 1961). As a result of these societal changes, including lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, a dramatic shift in policy occurred in the 1970's away from *in loco parentis* to supporting student rights and the concept of due process (Lee, 2011).

After a decade of college administrators standing aloof and uninvolved in adult student activities, the 1980s brought more changes as a result of several legal decisions. The courts determined that colleges had a responsibility to take reasonable measures to keep their students safe, whether or not the students were legally adults (Lee, 2011). Today, most colleges follow some form of the "facilitator" model of Bickel & Lake (1999). In this model the institution provides the rules, and consequences for violating the rules, and then allows students the freedom to make choices within the acceptable boundaries established by the rules.

One explanation for the shift, which has profoundly impacted the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, is the closer relationship between the millennial generation and their parents (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Winegard, 2010). Today's parents are very involved and hold specific expectations for institutional responsibilities and parental rights (Vinson, 2013; Wawrzusin, 2012). Ironically, in many cases the students of the late 1960's and 1970's who fervently advocated for more student rights and personal responsibility, are the parents of today's college students who are demanding increased parental rights.

Summary: parental involvement. Research has repeatedly shown appropriate levels of parental involvement correlate positively with numerous measures of academic success such as higher grades, lower dropout rates, higher levels of educational aspirations, and enrollment retention. Recognizing societal trends affect the level of parental involvement in the lives of their college-aged children, current research indicates parents of today's traditional-aged college students have a closer relationship with their children and consequently intend to stay involved in their children's education beyond high school graduation.

The Influences of Sociological Trends on Higher Education

Introduction. Although sociological and economic trends may affect all segments of society, higher education is often affected in an opposite direction than other sectors of American life. For example, when the economy slows down and jobs are scarce, household spending typically slows down. However, enrollment at institutions of higher education, particularly at community colleges, will often increase as students attempt to provide themselves with greater credentials or to obtain new job skills when their jobs have been eliminated (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). College enrollment has also been affected by social and catastrophic events, new technology and the need for subsequent training on its use, changing skills and education for entry level jobs, and preparation for emergent occupations (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Today's typical high school graduate is not prepared with the requisite skills to secure employment that pays a living wage, as may have been possible several generations ago. According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), unemployment decreases and average wages increase as educational attainment increases beyond high school. As a

result, adolescence has been extended. Students remain dependent on their parents for longer periods of time. They remain as dependents for income tax purposes and family insurance policies until the age of 23 if they are enrolled in college, and are eligible or ineligible for financial aid based on their parents' level of income. The cost of college tuition at private and public senior institutions has increased on average 15% and 60% respectively over the 2003 - 2013 decade (NCES, 2013b) making a college education a major investment and thus more likely to be closely monitored by the individuals responsible for the costs (i.e. parents). Safety issues have become a concern for our society in general, but may be especially worrisome for loved ones who are living away from home. Therefore, as a result of various sociological trends, parents are more involved than ever before with their children's education at the post-secondary level.

Extension of adolescence. The United States and other developed nations have experienced an extension of adolescence over the past several decades (Hayford & Furstenburg, 2008; Merriman, 2007; Miller, 2005; Nimon, 2007). In addition to sociological trends and generational attitude differences (an area that will be explored later) and approaches to child rearing, this extension can also be attributed to economic factors such as the necessity to acquire increased levels of training and education beyond secondary education for employment security and stability (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The extension of adolescence and the delay of emerging adulthood have led to increased parental involvement in higher education matters from both the student and institution perspectives (Winegard, 2010). A study by Andrea Wawrzusin (2012) supported previous assertions by Nimon (2007) that millennials have been reared in a

protected, largely competition free environment, and may not have developed the same level of self-reliance as previous generations of students.

Campus safety. Even before recent campus incidents, college administrators and student affairs professionals were addressing ways to improve campus security and reduce the anxiety experienced by parents as their children transitioned from home to college campuses (Sloan & Fisher, 2014). Safety issues such as alcohol related deaths, hazing, and bullying had increased on college campuses which led to increased parental involvement and resulted in greater expectations for institutional accountability and policy changes. However, in the wake of the 2007 Virginia Tech tragedy, where a mentally disturbed student took the lives of 32 individuals (including students, faculty members, and himself), colleges and universities across the nation once again made an even more critical reassessment of their emergency response and communication plans (Redden, 2007). Understandably, parents expressed concern and demanded assurances from institutions from across the nation for answers to questions of how such a tragedy could occur and what was being done to prevent it from happening again (Leavitt, Gonzales, & Spellings, 2007). College administrations joined forces with local law enforcement and mental health agencies to improve safety and security, and implemented new policies and procedures for notification (Young, 2006) and evacuation. Responding to understandable parental concerns for campus safety, while keeping within the legal limitations imposed by federal legislation, has been a fine line for college and university administrators to walk.

FERPA interpretation. Senator James Buckley of New York and Senator Clayborne Pell of Rhode Island, introduced the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy*

Act of 1974, also known as *FERPA* or the Buckley Amendment (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99). Often viewed by today's parents of college students as a major roadblock to fundamental parental rights (Merriman, 2006), Senator Buckley's original purpose for introducing the legislation as noted in the Congressional Record was to provide greater parental access to their children's educational records in elementary and secondary education. He is quoted as saying:

The most fundamental reason for having introduced the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* . . . is, my firm belief in the basic rights and responsibilities and the importance of parents for the welfare and the development of their children. Parents are the first and most important teachers of their children. I introduced the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* not only to correct certain abuses in the schools but also to reassert and re-establish the basic rights, responsibilities, and involvement of parents in their children's upbringing and education [*Congressional Record*, 1975, p. 13991].

The purpose of the federal statute was to ensure an adult student's access to his/her own academic records and to assure the privacy of the information contained within the record (White, 2005). Ironically, the legislation introduced to assure parental rights to educational information of minor children is the same legislation that prohibits parents from accessing their adult children's academic records without the adult child's permission.

Tuition costs and financial aid. The rising cost of tuition has created a consumerist attitude among all constituents of higher education (Chopra, Hughes, & White-Mincarelli, 2011; Sacks, 2010). Colleges and universities acknowledge the

important role parents play not only in a student's college selection, but as an important funding source (Turrentine, et al, 2000). While many students receive need based tuition assistance through the federal or state governments in the form of grants, a report by the National Center for Educational Statistics found one-half (51 %) of all undergraduate students at public four-year institutions, and one-quarter (25%) of students at public two-year institutions, borrowed through loan programs in 2010-11 (NCES, 2012).

Consumerist approach to education. The roots of the idea of higher education as an entitlement can be traced to the case of *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961), which established a student had a constitutional right to due process and thus shifted the focus of institutional relationships from the parent to the with a rapidly growing amount of state and federal regulatory requirements placed on colleges to inform and protect students (Lake, 2013). There has also been a growing trend and shift toward consumerism in education from students and their parents (Wilkins, 2011). This trend can, in part, be attributed to increased tuition costs making a college education a major financial investment. In addition, the growing number of students and their families who expect value for their investment, coupled with their sense of entitlement to higher education, contribute to the consumerist approach to education. As a result, a college education is no longer considered by much of the public to be a privilege and an honor but, rather, a necessity (Szymanski & Wells, 2013).

With tuition costs becoming a major financial investment, many students must rely on financial aid in order to afford a college education. It is reasonable to assume parents expect value for their financial investment and higher education serves as a means to an end as evidenced by the research of the Pew Research Center (2014) on a

nationally representative survey of over 2000 adults. “On virtually every measure of economic well-being and career attainment—from personal earnings to job satisfaction to the share employed full time—young college graduates are outperforming their peers with less education” (2014, p. 3). Over 85% of the millenials who participated in the Pew study said that paying for their college degree was worth it, even if they had to borrow money in order to earn the degree.

Summary: increased parental involvement. Whether the investment is financial or emotional, most investors expect to be informed about, if not in control of, their assets. Researchers have shown that parents of today’s traditional-aged college students expect to play a role in many of the decisions surrounding their children’s college education particularly if they are financially responsible for this major investment. The extension of adolescence in the United States of America (and other economically developed countries), paired with recent tragic incidents of campus violence, has given more credence and understanding to increased parental involvement. In short, sociological changes have affected the degree to which, and under what conditions, college students are considered to be independent adults. Therefore, parents will continue to be involved in the education of their college-age children until the students are considered to be independent adults.

Characteristics of Today’s Student and Their Families

Introduction. Developing a characterization of today’s college student is a difficult task, given the fact they represent, and are reflective of, an increasingly diverse American society with a growing percentage of minority students, from 34% in 2007-2008 to over 40% in 2012-2013 (NCES, 2013c). College students may be (a) traditionally-aged 17–23, (b) dual-enrolled high school juniors or seniors aged 16–18, (c)

working young or middle-aged adults, (d) single parents, (e) senior citizens, (f) international, (g) English language learners, (h) ethnically and racially diverse, (i) returning veterans, (j) first-generation, (k) second-generation, (l) disabled, (m) distance learners, (n) academically challenged, (o) academically advanced, (p) economically disadvantaged, (q) economically advantaged, (r) home-schooled, (s) part-time, (t) full-time, or (u) various combinations of the factors listed. This diversity is particularly evident in community colleges (AACC, 2014a). In as much as college campuses are increasingly more diverse, so too are the families of today (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Even though the family compositions of traditional-aged students may be highly variable, there are distinct characteristics of this generation that distinguish these students and their families from previous generations and help to explain the increased level of parental involvement in higher education today.

Generational differences. Generational theory is based on the idea that people with common birth years will share common beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors shaped by the social events of their time period and these commonalities form the personality of that generation (Nimon, 2007; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generations are approximately 20 years in length and are often named for a significant event or impact made in society. Howe and Strauss (2003) identify the generations of the 20th and 21st century as (a) the *G.I. Generation*, born 1901–1924; who came of age during World War II, (b) the *Silent Generation*, born 1925–1942; who came of age following WWII, (c) the *Boom Generation*, born 1943–1960, named for the tremendous “baby boom” following WWII, (d) *Generation X*, born 1961–1981, considered nameless and lacking a single unifying

description, and (e) the *Millennial Generation*, born since 1982 and coming of age in the new millennium.

According to Coomes and DeBard (2004), each generation seeks to form an identity and thus tends to share attitudes not with the preceding or succeeding generation, but with three generations prior. Therefore, as expected, today's traditional-aged student respects authority and wants additional parental involvement (Golonka, 2013), in keeping with the conventional attitudes of the Silent Generation. Other characteristics shared by the millennial and silent generations include a service and community orientation, a preference for structured environments, and a hopeful and optimistic outlook toward life (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Moore, n.d.).

Characteristics of the millennial generation. Today's traditional-aged student is part of the millennial generation, those born between 1982 and 2002, and represents the largest generation in United States history. Neil Howe and William Strauss, arguably the most often cited writers on the millennial generation; suggest seven distinguishing traits that describe this generation as outlined in Table 2. Millennials are also the most affluent, most educated, and most diverse (36% non-white) generation and describe themselves as optimistic team-players and rule followers (Howe & Strauss, 2000; DeBard, 2004).

Taylor (2005), however, took issue with many of the millennial generation characteristics as described by Howe and Strauss. He referred to this generation as *Generation NeXt* and noted less positive attributes of today's traditional-aged college student resulted in challenges to student affairs and faculty members at postsecondary institutions. Rather than high achieving and respectful, Taylor's research suggested just the opposite. He maintained, as a group, Generation NeXt is the most disengaged and

least studious generation ever whose members seriously lack critical-thinking, problem-solving, and long-term planning skills. The lack of requisite developmental skills was most evident in students who attended less selective or open-admissions institutions such as community colleges and may have been a result of excessive parental involvement (Taylor, 2005). Taylor did, however, concur with Howe and Strauss that the millennial generation is closer to their parents, adaptable to change, more diverse, and technologically advanced.

Table 2

Millennial Generation Traits

Trait	Explanation
Special	From “precious-baby movies” to effusive rhetoric.
Sheltered	Explosions of child safety rules and devices.
Confident	High levels of optimism. Often boasts of power and potential.
Team-oriented	New emphasis on group learning, tight peer bonds.
Achieving	Accountability rising. Best-educated and best-behaved.
Pressured	Pushed to study hard, take advantage of opportunities.
Conventional	Takes pride in behavior. Comfortable with parents’ values.

Source: Howe & Strauss, 2000.

A generation connected. With the explosive advances in technology, it is not surprising the millennial generation is more savvy and comfortable with technology than their parents (Nimon, 2007; Whitfield, 2006). The ability to maintain an immediate and constant level of communication through electronic devices has contributed to increased parental involvement in the lives of college students compared to previous generations

(Rainey, 2006; Somers, 2007). Baby boomers and early GenXers did not have cell phone and email technology available to them when they were in college and thus the communication between parents and students in the 1970's and 1980's was less frequent and often initiated by the student.

According to Miller (2005) and Young (2006), the cell phone is considered to be a major contributor to the increased level of parental involvement. The accessibility and prevalence of cell phones and group plans allow for virtually constant communication. The defining millennial generational characteristic of “connection” is present in other countries such as Australia and Great Britain as well as the United States (Nimon, 2007).

In a survey conducted by the College Parents of America (2007), 72% of parents indicated they communicate with their children at least twice a week with 31% of that number communicating on a daily basis. Not only are 60% of millennial students comfortable with the current level of increased parental involvement, but 28% indicated a desire for more parental involvement (College Parents of America, 2007; Hesel & Bartini, 2007; Whitfield, 2006).

Characteristics of today's parents and family. Parents of today's traditional-aged college students are either Baby Boomers or early GenXers. The changing definition of today's family has become multifaceted and includes much more than the “nuclear family” such as single-parent, step, multigenerational, and two-parent (Phillips, 2012). College students are increasingly more diverse (NCES, 2013c), and so too are their families (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). As a result, it is reasonable for institutions to consider a broader interpretation when referring to “parental involvement.” Although many families today are blended, students have fewer biological siblings than in previous

generations, which in turn may allow parents the opportunity to devote more time per child thus leading to overall increased parental involvement (Moore, n.d.).

Roles of parents and family. The range of findings, perhaps explained by each researcher's definition of involvement, create contradictory expectations of the role parents and other family members should play in the lives of college students. The influences of parents, other family members, and mentoring role models have major implications, both positive and negative, in the adjustment (Carter, 2006), academic achievement (Fan, 2001; Lipka, 2005; Pagliarulo, 2004), and overall psychological development of students (Ratelle et al., 2005). For example, family environments that are perceived as involved and autonomy supportive, can predict perseverance in college science programs (Ratelle et al.). According to Fan (2001), when using a global indicator such as grade point average (GPA), a stronger relationship exists between parental aspirations/expectations and academic achievement than exists between parental supervision and academic achievement.

Even in families where the parents are personally unfamiliar with the college experience, Pagliarulo (2004) found parental involvement to be a strong predictor of educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students. On the other hand, student affairs and other college professionals have expressed concern over increased parental involvement as it relates to student development (Somers, 2007; VanFossen, 2005; Wills, 2005). The assumption is as parental involvement increases, student involvement decreases. Consequently, development of problem solving skills and independence decreases as parental involvement increases (Merriman, 2006).

In contrast, Carter (2006) found not all college students benefit from independence from their parents. Maintaining closeness to parents may be beneficial for low-income students and those from non-intact families. Carter stated emotional closeness to parents is not detrimental to student adjustment to college, although conflict with parents in general, and specifically over decision-making regarding academic issues, may hinder college student adjustment.

The concept of parental control, which typically refers to the intrusion into an adolescent's emotional and psychological development, is predictive of adolescent problems such as depression and delinquency (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013). The research of Padilla-Walker & Nelson (2012) supported previous studies of Barber (1996), and Melby and Conger (1996) which showed parental involvement in the form of psychological control was a major predictor of academic failure during the first two college semesters even after individual differences in high school success had been controlled. Psychological control refers to parental interference in children's psychological and emotional development usually manifested through parents' use of guilt and emotional manipulation to control their children's behavior (Barber).

Other concerns expressed by college personnel include the unfairness that can exist when controlling and overly involved parents place demands on the institution for special dispensation for their children. Parents who have enjoyed a high level of influence in their children's primary and secondary schools are likely to expect a stronger level of involvement in the post-secondary lives of their children (Sil, 2007). This may be especially so when students remain in the community and attend community colleges

(Carney, 2004); whether to earn a terminal degree or as a starting point for transferring to a four-year institution.

Building on the social capital theory of Coleman (1988), Sil (2007) argued that powerful parental groups, who enjoy strong social capital, can actually cause schools to make decisions that benefit neither the school as a whole nor the other students whose parents do not share the same level of influence. However, according to Perna and Titus (2005), college preparation programs that effectively and appropriately involve parents help raise social capital for minority and ethnic groups such as African-American and Hispanic students. By involving all parents, rather than only those who are accustomed to expending social capital, essentially creates a more level playing field for all students.

Impact of parental involvement. A vast amount of research supports the correlation between increased parental support and academic achievement for elementary and high school students (Jeynes, 2012). In addition, Harper, Sax, & Wolf's research (2012) showed this relationship held true regardless of racial or ethnic background. Data which indicate greater student achievement provides support for school systems to encourage increased parental involvement at the compulsory levels.

Much less empirical research, however, exists that examines the relationship between increased parental involvement and student academic achievement at the post-secondary level. Young (2006) and Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, and Ward-Roof (2000), operating on the assumption that parents would continue involvement in their children's college education, investigated parental expectations in an effort to establish ways to strengthen relationships between parents and the institutions. Turrentine, et al (2000) found that parents in both years of their study reported high priority for the goals of

quality education, job preparation, maturity/independence, fun/enjoyment, graduation, academic success, and friendships/networks. Young (2006) found that parents had higher expectations of faculty in “caring functions” than “teaching functions” indicating a need to revise the type of information disseminated at parent orientation programs such as the legal limitations of communication, how a student will be taught, the role and responsibilities of faculty, and the changing role that parents will assume as their student begins a new developmental stage.

Canadian researchers, Ratelle, Larose, Guay, & Senecal, (2005), studied parental involvement with respect to college students enrolled in science curricula, an area of study that has had a 30-40% attrition rate in both the United States and Canada. Their findings indicated that when parental involvement supports autonomy and psychological development, academic success and one’s persistence in science and technology majors is increased (Ratelle, et al, 2005). Although the interactions between today’s traditional-aged students and their parents may seem different to today’s college administrators, according to Miller (2005), parents expect to have less influence over their students in college than they did in high school, indicating an expectation that the years following high school are a time for increased autonomy and independence to develop. She further stated, however, that mothers expect the interactions with their children will be more meaningful when their children are in college than when they were in high school.

Summary: Changing characteristics. Today’s college student body is highly diverse, both in its demographic and family compositions. In addition, some of the generational differences illustrate how today’s millennial generation share the characteristics of conventionality and respect for authority figures with the Silent

Generation who came of age after World War II. Some differences, though, lie in the extension of adolescence for the millennial generation (Merriman, 2007), the need for additional education beyond high school in order to compete for well-paying jobs (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), the explosion of technology advancement, and the subsequent ability to stay in virtually constant contact with parents or friends (Golonka, 2013).

The influences of parents, other family members, and mentoring role models have major implications, both positive and negative, in the adjustment, academic achievement, and overall psychological development of students. When parental involvement is supportive, students are able to achieve and persist academically as well as develop autonomy and confidence. In contrast, when parental involvement is controlling, students are more likely to fail and less likely to persist (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

Research is mixed where the expectation of parental involvement is concerned. Studies show both an increase in and desire for parental involvement throughout their student's college experience, but also show that parents expect to be less influential in the lives of their college aged students. In families of first-generation college students whose parents are personally unfamiliar with the college experience, parental involvement has been shown to be a strong predictor of educational aspirations and attainment. Regardless of the positive attributes of parental involvement, student affairs and other college professionals have expressed concern over increased parental involvement and its potential harm toward student development and the unfairness that can exist when controlling and overly involved parents place demands on the institution on behalf of their children. It is anticipated that parents who have enjoyed and used a high level of

social capital for their child's benefit in K-12 education will expect to impose their influence at the post-secondary level (Savage, 2009).

Creation of Helicopter Parents

Introduction. When compared with their own childhoods, the parenting styles of Boomer and GenX parents indicate increased parental involvement in all aspects of their millennial children's lives (DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Somers, 2007; Young, 2006). The parents of today's college students interact with student affairs staff, senior administrators, and faculty members much more frequently and for different reasons than did parents in previous generations (Keppler, Mullendore, & Carey, 2005). Some of the reasons parents contact college officials include curriculum changes, registration, grade notification or changes, behavioral updates, admission denials, complaints, and financial aid or other tuition matters. This trend has implications for student affairs departments and their policies as will be discussed later in this dissertation.

While parental support is generally accepted to contribute positively to a child's overall growth and development (Phillips, 2012), the perception of increasing parental over-involvement, as expressed by other authors in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Rainey, 2006; White, 2005; Wills, 2005) and scholarly journals, has addressed the increased level of parental involvement in higher education and the concerns that have arisen as a result (Merriman, 2006; Somers, 2007; Young, 2006). Stories of parents who attempt to (a) bribe officials to assure their child's college admittance (Sanoff, 2006), (b) complete their child's application essay and threaten a lawsuit if the child is not admitted (Jacobson, 2003), (c) register their child for classes, or (d) speak with counselors and other college personnel rather than allow the student to handle these important tasks

(Somers 2007; Wills, 2005) are a few of the over-involvement behaviors that have raised concern among college professionals. Parents who exhibit excessive behaviors have been labeled *helicopter parents*. Very little actual research has been conducted on this phenomenon. However, the term has had such an impact in the popular media that one organization, College Parents of America, was formed to present clarification, balance, and justification of parental involvement.

Helicopter parents: A negative connotation. The first reported use of the term “helicopter parent” is credited to Ned Zeman in an article entitled *Buzzword* for Newsweek on September 9, 1991 and referred to: “...A nosy grown-up who's always hovering around. ..Quick to offer a teacher unwanted help,” (Word Spy, 2003). As the millennial generation has aged, the negative connotation of over-involved parents expressed by elementary and secondary teachers is now expressed by those in higher education. The introduction of the term helicopter parent has since entered the vernacular of researchers and reporters alike. Researchers give the more current definition of a helicopter parent as a person who stays extremely connected to his/her children often to the point of intrusion on college campuses (Hoover, 2008; Bauer, K. W., 2005), although there is lack of a clear, accepted definition of the term in the research literature (Wawrzusin, 2012).

In an article for USA Today (April 2007) entitled “Helicopter Parents Cross All Age, Social Lines,” reporter Sharon Jayson referenced what she believed to be the first scholarly research addressing parental over-involvement, conducted by Patricia Somers at the University of Texas-Austin. According to Somers (2007), “...helicoptering is not an exclusively middle- and upper-class phenomenon, as many assume. All income levels are

represented to some extent, as well as both genders and every race and ethnicity.” Somers found that behaviors did differ somewhat between mothers and fathers indicating that 60% of helicoptering behaviors were mothers who were hyper-involved in their son’s social, academic, and domestic life. Specific behaviors included posing as the student, using passwords to register, checking grades, and asking for roommate reassignments after accessing information on other students through social on-line networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler, and Instagram. Somers found that fathers, on the other hand, were more likely to invoke imagined or real personal power and authority or to use threats to handle problems such as bad grades, financial aid issues, or to demand disclosure of private information because they were paying the child’s tuition.

Further literature review revealed that the dissertation research completed in 2006 by Lynette Merriman, may actually have been the first to blaze the trail for scholarly research on the topic of parental over-involvement as she also studied the increase in parental involvement at research universities and the practical ways in which student affairs departments and college administrators could deal with concerns. Merriman’s research also supported the same concerns expressed by other college administrators who worry about the direction of student affairs if parental issues continue to increase.

Related research also conducted in 2006 by W. Wayne Young, who studied parental expectations of collegiate “teaching” and “caring” at a private, comprehensive, religiously affiliated university, addressed the phenomenon of helicopter parents from a different perspective. He acknowledged the concern of student affairs staff that students were arriving on college campuses sheltered by their parents and ill equipped with adequate problem-solving and coping skills, but also acknowledged that the millennial

generation and their parents enjoy a different and closer relationship than previous generations. Young (2006) maintained that colleges and universities should seek to understand what the expectations are that parents have of postsecondary institutions and how they can work together with the university; and thus studied which parents thought was more important, the “teaching” or “caring” functions of the institution. His research, conducted at Creighton University, found that parents placed a higher importance on the “caring” rather than the “teaching” functions of the university. At the least, the virtually simultaneous recent research conducted only at senior public and private institutions, illustrates why the need exists to explore this new phenomenon in other types of higher education institutions, such as community colleges, and the ways that student affairs and academic departments may need to address this phenomenon.

College Parents of America. In 2003, James A. Boyle founded College Parents of America, a national lobbying group whose membership consists of parents, colleges and universities, and school systems. The organization’s mission is to provide parents with higher education information, resources, and legislative advocacy at the federal and state levels of government and to advocate for, and serve on behalf of, present and future college parents. In 2006, College Parents of America conducted its first survey of “Current College Parent Experiences.” Responses were received from parents residing in 49 states and the District of Columbia with the vast majority of the students identified as either freshmen or sophomores. Results of the research indicated that in comparison to the level of involvement/communication during their own college years, 84% of parents surveyed were “more” or “much more” involved with their children than their parents were with them. The obvious limitation of this question is that the students represented

by this question are not first-generation college students, and thus, it cannot be generalized from this question that parents who have not attended college are more/less involved in their children's education.

It should be noted the survey indicated only 3% of students represented by the College Parents of America membership were currently attending a public two year institution, yet 45% of all U. S. undergraduates attend community colleges and nearly one-third are age 21 or younger (AACC, 2014a). Therefore, the parents of community college students may not share the same views and attitudes as the members of the College Parents of America providing further evidence that community colleges should be studied.

Summary: concerns regarding parental over-involvement. Concerns that have been raised by student affairs personnel have been supported by research conducted at senior institutions. According to the literature, parental over-involvement has increased at senior institutions and crosses all demographics. The increased level of parental involvement has risen to the point of national organization and lobbying on the part of parents and the recognition by many colleges and universities of the importance of parents as stakeholders.

Although the research has been conducted primarily at senior institutions (Merriman, 2006; Somers 2007; Young, 2006), one cannot assume that parents of traditional-aged students attending two year community colleges, an area of higher education that represents diverse demographics (AACC, 2014a), will not be involved or even overly-involved in their children's education as well. Regardless of the researcher's perspective, a shift in parental involvement has been shown to exist with the millennial

generation. The question will be whether this only affects those who attend residential colleges and universities, or if this also true for community colleges.

Relationship Between Parental Involvement and Student Development Theory

Introduction. Parental involvement has been shown to influence all aspects of a child's development (Jeynes, 2012). As one might expect, parental involvement and its effects do not end when the child graduates from high school. For example, parental aspirations have a positive effect on student academic growth (Fan 2001). Although parental involvement was found to be the strongest predictor of student educational attainment for non-first generation students, parental involvement was not the strongest predictor for first generation students (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pagliarulo, 2004). While students perceived substantial parental involvement during their first year of college, they also appreciated a balance between independence/freedom and parental involvement (VanFossen, 2005).

It appears that the *level* of parental involvement, either too much or too little, which may have a positive or negative effect on the individual's development or maturation is at the root of concern expressed by student affairs personnel (White, 2005). The two primary concerns of parental over-involvement expressed by student affairs practitioners and college administrators are (a) the legal ramifications associated with the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* of 1974 (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99), also known as *FERPA* guidelines (White, 2005) when parents demand the disclosure of student academic records and (b) the student's inability to develop autonomy, although there is not much research to support this at the college level (Savage, 2009). At the foundation of good practices within student affairs departments throughout college

campuses, is the fundamental belief in education and development of the whole person (American College Personnel Association, 2008) and as such it is pertinent to review theories of development relative to emerging adulthood and college aged students.

Psychosocial development. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1950), an expansion of Freud's psychosexual development theory (Freud & Brill, 1938) stated that the demands of society promote personality, attitude, and skill development that help individuals to become contributing members of society. Each of Erikson's eight stages of development presented a basic psychological conflict which the individual must resolve, along a continuum from positive to negative, before progressing to the next developmental stage. Failure to deal positively with conflict at one stage will influence one's ability to handle the conflict at the next stage of development (Erikson, 1950).

At the time Erikson (1950) originally published his theory, adolescence ended at age 18 and young adults were ready to enter the workforce, military, marriage, or in some cases continue their education. Over the years, societal and workforce changes have expanded the present stage of adolescence well beyond the legal age of 18 years, however, there is no definitive age at which adolescence officially ends. The lack of consistency contributes to mixed messages for parents. For example, the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (U. S. Department of Education, 2013) classifies students up to the age of 21 as "children." College admission and financial aid applications require parental information for domicile verification on dependent students under the age of 24 (U. S. Department of Education, 2013). Therefore, adolescence is now considered to extend to approximately age 25 (Arnett, 2004; Merriman, 2006). This change has created legitimate challenges and concerns for

college student affairs professionals who now work with students in two of Erikson's stages of development and conflict resolution: *Adolescence* (identity vs. identity diffusion) and *Young Adulthood* (intimacy vs. isolation).

According to Erikson (1950) the conflict of adolescence asks two questions (a) *Who am I?* and (b) *What is my place in society?* Student affairs professionals have expressed concern that parental over-involvement will prevent students from effectively developing (a) an identity, (b) competence in their ability to work and cooperate with others, (c) problem solving skills, and (d) decision making ability (Merriman, 2006; Somers, 2007). Building on Erikson's theory of conflict resolution, Chickering (1969) introduced his theory of identity development after studying undergraduate students in 13 small colleges. His theory stated that the development of identity is *the* central developmental issue during the traditional college years; the stage of development with which student affairs departments are most often concerned.

Chickering and colleague Reisser (1993), proposed seven *Vectors of Development*, perhaps the most widely known and applied psychosocial theory of development. Their theory stated that students move through the *vectors* at different rates; individuals may progress through several vectors simultaneously, progression through vectors is not linear, and students can often find themselves re-visiting vectors through which they had previously worked. The seven vectors are (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Reisser subsequently revisited and updated the seven vectors to include additional

information related to student ethnic background and sexual orientation (1995). A more recent study confirmed the non-sequential progression students make through the seven vectors, but also showed that gender differences existed. Female students developed more mature interpersonal relationships and tolerance of others than did male students (Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, & Barnes, 2005).

Intellectual and ethical development. William Perry's study of Harvard and Radcliffe college students of the 1950's and 1960's is still regarded by student affairs professionals as the seminal study illustrating the role higher education plays in a student's intellectual and ethical development (Perry, 1968/1970). *Perry's Scheme* represents a continuum of nine positions divided into four levels. Students are expected to move through the levels of (a) dualism, (b) multiplicity, and (c) relativism to (d) commitment in relativism (King, 2003; Perry, 1968/1970). Intellectual and ethical development is constructed as the individual moves from a polar interpretation of the world involving an authority figure who possesses the right/wrong answers to questions; to relative value interpretations and levels of uncertainty with respect to authority figures having all of the answers; to one's ability to make critical judgments based on evidence and debate; and finally to develop the ability to test, evaluate, and commit to a personal set of values, lifestyle, and identity (King, 2003).

Moral development. Kohlberg's (1972) theory of moral development centers around the concept of justice, which he defines as the "...primary regard for the value and equality of all human beings, and for reciprocity in human relations" (p. 14). According to Evans' (2003) interpretation of Kohlberg, the ability to appreciate another person's point of view is necessary, but insufficient to the development of moral

reasoning. It is only after opportunities to confront and resolve the conflict when one's current way of thinking is disrupted that true development occurs. Gibbs (2013) maintains that the reversibility of the Golden Rule (don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you, or the ability to put one's self into another's position) is the objective basis of morality.

Summary: A Fine Line between Involvement and Over-Involvement

Based on the literature, it is the *level* and *type* of parental involvement, and not involvement per se, that determines whether an individual student's development and maturation will be positively or negatively affected. The level of involvement may also be the fine line that determines when parental involvement becomes over-involvement. Aside from the legal ramifications associated with *FERPA* guidelines, student affairs professionals have expressed concern that parental over-involvement will prevent students from effectively developing: (a) an identity, (b) competence in their ability to work and cooperate with others, (c) problem solving skills, and (d) decision making ability. Therefore, to understand the concerns of student affairs practitioners as they relate to traditional-aged college students, it is pertinent to review the theories of psychosocial, intellectual, ethical and moral development associated with the ages of emerging adulthood.

At the cornerstone of student development theory, and, from which many other theories grew, was Erikson's theory of development, which stated that an individual must resolve, either positively or negatively, a basic psychological conflict before progressing to the next developmental stage. Failure to deal positively with conflict at one stage will influence one's ability to handle the conflict at the next stage of development. Emerging

adulthood which begins with the stage of Adolescence (identity vs. identity diffusion) asks the questions (a) *Who am I?* and (b) *What is my place in society?*

Chickering stated that the development of identity is *the* central developmental issue during the traditional college years. Schlossberg's (1989) constructs of *marginality* vs. *maturing* built on the development of identity and stated that students who are unable to resolve the conflict between maturing and marginality are less responsive to learning, become preoccupied with belonging, and are more likely to drop out of the institution. Perry's theory of intellectual and ethical development stated that an individual moves from (a) a polar interpretation of the world involving an authority figure who possesses the right/wrong answers to questions; to (b) the ability to develop relative value interpretations and levels of uncertainty with respect to authority figures having all of the answers; to (c) the ability to make critical judgments based on evidence and debate; and finally to (d) the ability to test, evaluate, and commit to a personal set of values, lifestyle, and identity. Kohlberg's theory of the development of moral reasoning stated that while the ability to appreciate another person's point of view is necessary, this will only develop *after* one is able to confront and resolve the conflict when one's current way of thinking is questioned.

Higher Education Challenges from the Community College Perspective

Introduction. All segments of higher education face similar challenges and criticisms in general such as the demand for access, administration, accountability, governance, knowledge creation and development, the academic profession, private resources and public responsibility, diversification and stratification, economic disparities, globalization, and internationalization (Altbach, 2011). Community colleges,

in fulfilling a broader mission of open access, have the additional challenges associated with attempting to be all things to all people (Altbach, 2011).

Funding. Although educational challenges vary depending on current world events, sociological/economic trends, and regional/cultural attitudes; some issues have remained constant over several decades. For the past 50 years, funding has remained the number one concern and challenge across all segments of higher education, with state funding dropping steadily since 1988 (Tandberg, 2010; Trostel, 2010). The issue of funding has always been, and will continue to be, a concern for community colleges (Tschechtelin, 2011). All segments of higher education, particularly community colleges, have in many ways adopted the “business” rather than the “medical” model in its philosophy and relationships with constituents (Gumport, 2001). Community colleges have adopted this approach in part as a natural outgrowth of their mission to collaborate with the communities they serve and partially out of necessity to enlist economic assistance from the business community in an attempt to compensate for the perennial lack of state funding. State funding is critical to community colleges and is the source for the majority of their operating budget (Hendrick, Hightower, & Gregory, 2011). As a result, students, as well as the business community with whom community colleges often partner in workforce development ventures, are often referred to as “customers.” Their opinions and preferences contribute to program offerings, course delivery methods, expansion efforts, policies and business practices.

As the cost of a college education is considered a major financial investment, both by the individual and by the government (Trostel, 2010), community colleges are quick to distinguish themselves to students and parents as the most affordable form of

postsecondary education; available at roughly one-third the cost of tuition at a public senior institution (AACC, 2014; VCCS, 2014). Even so, 58% of community college students receive some type of financial aid to offset their educational expenses (AACC, 2014a). While lower tuition rates may have contributed to an enrollment increase of almost 7% headcount and 14% FTES throughout the VCCS (2013c) over the past four years, Virginia's higher education funding, particularly for community colleges, continues to fall short of base budget adequacy (Hix, 2007). This growing disparity between increasing enrollment and decreasing state funding necessitates the need for greater community financial involvement (Hendrick, et al., 2011) of which parents are a part.

The Role of Community Colleges in Higher Education

Although community colleges have been around for the past 100 years, the majority of community colleges across the nation were established in the 1960's and 1970's (AACC, 2014b). The growth and expansion of community colleges during this time were a direct result of the "boomer" generation reaching college age and the inability of four year institutions to accommodate the rising enrollment; attributable in part to male students seeking to avoid the military draft by securing student deferment status (Card & Lemieux, 2001).

It was in 1967 that the first colleges, of what would become the VCCS comprised of 23 institutions, opened their doors to students. Historically the nation was involved in the Viet Nam War, was in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, and was experiencing the beginning of the feminist movement (AACC, 2001). While the first students to enroll at community colleges in the VCCS were predominately traditional-aged, white males

preparing for transfer to four-year institutions in the areas of engineering and other technical programs, the past 50 years have seen a remarkable shift and expansion in the characteristics of VCCS students and the programs they offer.

Until recent years, the “typical” community college student has been enrolled part-time, and is a non-traditional, age 29, first-generation, female, who is employed part-time. Students were and remain, diverse in their goals, abilities, ambitions, backgrounds, ethnicity, level of preparedness, and financial security. However, the one overwhelming similarity among community college students, and of which much research has focused, has been the predominance of those students who are first-generation (Pascarella, et al, 2004) and the challenges that arise as a result of this characteristic (Nomi, 2005).

The most current definition of first-generation college student is one whose parents did not attend college and earn a bachelor’s degree, (Hirudayaraj, 2011; Stebelton & Soria, 2012) and therefore are unable to provide guidance on college procedures based on personal experience. One noted limitation of the research of first-generation students is the restrictive definition of first-generation to include only the parents’ level of education without considering the educational attainment of siblings or other family members. Research has shown that first-generation students feel less supported and encouraged by parents to attend college (Pascarella, et al, 2004), and that one’s social and intellectual experience may be less important to parents than the need for their children’s career preparedness (Pagliarulo, 2004). First-generation students are also less academically prepared (Pascarella et al., 2004) and less likely to seek assistance from faculty advisors or counselors (Stebelton & Soria, 2012).

Although one's lack of first-hand experience does not imply an inability or unwillingness to be supportive, it does limit the type of support that can be provided to students (Pascarella, et al, 2004). Aware of this limitation, student affairs practitioners have, in many instances, provided the sole support in navigating students through college processes and procedures.

One example that illustrates this awareness of the need for student support is the student development course that is currently required by VCCS policy in most programs of study within the Virginia Community College System (2014d). Over the years, the name, grading method, departmental assignment, and significance of this course has changed from the one-credit *College Orientation* (graded on a pass/fail basis), to the current one-credit *College Success Skills* (graded on a standard academic scale) which is almost exclusively taught by student services counselors. Other two- and three-credit student development courses have been established to assist students with remedial needs, and for program specific support. The greater emphasis on addressing student development needs within the requirements of an academic program is indicative of the institutional commitment to provide support and guidance. Research has shown that especially for at-risk students (including minority, disabled, non-native speakers of English, academically under-prepared, as well as first-generation students), personal support and skills development are crucial to the success and retention of college students (Pascarella et al, 2004; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). As reported in a Student Success Snapshot, research conducted through the VCCS revealed a 21% increased retention rate from fall 2007 to spring 2008 semester and from fall 2007 to fall 2008 for those students who enrolled in the student development course in their first term (VCCS, 2009).

Over the years, student affairs departments have been mindful of the vast research reports that demonstrate the need for support to strengthen a student's chances for success (Tinto & Pusser, 2006; Pascarella et al, 2004). Student services and programs such as *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* (2014) and *Student Support Services* (Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), as amended, Title IV, Part A, Subpart 2, Chapter I, § 402D; 20 U.S.C. 1070a-14), are often provided specifically with at-risk college students in mind, and middle and high school programs such as GEAR UP and Upward Bound target at-risk youth in providing college information and exploration opportunities.

While the need to provide support for first-generation and other at-risk students is likely to continue at community colleges, the trend of student affairs practitioners providing the sole support for navigation through the waters of new student voyages is changing. In contrast to the research of Terenzini, et al (1996), Carl Bauer (2005) found that even in cases of first-generation students, parents and other family members play a trusted and supportive role for many students who attend college. According to Bauer, many students choose to attend a community college based on encouragement and support from family members even if there is little first-hand knowledge of the college experience. He further stated that in many cases, high school educators explicitly discouraged students from pursuing higher education at all. Bauer's findings drew the conclusion that students may need the support of their parents to overcome feelings of academic inadequacy. As a result, college student affairs and administrative personnel need to be sensitive to parental involvement as rapport and trust is established with new

students due to an initial lack of trust that may exist based on the student's and parent's previous experience with high school personnel in similar positions.

According to Bers and Galowich (2002), parents expect to not only be involved with their child's decision to attend a community college, but also in the advising and registration processes. This increased parental involvement demonstrates a change from previous research conducted by Smith and Bers (1989). More current research by Somers, Haines & Keene (2006) found that second to reduced tuition costs, parents indicated that an interest in continued involvement in their child's postsecondary education experience was a primary reason why they suggested community college enrollment to their children. This shift in parental involvement, which contributes to the challenges and opportunities for community college personnel, will be identified and addressed in this research.

Community responsiveness and expanding mission. The broad mission of community colleges has evolved to reflect a greater commitment to diversity in demographics and offerings. Community colleges have faced criticism in attempting to be all things to all people (Altbach, 2011); an impossible task during a period of diminishing resources (Hendrick, Hightower, & Gregory, 2011). In the VCCS, more recent emphasis has been placed on attracting and serving traditional-aged students (Kraus, 2008).

Educational costs. Although community college educational costs have risen in the past decade and include tuition, fees, laboratory/uniform costs, and books, community colleges and the state and local governing bodies who determine funding allocations are mindful of the core mission of open access. Regardless of the funding sources and

challenges, community colleges strive to keep the cost of attendance at a reasonable level. According to the AACC (2014), the annual average cost of tuition and fees at public community colleges is \$3,260 as compared to \$8,890 at 4-year public institutions. The cost of attending community colleges in Virginia is approximately one third of the cost of tuition at public senior institutions not including the added residential costs associated with most senior institutions (VCCS, 2014a).

In the VCCS, tuition costs have seen modest, predictable increases, comparable to the national average. In 2013-2014, in-state tuition and mandatory fees for the VCCS were \$3,578, representing approximately one-third the average cost of \$9,534 for tuition and fees at Virginia's public senior institutions (VCCS, 2014a). The disparity of tuition costs between community colleges and senior institutions in Virginia and elsewhere has contributed to the increase in enrollment of all community college students.

Financial aid. Community colleges are particularly concerned about the affordability of tuition and the financial burden that a student can accumulate over the course of one's education. The percentage of students who may actually qualify for, but do not receive financial aid due to lack of procedural information and institutional support regarding financial aid processes is unknown, however, approximately 58% of all community college students do receive some form of financial aid (AACC, 2014a). Students who attend VCCS colleges are encouraged to apply for financial aid using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. Using a standardized formula, grant awards are determined by the student's financial need based on his or her income or the income of parents if the student is still a dependent.

According to VCCS (2013b) statistics, approximately 35% of VCCS students received some type of financial aid in 2011-2012. It should be noted, however, that students who are eligible for financial aid must be in the process of pursuing a program of study. Therefore, non-curricular, dual-credit, and concurrent students are ineligible for financial aid and thus are unrepresented in these figures. Financial aid awards are based on students enrolled in at least six credit hours for half-time enrollment. Traditional-aged, dependent students typically must have full-time enrollment status in order to remain on their parents' insurance policies and consequently, make up a higher percentage of full-time equivalent students.

Academic preparedness and retention. Academic deficiencies and the lack of academic preparedness is a concern of higher education in general, but particularly at community colleges given the general open admittance philosophy (Bauer, C. J., 2005). As a result, institutions have had to increase their offerings of remedial coursework and student services to accommodate student need. According to Tinto and Pusser (2006), students who are less prepared are also less likely to be retained to program completion. Aware of this new data, the VCCS addressed the status of its *Achieve 2015* strategic plan and revised initiatives with increased remedial support in an effort to improve retention (VCCS, 2014c). Placement in remedial courses, however, increases the time and financial investment in completing general education coursework for those students interested in transferring to senior institutions which may lead to increased incidences of parental complaints and involvement with college staff. According to Bers (2005), 25% of the parents of community college students misjudged their student's level of academic

preparedness in English and 40% misjudged their student's ability in mathematics creating unrealistic parental expectations.

Campus safety and FERPA interpretation. Although the majority of media reported campus incidents which have threatened the safety and security of students have occurred at residential colleges, community colleges are no less concerned with safety issues than four year institutions. While issues typically involving residential students such as underage drinking, drug abuse, date rape, and homicide/suicide threat may not be as prevalent on community college campuses, incidents involving estranged spouses, assault, presence of sex offenders, threatening behaviors, financial crises, vandalism, and theft are issues that many community colleges face and report, as mandated by the *Clery Act* (1990). In addition to crimes against individuals, community colleges, like any other institution of higher education, must plan for other emergencies such as inclement weather crises, fires, earthquakes, and hazardous spills to name a few.

In response to the Virginia Tech tragedy, the VCCS placed the safety and security of its students and employees at a high priority vowing to take what has been learned from this horrible tragedy and converting it into positive action by requiring each college to develop and/or update an Emergency Preparation and Management Plan (Matkin, Thompson-Stacy & Sam, 2008). College and system office officials, many of whom are also parents of college-aged students, understand safety concerns expressed by parents. Steps have been taken to accurately interpret and clarify the legal limitations imposed by *FERPA* regulations (Matkin, Thompson-Stacy & Sam).

Changing Demographics of Community College Students

Introduction. Institutions of higher education are currently more diverse than ever before (Bauer, K. W., 2005) and community colleges, by virtue of their inclusive mission, reflect greater diversity than any other type of higher education institution. Diversity encompasses students from various races, cultures, backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, ages, and disabilities. According to the AACC (2014), 57% of community college students are women. Fifty-six percent of Hispanic and 59% of Native American undergraduate college students are enrolled at community colleges. Black and Asian/Pacific Islander community college students make up slightly less than half of all undergraduate students in those racial categories at 48% and 44%, respectively (AACC, 2014a). Among US undergraduate college students, 12% have self-disclosed disabilities (AACC, 2014a).

In 1995-1996, 52% of all first-generation students enrolled in community colleges (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). An extensive body of research exists that describes the many challenges that first-generation students face in achieving academic success. First-generation students are more likely to be women, to be non-traditional college aged, employed full time, and supporting dependents living at home (Nomi, 2005). Compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation students are less academically prepared, have less social and cultural capital, and are more likely to enroll at community colleges (Pagliarulo, 2004; Pascarella, et al, 2004).

In 2003 first-generation college students made up 45% of the total community college enrollment (Nomi, 2005). Ten years later that number dropped to 36% (AACC, 2014a). Three possible reasons for the decline are (a) the broader definition of first-

generation to include those whose parents have earned *any* type of degree (b) with local accessibility to higher education as the primary mission, community colleges now boast increased enrollments of second-generation students and (c) the increased number of dual credit offerings has attracted more second-generation college students to the community college prior to attending a senior institution. Parents with first-hand college experience have more influence over their children's educational decisions than those with no personal college experience (Nomi).

Nationwide approximately 45% of all students enrolled in higher education are enrolled in community colleges (AACC, 2014a). In Virginia, community college students make up approximately 60% of all undergraduates (VCCS, 2014a). The VCCS expects its student demographics to mirror the national trend leading to increased numbers of traditional-aged students.

Greater ethnic and cultural diversity. Most community colleges operate from an open admissions policy, a commitment to access and opportunity, and represent the most diverse form of higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Hendrick, et al, 2011). The number of minority students attending community colleges has increased from 29% in 1996 (Rendon, 2002) to 49% in 2013 (AACC, 2014a). Although it was once believed that “helicopter parents” of students attending college were primarily college educated, White, and from middle to upper middle class socioeconomic levels, Merriman (2007), found that helicopter parents actually crossed all demographic categories. Even with some training in multicultural counseling and sensitivity to multicultural issues, student services personnel cannot be familiar with all groups and thus parental involvement may be beneficial to improving student success and retention.

Increased number of dual and concurrently enrolled students. Many students begin their college careers while still enrolled in high school through dual credit courses. Dual credit allows students to earn both high school and college credit simultaneously, creating the opportunity for substantial time and financial savings to students and their families. Concurrent students are also high school students who, with permission of high school administrators and parents, are permitted to enroll in college courses which may or may not count as high school credit. Between 2009 and 2013, the number of dual credit students in the VCCS increased from 8,937 to 9,441 FTES (VCCS, 2013a), as a result, parental involvement may also have increased.

Decreased number of traditional-aged students. While community colleges have the most diverse student body of all types of higher education institutions (AACC, 2014a), the demographics of community colleges are shifting. Research has indicated that slightly fewer are first-generation students than in previous years (AACC, 2014a).

Traditional-aged students are more likely than older students to transfer to four year institutions (Wyner, 2006). Strengthened guaranteed admission and articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions have created attractive alternatives to transfer-oriented community college students and have been a major focus of VCCS change in the past decade. The VCCS currently has guaranteed admissions agreements with over 30 public and private senior institutions and an even greater number of program specific articulation agreements between the individual 23 community colleges and senior institutions (VCCS, 2014b). Accompanying the increased number of traditional-aged students, and increased level of parental education, is the increased level of parental involvement (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Parents of second-

generation students have more influence on their children's educational decisions than do parents of first-generation students (Nomi, 2005).

Multi-generational enrollment. Parents, who are also community tax payers and employers of local community college students, are more likely to enroll in the local community college even if their own children ultimately choose other types of higher education. Thus, community colleges are more likely than senior institutions to simultaneously enroll multi-generations of parents and their children (Bers, 2005). This unique enrollment demographic creates additional, and perhaps a different type or level, of parental involvement that may not be experienced at senior institutions.

Changing number of students with disabilities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, from 1977 to 2005, the number of children with disabilities served by federally funded K-12 schools rose from eight percent to fourteen percent, but then gradually dropped to 13 percent by 2013 (NCES, 2013a). Much of the increase up to 2005 was attributed to the identification of students with learning disabilities (Battle, 2004; Bauer, K. W., 2005).

Jerome's (2006) finding of the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement supported previous research that parents of students with disabilities were (a) active and involved in their children's education at the elementary and secondary level, (b) offered and accepted more opportunities to volunteer at school events than parents of non-disabled students, and (c) involved in decision making with respect to educational plans and behavioral problems that might exist. Further findings showed that parental involvement of students with disabilities improves overall student success, educational program offerings, and disability advocacy (Jerome, 2006). It is

unknown exactly how many of the students served in special education continue on to postsecondary education due to the need for self-reporting at the postsecondary level. However, in 2008-2009, roughly 50 percent of undergraduates who reported having a documented disability attended community colleges (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Learning disabilities make up the largest category of disabilities with 31% of all postsecondary students who self-identify reporting this type (Raue & Lewis, 2011).

While these relatively similar numbers would indicate a majority of secondary students with disabilities are the same as the postsecondary education population, one cannot make this assumption. Many students in postsecondary education, particularly those attending community colleges, are non-traditional in age and were never identified with a disability during secondary schools. Additionally, according to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th Edition, or *DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), some emotional and physical disorders do not manifest until young adulthood. Greater student diversity with respect to an increase in the number of students with disabilities affects all segments of higher education, but is more likely to affect community colleges (Battle, 2004). Seventy-one percent, or more than twice as many students with disabilities enroll in community colleges than enroll at senior public institutions (Snyder, 2008).

Increased number of homeschooled students. In 2007, the number of homeschooled children exceeded 1.5 million, representing more than 3% of the total number of school-aged children (NCES, 2008). Currently all segments of higher education are experiencing an increase in the number of homeschooled students. The number of homeschooled students who plan to continue their education beyond high

school, and choose a community college either as a concurrent student or upon completion of their secondary requirements, is increasing (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a). Community colleges, however, tend to enroll a greater percentage of eligible students driven in large part by the practices and attitudes of admissions departments at many four year institutions (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b). Even with changes in admissions standards relaxing for homeschooled students, many choose community colleges while they are completing their secondary requirements.

Summary: Increased numbers of traditional students and thus more parental involvement. Historically, community college students are non-traditional with an average age of 29, have family and job-related responsibilities, are more likely to be first-generation students, and have limited financial resources. Compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation students are less academically prepared and have less social and cultural capital. Although first-generation college students are still more likely to enroll in community colleges than senior institutions, the percentage is declining. For the past two decades, the national average age of community college students has also declined and is expected to continue to decline due to the increased number of traditional-aged students. Accompanying the increased number of traditional-aged students and the increased level of parental involvement is the increased level of parental education. Parents of second-generation students have more influence on their children's educational decisions than do parents of first-generation students. These statistics indicate a shift in the demographic makeup of community college students and perhaps a resulting shift in the level of parental involvement.

Contributing to the increase in traditional-aged students are the lower tuition costs of community colleges and the increased interest in transfer programs and guaranteed admissions agreements. Another unique demographic change that community colleges are more likely to experience than senior institutions is the increase in multi-generations of parents and their children simultaneously enrolling at the community college, creating perhaps a different type or level of parental involvement that may not be experienced at senior institutions.

Community colleges enroll greater numbers of dual-credit students, home-schooled students, and students with disabilities, than do senior institutions. Parents of these students are more involved in their children's education, either by choice or necessity, and therefore may expect to stay involved as their student transitions to post-secondary education. Research has shown that parental involvement of students with disabilities improves overall student success, educational program offerings, and disability advocacy.

The need to provide support for all students, especially first-generation and other at-risk students, is likely to continue at community colleges. Student services practitioners will be less likely to provide the sole support for millennial students in the areas of academic counseling and advisement as parents of millennial students play an increasingly trusted and supportive role and expect to be involved in the college admissions and enrollment processes. However, an area of concern in higher education in general, but particularly at community colleges given the general open admission philosophy, is the increased lack of academic preparedness of many entering students. According to Bers (2005), 25% of the parents of community college students misjudged

their students' entering level of academic preparedness in English and 40% misjudged their student's ability in mathematics creating unrealistic parental expectations.

According to Tinto and Pusser (2006), students who are less prepared are also less likely to be retained to program completion; a major concern and accountability issue facing higher education and particularly community colleges. Therefore, due to the lack of objectivity of their child's academic preparedness, parents are not the best academic advisors for their college-aged children.

While community colleges are concerned about parental over-involvement and its effect on students, there is also concern for another major stakeholder – the business community. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of persons aged 25 to 64 with at least an associate's degree increased by 50% from 28% to 43% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013b). While increased levels of education improves one's likelihood of employment, the level of academic preparedness as students enter and exit higher education has become an increasingly significant concern as workforce needs for specific technical and professional skills has continued to grow (Ratelle et al, 2005).

According to a U. S. Department of Labor's report of employers' perspectives, graduates of community colleges and four year institutions are deficient in the areas of writing and communication skills, as well as leadership (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). It is not unusual for employers to express to community college administrators a desire to hire graduates who have developed effective "soft skills" such as those reflected in one's work ethic, attitude, and sense of personal responsibility (Casner-Lotto & Barrington). Parental over-involvement can interfere with the development of such skills

and thus may hinder future employment prospects, ironically, a primary reason that parents suggest post-secondary education to their children (Turrentine, et al, 2000).

Research indicated that tuition costs and an interest in staying involved in their children's education were the two top reasons parents suggested community college enrollment to their children. The lower tuition costs of attending community colleges in Virginia, approximately one third of the cost of tuition at public senior institutions, has contributed to the increase in enrollment of all community college students, and particularly to the increase in traditional-aged millennial students. Even with considerably lower tuition costs, approximately 35% of all VCCS students received some type of financial aid in 2011-2012 (VCCS, 2013b).

Parents are able to maintain virtually constant contact in their children's lives through technological devices such as cell phones and personal computers. A contributing factor to the increased level of parental involvement in the form of communication is the increased awareness of campus safety and security issues. Although the majority of media reported campus incidents which have threatened the safety and security of students have occurred at residential colleges, community colleges, such as the VCCS, have placed the safety and security of their students and employees at a high priority by requiring each college to develop and/or update an Emergency Preparation and Management Plan utilizing the same technology that students use to connect with parents.

Is it Time for a Change in Student Affairs?

Is a change needed in the way colleges in general, and student affairs staff and administrators in particular, work with parents? Recognizing that college is a transition

period for parents as well as students (Connelly, Good, & Perryman, 2001), institutions such as Washington University, Appalachian State University, and East Stroudsburg University began expanding orientation programs aimed at parents in the late 1990's (Coburn & Woodward, 2001) and Colorado State University established a Parent and Family Relations Office (Ronen, 2011). Through information sharing, panel discussions, and "tongue in cheek" skits by student affairs counselors, upperclassmen, veteran parents, and senior administrators, new parents were being welcomed to the institution and provided guidance to the anticipated changes they and their children would experience in this new life stage. Gassiot (2012) found parent involvement in the new student orientation process improved college-parent-student relationships and student independence.

Merriman (2007) maintains that colleges and universities are already guilty of sending mixed messages to parents by holding special activities specifically for parents such as Parent Orientation and staffing offices dedicated to parental concerns. Whether the increase in parent activities is due to, or in response to, the increase in parent interactions (as expressed by 93% of the respondents in Merriman's survey of college administrators) remains unknown (2006). Serious safety concerns and generational approaches make it unlikely that parents will reduce their involvement in the foreseeable future (College Parents of America, 2007; Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech, 2007).

According to Young (2006), parents place more emphasis on the institution to provide "caring" rather than "instruction" during the first two years of college, apparently considering this period as a time for developmental preparation and transition to adulthood. If, as Young's research indicates, more parental involvement is needed in the

first and second years of their child's college experience, is it not reasonable and appropriate for community colleges to change the way they work with parents? If the current interactions with parents are considered less than ideal, then how can community colleges help shape and develop an ideal collaboration with parents?

Whether current traditional community college students are first-generation or not, their parents are either Baby Boomers or GenXers. A characteristic of these two generations of parents is an increased involvement in their children's education when compared to parents from earlier generations (College Parents of America, 2006a; Merriman, 2006; Young, 2006). Community colleges are enrolling younger students (dual credit, concurrent, home schooled and traditional-aged) in greater numbers in Virginia. As a result of these demographic changes, interactions between parents of these students and community college student affairs professionals and administrators may be increasing as well.

Conclusion

College administrators and student affairs practitioners express concern over the disruptions to the normal transition to college life caused by over-involved parents to the extent that some colleges and universities are preventing parents from participation in decision making activities such as class selection and orientation sessions (Wills, 2005). The University of Vermont and University of California at Santa Barbara are two institutions who have intentionally devised methods to prevent parental interference by posting "bouncers" to redirect parents to other areas of campus during new student orientation programs. Other institutions offer programs specifically targeted for parents (Wills, 2005) acknowledging that when a child leaves home for college the entire family

is in a period of transition. Some parent orientation programs are intended to shape preferred parental behavior by presenting light-hearted but realistic scenario skits performed by upper class students (Coburn & Woodward, 2001).

Miller (2005) studied the expectations for involvement that family members have with first-year college students. Although the results of her study indicated an expected increase in contact between the student and family members compared to previous generations, it appeared that most families still view and encourage the first-year experience as a launching stage toward independence. Students (and their parents) must make developmental and emotional transitions at each educational level. Parents who are involved in appropriate and supportive ways as their children transition from middle to high school contribute to academic achievement, competence and independence. In contrast, when parents are negative and controlling, academic performance, competence, and maturity are diminished. Taylor (2005) expressed concern for millennial students transitioning to post-secondary education when parents increasingly did more for their children, thus contributing to the lack of development and maturity necessary for college success. As the research by Ratelle, et al (2005) has shown, a difference exists between “parental support” and “parental autonomy support” at least for students in a science curriculum.

Perhaps it is no longer feasible to expect that community college students or the college staff will assume total responsibility for the educational guidance of students and that their parents will be uninvolved in this next stage of development. Perhaps it is not only unlikely, but unreasonable. Therefore, should community colleges be prepared for increased parental involvement and should they develop strategies to utilize this

involvement in a positive manner by shaping the level and type of involvement rather than resist and react to it as many of their senior institution colleagues have done? Should community college personnel adopt plans to shift parents from the pilot to the copilot seat as they hover over their child's college experience?

If a change in how a community college deals with parental involvement is warranted, it is likely that new strategies and policies will involve several, if not all, segments of the campus community. Hunter (2006) suggests strengthening collegial partnerships between academic departments and student affairs for the benefit of all students. Collaborative efforts may be especially warranted to accompany changes in addressing increased parental involvement.

Student attitudes, behaviors, and experiences are not static. With each entering class the world events and culture that shape their growth and development differ. Faculty and staff, however, sometimes tend to assume that the current undergraduate experience is similar to the experience they had as students (Hunter, 2006, p9).

When one looks at all of the issues surrounding higher education and community colleges in particular, such as increased costs, changing family dynamics from previous generations, lack of academic preparedness, extension of adolescence, campus safety, and generational differences, it is reasonable to expect an increased level of parental involvement and parental over-involvement. The challenge will not center on plans to avoid parental involvement, but rather how to shape that involvement into a positive, collaborative effort; with college personnel in the pilot seat and parents in the copilot seat

as they work together to help students navigate the uncertain journey through higher education. This dissertation will address the questions raised by this literature review.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Much had been written in the last few years about the concerns expressed by those in higher education when involved parents, generally accepted as positive for students, become over-involved or “helicopter” parents. However, a limited amount of empirical research had been conducted to examine this phenomenon. After a thorough literature review of the limited research that was conducted at senior institutions with respect to helicopter parents, and other factors which may be associated with increased parental involvement, there was evidence of increased parental over-involvement which was causing problems on college and university campuses (Merriman, 2006; Somers, 2007; VanFossen, 2005). The literature reviewed did not reveal any major research that had been conducted to determine whether this phenomenon also existed at community colleges. Admittedly, post-secondary, residential institutions experienced unique challenges and problems, but the literature revealed that many issues and problems for residential colleges and universities were true for community colleges as well (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

According to national statistics, community colleges enrolled approximately 50% of all undergraduate students, and that number was closer to 60% in the Commonwealth of Virginia (VCCS, 2014a). This study, which took place in Virginia, examined the extent to which parental over-involvement existed in community colleges and how it was operationally defined by those individuals who had the most contact with parents; primarily student services professionals. If parental over-involvement was a problem,

then what policy changes had taken place to address the issue of “helicopter” parents? If there had been no changes made to date, were changes needed?

Several factors contributed to the growing issue of increased parental involvement such as the (a) increased number of students enrolled in postsecondary education as the millennial generation achieved college age (Howe & Strauss, 2000), (b) increased tuition costs and more competitive admission standards at 4-year colleges and universities (Somers, 2007), (c) extension of adolescence from age 18 years to approximately 25 years of age (Merriman, 2007), (d) increased “consumer approach” to education (Conneely, Good, & Perryman, 2001), (e) over-protective nature and closer relationships of Baby Boomer and GenXer parents with their Millennial children (VanFossen, 2005), (f) technological advances in communication, (g) heightened awareness of campus security and safety issues (Redden 2007), and (h) increased number of second-generation college students (Miller, 2005).

At the core of the concern expressed by college administrators regarding increased levels of parental involvement were the (a) legal implications of *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) guidelines for sharing student information with parents (Lange & Stone, 2001), and (b) negative effects of too much parental involvement on student maturation and development (Bauer, C. J., 2005). While discussing the appropriateness of when to share or withhold student information with parents may be bothersome, the future consequences of parental over-involvement on student maturation and development may be more troubling. When parental over-involvement hampered a student’s identity development, critical thinking skills, and decision-making ability, the student’s college

and post-college success was jeopardized (Somers, 2007). These concerns spoke to the need for further study.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined (a) how the phenomenon of parental over-involvement was operationally defined by student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges, (b) whether parental over-involvement was occurring in Virginia community colleges and, if so, to what extent, (c) how Virginia community college student services staff and administrators responded to over-involved parents, and (d) how Virginia community college student services staff and administrators described an ideal collaboration with parents. The purpose of this study was to assess concerns expressed by community college employees who had the most frequent interaction with students and their parents; primarily student affairs department employees who were responsible for “student services” such as admissions and records (enrollment services), counseling, financial aid, disability services, advising, tutoring services, and student activities. In addition, the study also sought input from administrators who had student services responsibilities.

Research Design

This descriptive study utilized a mixed method design. The purpose of descriptive research is to “define the existence and delineate the characteristics of a particular phenomenon” (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992, p. 194). This definition of descriptive research is literal in its focus on describing and identifying situations/events/problems without explaining relationships, meanings or implications, testing hypotheses, or making predictions (Isaac & Michael, 1981). Descriptive research

typically answers the objective questions *who, what, where, when, and how* through qualitative means. However, descriptive research may also contain quantitative statistical calculations, such as frequency distributions and averages, to arrive at results in quantifiable form.

The mixed method research design used in this study employed both quantitative and qualitative phases of research. Quantitative research assumes that sample data can be objectively measured, quantified, and statistically manipulated to approximate reality and determine relationships between variables (Schloss & Smith, 1999). In contrast, qualitative research assumes social phenomena are complex and interactive, and perceptions are not easily quantified and statistically manipulated to approximate reality (Schloss & Smith). Qualitative research is based on the assumption that reality is subjective and dependent on context and consists of the following five features (a) it is conducted in a natural setting, (b) it tends to be descriptive in nature, (c) it is concerned with the process as much as it is with outcomes and products, (d) the strategy used to analyze the data is inductive reasoning, and (e) the essential concern of the investigators is how the respondents make meaning of their experiences (Upcraft, et al, 1996). According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research may be categorized into five theoretical frameworks (a) biography, (b) phenomenological study, (c) grounded theory study, (d) ethnography, and (e) case study. This study employed the phenomenological framework, which described the meaning of the phenomenon through the perceptions of lived experiences of several individuals (Creswell). Phenomenological studies were used to describe and interpret experiences of those studied in order to gain an understanding of

the experience from the individual participant's reality (McMillan & Wergin, 2002; Whitt, 1991).

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), mixed methods research incorporates (a) *methodology*, the philosophical framework relating to the entire process of the research; (b) *design*, the plan of action that links the philosophical assumptions to the methods; and (c) *methods*, or specific techniques of data collection and analysis. Creswell and Plano Clark's broader definition of mixed methods research, emphasizing techniques in addition to framework and philosophical assumptions, was supported by other mixed method writers such as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who asserted one strength of mixed methods was the inclusive rather than limiting approach to answering research questions. Other strengths of mixed methods research included (a) a more comprehensive approach than either quantitative or qualitative methods alone, (b) the ability to ask and answer questions that would not be appropriate through quantitative or qualitative methods alone, and (c) the utilization of multiple paradigms – not limited to one rigid approach (Creswell & Plano Clark).

One major purpose of mixed methods research is to seek corroborating results in the study of a phenomenon from various methods and designs (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), and is most often accomplished through a triangulation design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This study specifically utilized the *convergence model variant* of the triangulation design. The purpose was to arrive at a valid and well-substantiated conclusion about a phenomenon by separately collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data on the same phenomenon, then converging (comparing and contrasting) the results during the interpretation phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Purposeful sampling assumes that the participants chosen would have the most experience with the phenomenon studied and therefore would provide the most informative contribution to the research questions (McMillan & Wergin, 2002). The six colleges selected for study were representative of the range of institutions throughout the VCCS. Although there was much similarity in mission, types of program offerings, and job responsibilities within community colleges, it should be noted that there was also a great deal of variance in the organizational structure of colleges within the VCCS. Therefore, the selection of participants was based on the functional responsibilities of the individuals and specifically, the fact that their roles involved contact with parents. For this study, the researcher requested a list of potential respondents comprised of student services staff and administrators from each of the representative six colleges selected for study who were responsible for (a) admissions and records, (b) academic advising, (c) counseling, (d) disability services, (e) financial aid, (f) placement testing, (g) student activities, (h) student affairs, and (i) tutoring. The responses and data collected from the electronic survey (including objective and open-ended questions), along with the responses from the focus groups, were triangulated to enhance validity. This method of combining different data sources provided a greater understanding of the phenomenon studied and is typically utilized in qualitative research (McMillan & Wergin, 2002; Whitt, 1991).

Research Questions

Four major research questions were addressed:

1. *How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?*

2. *To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges?*
3. *How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?*
4. *How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?*

Participants

In higher education, student affairs employees are typically new students' "first points of contact" with the institution and as such, those staff members are more likely to have the most contact with parents than other divisions or departments. According to Merriman (2006), student affairs professionals at senior institutions expressed the most concern with the phenomenon of "helicopter parents." Therefore, community college employees with comparable job responsibilities to "student affairs" staff in senior institutions were purposefully selected as participants due to their experience, expertise, and frequent student/parent contact. It should be noted, however, that the division of student affairs differs within the type of higher education setting. For example, residential life, a major component of student affairs at many senior institutions, is rarely a component of student affairs at community colleges throughout the nation; and non-existent in the VCCS. In contrast, enrollment management services (or admissions and records), a major part of student affairs divisions at community colleges, are often separate from student affairs at senior institutions.

In addition, while there is much similarity within the VCCS, the variability within organizational structures and departmental names is worth noting. For example, in the VCCS Central Office, the Director of Student Affairs provides support to all 23 colleges

for those departments that are responsible for enrollment management services, counseling, academic advising, financial aid, placement testing, tutoring services, disability services, and student activities. However, the department of financial aid, an area considered to have significant parental involvement, may report to the Vice President of Academics and Student Affairs or to the Vice President of Business and Finance depending upon the individual college. Therefore, as stated previously for the purposes of this research, the term *student services* was used rather than “student affairs” to include those departments and employees who were considered to have greater contact with students and parents regardless of the college’s reporting structure.

Student services staff and administrators from the six institutions (approximately 25% of the total number of colleges within the VCCS) were invited to participate in either an on-line survey or an on-site focus group to share impressions and opinions about their interactions with parents. The total number of potential student services respondents from the six institutions was approximately 200, as detailed in Table 5. Student services professionals who agreed to take part in the study chose whether they wished to complete the survey or participate in an on-site focus group and the number of focus group participants was supposed to be limited to between five and eight per college. However, for political reasons, and to avoid any ill will between members of the various student services departments, nine individuals were allowed to participate in the focus group activity at one college.

Survey

The quantitative portion of the study consisted of an on-line survey distributed to student services employees at six representative colleges (approximately 25% of the total

number of colleges within the VCCS). The potential size of this sample population, approximately 160, equals the total number of student services professionals at the six colleges, minus the potential range of focus group participants.

Focus Groups

In addition to forced choice and Likert-type scaled questions on the survey, several open-ended questions were asked for qualitative analysis. However, the major portion of qualitative data came from focus groups of five to nine self-selected participants from student services entities at each of the six representative institutions. Individuals who wished to participate in the focus group did not complete the survey. Demographic information was requested from the focus group participants prior to the scheduled focus group activity as part of the informed consent process.

Focus groups are semi-structured discussions (Whitt, 1991) that are most effective when the purpose is to obtain in-depth information about perceptions, beliefs, or opinions, and when the participants selected share many of the same characteristics (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). According to Patton (2002), focus groups are neither problem-solving nor decision-making sessions, but are interviews that are carefully planned to obtain information about a specific area of interest in a non-threatening environment. Homogeneous groups tend to exchange ideas and opinions more freely than groups that are more diverse (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001); contributing to “thick, rich description... the foundation of qualitative analysis and reporting,” (Patton, p. 437).

Description of Sites

The following demographic information and enrollment data regarding the six institutions selected for further study were gathered from the website of the VCCS (2008)

and from links to the individual colleges. The colleges represented not only the various types of VCCS institutions, but also various geographic regions of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Demographic information was later confirmed by a contact person at each institution.

College A

College A is a 62-acre, single campus institution located in the Central Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and serves the citizens of three counties and three cities. In addition to the main campus, College A has two off-campus centers which opened in 1997 and 2003. There are three senior institutions within the College A service area – one public and two private.

College A has one of the few cooperative veterinary technician programs in the VCCS, won national awards for their Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) chapter in 2007-2012 in the Two Year College Division, and received Top-20 recognition among all US colleges and university SIFE programs in 2010-2012. The college promotes the region's unique cultural interests and natural beauty by partnering with the community in offering music and arts festivals, and maintaining a community arboretum and art gallery. The enrollment figures for 2012–2013 were 6,463 unduplicated headcount and 2,891 annual full-time equivalent students (FTES). These enrollment figures (VCCS, 2013c) represent approximately a 12.1% increase in headcount and a 10.2% increase in FTES over the previous five years. There were approximately 22 student services employees at the college at the time this study was conducted.

College B

College B is strategically located within commuting distance to the Washington, D.C. metro area, and is one of the fastest growing multi-campus colleges within the VCCS. Operating from two campuses and one off-campus site, College B serves a diverse suburban and rural population of approximately 438,000 residents in one city and seven counties. This college's geographic region of Virginia has experienced tremendous growth in recent years. Two senior institutions are located within a reasonable driving distance of College B. The enrollment figures for 2012–2013 were 10,314 unduplicated headcount and 4,455 annual FTES. These enrollment figures (VCCS, 2013c) represent approximately a 26.0% increase in headcount and a 32.3% increase in FTES over the previous five years. There were approximately 37 student services employees at the college at the time of this study.

College C

College C is the newest of Virginia's 23 community colleges. It was founded in 1972 to serve a portion of the capitol region of Richmond and three adjoining counties. Since its founding, College C has grown into the third largest college in the Virginia Community College System, enrolling students at three major campuses. In addition, College C offers classes at additional off-campus sites located throughout the service region and worldwide through "virtual" coursework. Four senior institutions are located within the College C service region.

It should be noted, that within the Carnegie classification of colleges, College C is the only community college in the VCCS identified as an *urban college*; although due to their size and strategic locations, two other VCCS colleges (located in the greater

Washington, D.C. and Hampton Roads areas) are classified as “urban colleges” from the VCCS perspective. The greater Richmond region has experienced tremendous growth, and thus College C has increased degree and certificate offerings in broad transfer education, teacher education, business, industrial and computer technology, hospitality, child care, public safety and allied health to address growing employment needs. The enrollment figures for 2012–2013 were 19,352 unduplicated headcount and 8,271 annual FTES. These enrollment figures (VCCS, 2013c) represent a 3.6% increase in headcount and a 20.2% increase in FTES over the previous 5 years. There were approximately 134 student services employees at the college at the time of this study.

College D

College D is located in the New River Valley of southwestern Virginia. The college serves residents who live in four counties and one city. College D is geographically located near two major public universities.

Although College D is designated as a single campus college, their new off-campus site, which opened in 2007, offers increased educational opportunities to service area residents. In addition to the main campus and off-campus center, the college makes use of public schools, industrial plants, and other off-campus facilities to provide instruction for the residents of its service region. The enrollment figures for 2012–2013 were 7,423 unduplicated headcount and 3,007 annual FTES. These enrollment figures (VCCS, 2013c) represent a 2.5% increase in headcount and a 5.5% increase in FTES over the previous five years. There were approximately 19 student services employees at the college at the time of this study.

College E

Founded in 1970, College E is a small, rural, comprehensive, two-year college located in southeast Virginia. Its service area includes two cities and two counties. College E is one of the smallest colleges in the VCCS, but has two campuses, which are each located in one of the two cities, plus an off-campus center. One of the cities served by College E has the distinction of being the largest land-area city in Virginia, with 430 square miles. The short driving commute to the port of Virginia has contributed to this city earning the distinction as CNN Money Magazine's 9th best community in its Best Places to Live Top 25 List of "Where the Jobs Are" for 2012 (CNN Money, 2012). Twenty miles away, the other campus lies in the heart of the one of the most productive agricultural regions of the state.

Although there are no senior institutions within the designated service region of College E, there are numerous public and private choices within reasonable commuting distance in the tidewater and Hampton Roads regions of Virginia and North Carolina. The enrollment figures for 2012–2013 were 2,213 unduplicated headcount and 922 annual FTES. These enrollment figures (VCCS, 2013c) represent a decrease of 4.5% in headcount, and a 6.1% increase in FTES over the previous five years. There were approximately 24 student services employees at the college at the time of this study.

College F

College F is located in the southwestern portion of Virginia. Nestled at the foot of the majestic Clinch Mountains, College F serves four counties. Although the college is located in a rural region of the state rich in Appalachian culture and natural beauty, the area has experienced a decline in population, business, and industry over the past several

years. Much of the decrease can be attributed to changes in the once-booming coal mining industry. College F is the only college included in this study that has a declining student population, both in terms of FTES and headcount.

Two senior institutions are located within the College F service region. The enrollment figures for 2012–2013 were 4,095 unduplicated headcount and 1,8353 annual FTES. These enrollment figures (VCCS, 2013c) represent a 29.5% decrease in headcount, and a 20.3% decrease in FTES over the previous five years. There were approximately 24 student services employees at the college at the time of this study.

College Characteristics

The college characteristics, as indicated in Table 3, included (a) institution size, (b) community type, and (c) campus nature. Institutional size was categorized as either (a) small, (b) medium, or (c) large as determined by the institution's number of FTES. Community type was categorized as either (a) rural, (b) suburban, or (c) urban. Campus nature referred to institutions that were designated as either (a) single campus or (b) multi-campus colleges.

The demographic variables, represented by the survey respondents included (a) job title, (b) years of community college experience (c) years in current position, and (d) departmental supervisory responsibility. For the focus group component of the study, the functional role of the participants, as well as their institutional characteristics noted above, was collected and may serve as a basis for future analysis that is outside of the scope of this study.

Table 3

College Characteristics

Characteristics	Colleges					
	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E	College F
Size ^a						
Small					X	
Medium	X	X		X		X
Large			X			
Community Type						
Rural	X	X	X	X	X	X
Suburban		X	X		X	
Urban			X			
Campus Nature						
Single Campus	X			X		X
Multi-Campus		X(2)	X(3)		X(2)	

^aSmall = Under 1800 FTES, Medium = 1800 – 4999 FTES, Large = 5000+ FTES (SCHEV, 2013), (n) = Denotes number of campuses of the institution within the variable category.

Measures

Survey Instrument

Using the survey developed by Merriman (2006) as a starting point, an on-line survey instrument was developed by the investigator to replicate the questions relating to parental over-involvement that were pertinent to community college environments. Questions that appeared to reflect experiences unique to students enrolled in senior residential institutions, or did not address the research questions, were omitted and additional questions included (see Appendix F). The survey contained 62 items consisting of (a) forced choice, (b) Likert-type scaled, (c) open-ended, and (d) demographic information questions as noted in Table 4.

Table 4

Blueprint of Parental Over-Involvement Survey Instrument

Content area	Number of items
Working Definition of Parental Over-Involvement	
Definition (open-ended)	1
Behaviors (list + open-ended option)	1
Extent of the Problem of Parental Over-Involvement	
Forced choice options (closed questions)	8
Frequency of contact (4-point Likert-type + open-ended option)	9
Explanation (open-ended)	1
College & Departmental Responses to Parental Over-Involvement	
Forced choice options (closed questions)	9

Forced choice options (list + open-ended option)	2
Explanation (open-ended)	1

Staff Skills & Individual Responses to Parental Over-Involvement

Skills needed to manage parent concerns (4-point Likert-type multi-component)	13
Skills needed to manage parent concerns (open-ended)	1
Level of comfort with own abilities (4-point Likert-type)	2
Forced choice options (closed questions)	3

Ideal Collaborative Relationship with Parents

Explanation (open-ended)	2
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Operational Definition of “Helicopter Parents”

Definition (open-ended)	1
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Respondent Demographics

Forced choice options (closed questions)	3
Fill in the blank (open-ended)	2

Additional Responses

Agree to participate	1
Open solicitation for input (open-ended)	1
Total Items	62

Moderator's Guide

The investigator developed a moderator's guide for conducting focus groups (Appendix H) based on the model designed by Pickering and Calliotte (2006). The purpose of the moderator's guide was to ensure that, regardless of the moderators and participants, all focus groups were conducted in a consistent manner; contributing to

instrument reliability. Using the moderator's guide as a script, co-moderators led participants through a sequence of open-ended discussion topics and written responses to discover common themes that addressed the research questions (Attachment H). A brief outline of the moderator's guide is shown below.

- Introduction: *The investigator and co-moderator discussed the purpose of the focus group.*
- Introduction of participants: *Ground rules were discussed and assurances given that no names would be used in the study nor would any comment be attributed to a particular individual.*
- Warm-up exercise: *Participants were asked to characterize the relationship between today's college students and their parents.*
- The participants were introduced, through a series of open-ended probing questions, to topics that addressed (a) the current level and extent of today's parental involvement in their child's collegiate experience, (b) how they perceived the extent of parental over-involvement or "helicopter parents" at community colleges, (c) which staff skills were necessary in working with helicopter parents of community college students, (d) how community colleges responded to helicopter parents, (e) the ideal collaboration between community colleges and parents, and (f) how the individual colleges or the VCCS could assist to minimize the negative effects of interacting with "helicopter parents" while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement.
- Wrap-up: *Participants, comprised of student services staff and administrators, were then asked to operationally define helicopter parents.*

Participants' demographic information was collected prior to the scheduled group activity (Appendix G).

Pilot Study

Survey Instrument

In order to determine survey question clarity and relevance to the research questions, the survey instrument was piloted with members working in student services departments at John Tyler Community College (JTCC). Questions were refined and/or adjusted based on comments from pilot participants. JTCC's college type is medium sized, suburban, multi-campus and is located in Chesterfield County; the southern portion of the greater Richmond area. There are several senior institutions located in or near the college's service area such as Virginia State University, Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Richmond, Strayer University, and Virginia Union University. While JTCC was not one of the six colleges included in the study, colleges with similar characteristics were included in the study.

Moderator's Guide

Using the moderator's guide, a pilot focus group was conducted by the investigator at JTCC with employees working in student services. The purpose of the pilot was to determine clarity of topics, their relevance to the research questions, and to practice time management before conducting the actual focus groups for study. Topics and allocated time were refined and/or adjusted based on comments received from pilot participants. The survey instrument and the focus group moderator's guide were reviewed by three university research experts in the disciplines of education and social sciences and revised as needed based on their comments. After expert review, the revised

instruments were pilot tested by community college professionals employed in the division of student services of JTCC. An invitation was extended to members of student services to either participate in a focus group or complete a survey. The Dean of Student Services sent a follow-up email of support for the researcher and encouraged student services staff members to participate in the pilot study. Six members participated in the focus group and 15 members completed the survey. Upon completion of the pilot testing, final revisions were made.

Validity

Survey and Focus Groups

Following completion of the pilot, the results of the survey and responses of the focus groups were triangulated and examined. Convergence of findings from both quantitative and qualitative measures at the same institution provided evidence of validity for this study. Having established validity of the study protocol at one Virginia community college, the study was ready to be conducted at the six selected subject institutions.

In qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument” of the study, (Patton, 2002, p. 14). The researcher has 22 years of experience as a professional counselor and holds the credentials of Licensed Professional Counselor and National Certified Counselor. For a period of over 10 years prior to conducting this study, she worked at various colleges within the VCCS; primarily as a counselor and advisor in Student Affairs and Disability Services, but also as a faculty member and as the Coordinator of Public Relations and Marketing.

Prior to her employment in the VCCS, she worked at community colleges in Arizona and North Carolina. In addition to her community college experience, she maintained a private practice for eight years working primarily with high school students in the areas of mental health counseling, academic tutoring, career counseling, and college preparation. Her client base included both students and parents. The breadth of her experience speaks to her credibility in the subject areas of counseling, student development, parental concerns, and community college administration. The researcher has worn many hats in her professional career and has a relatively high level of objectivity and intuition; attributes essential in conducting mixed methods research.

The co-moderators of the focus groups were all doctoral students in the Community College Leadership program of Old Dominion University who had already completed or were at the candidacy stage of their program. All co-moderators were employed by Virginia community colleges in some capacity at the time of their participation in the study. The position titles of the co-moderators include (a) Coordinator of Student Affairs, (b) Adjunct Instructor, (c) Student Activities Counselor, (d) Vice President of Instruction and Student Services, and (e) Vice President of Finance and Administrative Services. All co-moderators were either employed in departments within student services or in academic divisions.

Reliability

Survey and Focus Groups

In order to establish reliability of the survey instrument, Cronbach's alpha statistical analysis was conducted on each scale as identified in Table 4. Values of 0.70 and higher were considered acceptable, and all questions used in the study achieved this

standard. Open-ended questions on the survey and in focus groups were coded into response categories by two investigators. Inter-rater reliability was demonstrated when both investigators agreed at least 80% of the time on category placement of the responses. Although it was not anticipated that individual raters would always agree on response coding, when there were large numbers of differing response categories, there was a greater need to reexamine the data to determine if responses could be more clearly grouped. If this was not possible, then the question was eliminated.

Procedures

Survey and Focus Groups

The six colleges selected for the study represented the various categories of institutions throughout the VCCS, as detailed in Table 3. The investigator sent an email (Appendix A) and letter (Appendix B) to the presidents of the colleges selected for study. The correspondence was to (a) inform the presidents about the research, (b) ask for their permission to contact their staff members, (c) request their support, and (d) assure anonymity of the survey participants. The investigator assured the presidents that only aggregate data would be published and the results of the study would be shared with the college presidents.

Upon securing permission from each of the six college presidents, an email was sent to the respective vice presidents and/or deans of student services explaining the study asking for their support in discussing the survey and focus group activity with their employees (Appendix C). After a group of five to eight individuals indicated a preference to participate in the focus group, the remaining number of student services employees received an email about the study (Appendix D) and an attachment (Appendix E), that

requested their participation, outlined their rights as respondents, and contained a link to the survey (Appendix F).

Table 5

Student Services Employees

Estimated Number of Potential Employees to Survey or Participate in Focus Groups							
Student Services Areas	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E	College F	Total
Office of VP/Provost	2	3	5	3	2	1	16
Admissions & Records	6	9	13	4	4	3	39
Advising Services	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Counseling Services	5	12	32	1	2	4	56
Dean or Director	1	1	1	1	6	0	10
Disabilities Services	1	2	1	4 ^a	0	0	8
Financial Aid	4	7	14	3	3	3	34
Placement Testing	0	0	20	0	1	0	21
Student Activities	1	0	1	1	0	1	4
Student Services	0	0	4	2	0	0	6
TRIO Programs ^b	0	0	9 ^b	0	5 ^b	11 ^b	25
Tutoring Services	2	3	34	0	1	0	40
Total No. of Employees	22	37	134	19	24	24	260

The number of employees working within a particular department is noted which included administrative assistants and part-time employees. Work-study students and career coaches were not included and were not surveyed.

^a College D has a Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing that is a unique program. This program increased the number of disability support providers. ^bAs components of TRIO programs, disabilities and tutoring services were often unduplicated in other departments and thus were only counted in one area.

In the one case where more than eight individuals were present for the focus group activity, that additional member was allowed to participate in the focus group session. The approximate total number of possible respondents is outlined in Table 5.

Focus Groups

The individuals selected for qualitative study at each of the six representative colleges represented the various functional areas of student services. The email and letter to the college presidents, referenced in Appendices A and B, also requested permission to conduct focus groups with selected members of their student services staff and administration. Job titles vary within the VCCS and thus the following types of college administrators were included in the study: Vice President of Academics and/or Student Affairs; Provosts; and Deans/Directors of Student Affairs. While confidentiality could not be guaranteed, the investigator and co-moderators assured focus group participants that no names were recorded and impressed upon the participants the importance of respecting the confidentiality of each participant by not quoting or attributing comments to particular focus group members when discussing the experience outside of the group.

To expedite the process of data collection, a team of co-moderators was selected from current or former ODU doctoral students and trained by the investigator. Working in tandem, the investigator and one of the co-moderators conducted a focus group at each of the six colleges. In addition to notes taken by the investigator and co-moderator, each focus group discussion was audio taped for later review by the investigator.

The selection of participants was from the pool of student services employees, and cross-sectional in nature based on the job function of the individuals rather than their titles alone. For example, it was not unusual for employees at smaller institutions to

perform several duties within their division or department; while departments at larger institutions may have had several individuals who shared the same title, but who specialized in one area or discipline. The functional duties and responsibilities of employees served as the criteria for selecting those members to invite. Invitees then chose whether to (a) decline to participate, (b) complete the on-line survey, or (c) engage in a focus group activity. The focus group consisted of five to nine participants from each college. Focus group participants were asked to complete a brief demographic information questionnaire and informed consent document prior to the scheduled focus group discussion (Appendix G).

Each of the six focus groups were comprised of student services staff members who were responsible for (a) enrollment management services, (b) counseling, (c) academic advising, (d) placement testing, (e) tutoring services, (f) disability services, (g) student activities, (h) financial aid, and/or (i) student services in general. According to Patton (2002), focus groups should include between 6-10 members and the length of the focus group should be between 60 and 90 minutes. Using the process of conducting focus groups as suggested by Schuh and Upcraft (2001), the interviewer coordinated with a contact person at each of the six colleges to arrange the following logistics:

- Determined an appropriate date (avoided “peak” times such as registration or exams), time, and location.
- Reserved an appropriately sized room, with comfortable chairs that were seated around a table, and that were in reasonable proximity to restroom facilities.
- Provided access for individuals with disabilities.

- Provided name tags and response cards.
- Determined if there were sufficient electrical outlets for any equipment needs.
- Made tablets of paper and pens available for each participant.
- Provided audio recorders for each focus group session.
- Identified a process for serving refreshments or lunch.

The participants were welcomed, introduced, and informed about the study, its purpose, and the issue of confidentiality. Topics were then introduced to address the four research questions. The investigator and co-moderator took turns in introducing topics and taking notes. Written responses by the participants, moderator notes, and notes from newsprint charts were copied and shared between the investigator and co-moderator; thus insuring both investigator and co-moderator had access to the same raw data. Upon conclusion of the focus group session, the investigator and each co-moderator independently analyzed the data for emerging themes. Focus group discussions were audio recorded for further analysis by the investigator to confirm emerging themes or to verify any significant discrepancies between data interpretations.

Data Analysis

According to Whitt (1991), mixed methods research incorporates both deductive analyses (analyzing data according to an existing framework), and inductive analysis (using small units of data to develop larger categories and themes). Qualitative data analysis often occurs simultaneously with the data collection as themes begin to emerge during, for example, a focus group or interview. The primary strategy used for data analysis when conducting mixed methods studies is the triangulation model; a comparative analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Patton, 2002). The purpose of

triangulation is to find areas of convergence in the two data sets, which increases the credibility of the findings. The five types of triangulation methods are (a) basic triangulation design, (b) convergence model variant, (c) data transformation model, (d) validating quantitative model, and (e) multi-level model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This study used the *convergence model variant* of triangulation, which consisted of separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on the same phenomenon followed by comparing and contrasting the results. The purpose of this model was to arrive at well-substantiated and valid conclusions about the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark). Patton (2002, p. 248) described an “ideal-typical qualitative methods strategy” that consisted of three parts: “1) qualitative data, 2) holistic-inductive design of naturalistic inquiry, and 3) content or case analysis.”

The survey results were collected electronically and the data obtained from demographic and Likert-type scaled responses were analyzed for descriptive and comparative statistics. For the survey, descriptive statistics such as response counts and relative percentages were calculated for each closed question. For the open-ended survey and focus group questions, responses were compared using the inductive analysis method for discovering emergent themes, then content analysis was performed. Content analysis, according to Patton (2002), is used in the reduction of volumes of qualitative data into a smaller subset of recurring themes of responses. Each co-moderator produced a report of their findings, including any perceived emerging themes for their respective focus group responses. Data sources included the collected participants’ written responses for three probing topics, listed discussion items on newsprint flipcharts, audio recordings, and co-moderators’ notes.

The investigator conducted follow-up data analysis with a second researcher (with 20+ years of experience in community college education in a variety of teaching and administrative positions) to determine inter-rater reliability of multiple coders. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state the primary concern of reliability in qualitative research is in the team of investigators reaching agreement on codes for passages of text. According to Stemler (2001, p. 5), inter-rater reliability answers the question, “*Do coding schemes lead to the same text being coded in the same category by different people?*” This may be calculated using Cohen’s Kappa; an adjusted percentage of agreement between coders. If the Kappa statistic is between 0.61-0.80, there is “substantial strength of agreement” and anything greater than 0.80 is “almost perfect,” (Stemler).

The procedure used by the principle investigator and secondary researcher to analyze qualitative data consisted of the following steps: 1) both individuals independently reviewed all responses to all questions containing qualitative data, 2) each researcher grouped responses for each question into one or more “emergent themes,” 3) the two researchers compared notes and agreed upon the categorization of responses into specified themes, 4) each researcher then independently re-evaluated the responses and grouped them into one of the agreed upon themes, 5) the principle investigator then performed content analysis on the placement of responses by both investigators into the agreed upon themes and calculated Cohen’s Kappa values for all responses to the three qualitative question for which there were written responses from each participant.

The Cohen’s Kappa calculations verified that the principle investigator and secondary researcher were in alignment in the placement of responses into emergent themes, thus establishing reliability of the principle investigator’s coding process for

reducing complex qualitative information into a small number of related emergent themes.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of the study include:

1. Although 23 community colleges (40 campuses) exist in the VCCS, only six community colleges were studied. The six colleges selected for the study included representation from small, medium, large, rural, suburban, urban, single campus, and multi-campus colleges from a variety of geographic areas from the mountains to the coast. The quantitative and qualitative data was triangulated to determine degree of convergence, but as with any qualitative research, it may not be possible to generalize the findings to all 40 VCCS campuses.
2. The classification criteria used by the VCCS and SCHEV to determine institutional size, residential character, and service region make-up (such as rural, suburban, and urban) differs from the classifications determined by the highly regarded independent policy and research center, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2007). Therefore, it may not be possible to generalize to specifically defined types of institutions across the nation as classified by the Carnegie Foundation. Carnegie classifies institutions as urban or suburban only if they are located within Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs) or Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), respectively, and with populations exceeding 500,000. Only one VCCS college campus currently qualifies for the urban classification using this criterion, and that campus was included in this study.

3. The student, parental, and faculty perspectives were not addressed in this study.
4. The surveys were not conducted during periods of peak registration in order to minimize biased responses produced during stressful periods. However, other local factors may have influenced personal responses for which there was no control.
5. Some colleges had significant enrollment at off-campus sites and centers where staffing is limited. Unless the staff at these centers specifically included student services staff, experiences with the students enrolled exclusively at off-campus sites and centers and their parents, may not have been captured in this study.

The delimitations of the study include:

1. The general demographics of the service regions of the six community colleges were identified and defined.
2. Only community college student services staff and administrators were surveyed or interviewed in a focus group.
3. The selected colleges were representative of eight institutional characteristics and the range of geographic locations across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Summary

While the current literature on the problem of “helicopter parents” and residential college students is somewhat limited, literature regarding helicopter parents at the community college level is minimal at best. A mixed methods approach was utilized in this study. Student services staff and administrators at six selected community colleges were invited to either complete an on-line survey or participate in an on-site focus group. Results of the survey were compared to the focus group discussion responses to discover

emerging themes and areas of concern. This researcher developed an operational definition of “helicopter parents,” determined if the problems described at senior institutions also existed at community colleges, identified how community colleges responded to helicopter parents, and described the ideal collaboration between community colleges and parents. This study provided ground-breaking documentation on the extent of parental over-involvement in community colleges; the segment of higher education that enrolls approximately 45% of all undergraduate students in the United States (AACC, 2014a) and approximately 60% in the Commonwealth of Virginia (Virginia Community College System, 2014).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The study took place in the Commonwealth of Virginia involving six (or approximately 25%) of the 23 community colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). While a convenience sample would have been acceptable, it was deemed inappropriate for this study. Community colleges were selected based on the following criteria:

1. size of college – small, medium, or large;
2. community type – rural, suburban, or urban; and
3. campus nature - single- or multi-campus.

Obviously, each college met more than one criterion, but all criteria variations were represented, as seen in Table 3. In addition, for colleges that had their own internal policies and procedures for conducting research at their college, the investigator complied with all college-specific requirements prior to receiving permission to proceed with this study.

Qualitative data included focus group responses, as well as some open-ended survey responses, from all six colleges. Quantitative data included an on-line survey distributed to all student services employees at each of the six colleges who had not participated in the focus group activity. Completing the survey was voluntary as was participation in the focus group. There were approximately 260 individuals in the study population pool (see Table 5). The Vice President for student services (or equivalent) at each of the six colleges was asked to select a cross-sectional, representative group of 5 –

7 individuals to participate in the focus group activity, and the remaining student services employees were invited to respond to the on-line survey.

Table 6

Demographic Descriptors of Focus Group Participants and Survey Respondents

Demographic descriptor	Number of focus group participants by college								Number of survey respondents by college							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total	%	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total	%
Classification of position																
Administrator	2	1	3	2	2	1	11	27	1	2	1	1	1	1	7	12
Counselor or advisor	3	2	6	2	2	2	17	41	2	2	7	2	1	2	16	29
Classified staff	3	2	0	2	3	3	13	32	6	4	15	3	1	4	33	59
Subtotal	8	5	9	6	7	6	41	100	9	8	2	6	3	7	56*	100
Years of experience at a community college																
Less than 3	2	2	4	2	1	4	15	36	2	1	5	0	1	1	10	18
3 – 6	3	1	1	2	1	1	9	22	3	3	4	2	0	0	12	21
7 – 10	3	0	0	0	1	0	4	10	1	2	3	2	0	1	9	16
11 – 14	0	1	2	0	1	0	4	10	2	0	3	0	0	2	7	13
15 or more	0	1	2	2	3	1	9	22	1	2	8	2	2	3	18	32
Subtotal	8	5	9	6	7	6	41	100	9	8	23	6	3	7	56*	100
Years of experience in current position																
Less than 3	4	3	4	2	2	4	19	46	3	2	10	1	2	3	21	38
3 – 6	3	2	4	2	2	2	15	36	2	3	8	2	0	0	15	27
7 – 10	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	1	3	2	1	1	2	10	18
11 – 14	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	5	2	0	2	0	0	0	4	7
15 or more	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	7	1	0	1	2	0	2	6	11
Subtotal**	8	5	9	6	7	6	41	99	9	8	23	6	3	7	56*	101

*Two survey respondents did not specify their institution, but answered most of the remaining questions.

**Subtotal may not equal 100 due to rounding of individual demographic percentages.

All focus group and survey questions were related to the basic research questions with the exception of some demographic questions. Demographic data were collected and used to verify the focus group and survey populations were similar in composition, with each group containing individuals from every demographic category. See Table 6 for a demographic breakdown of the focus group participants and survey respondents. Forty-one individuals participated in the focus groups and another 58 responded to the survey, for a total of 99 student services employees who engaged in the study; equal to a 38% participation rate

All focus group participants were instructed as to the importance of maintaining confidentiality and, as expected with student services employees, all seemed very comfortable with this concept. Surveys were completed independently, so there was no need to emphasize confidentiality. Focus group information and survey responses were triangulated to determine common themes.

Triangulation is a comparative analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Patton, 2002). The purpose of triangulation is to find areas of convergence in the two data sets, which increases credibility of the findings. This study used the *convergence model variant* of triangulation, which consisted of separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on the same phenomenon, followed by comparing and contrasting the results. The purpose of this model was to arrive at well-substantiated and valid conclusions about the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Results of the data analysis were segregated into groups that pertained to the four basic research questions, as detailed in Table 7. The four basic research questions were:

1. How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?
2. To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges?
3. How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?
4. How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?

Table 7

Mapping of Focus Group and Survey Questions to the Research Questions

Research Question #	Focus Group Question #	Survey Question #*
1	Warm-up, 1, 2, 6, & 13	2, 3, & 35
2	Warm-up, 1, 4, & 5	4, 5, 8, & 10-20
3	7 – 9	9, 21 - 24, 26-31
4	3 & 9 – 12	32-34

*Not all survey questions mapped directly to one of the research questions. Question 1 asked respondents whether or not they agreed to participate in the survey. Questions 6 & 7 were demographic in nature. Question 25 asked details about policy, procedure, and protocol changes but too very few responses to analyze.

Analysis of Focus Group Responses and On-Line Survey Data

Focus group participants were asked to complete an “Informed Consent Form” (Appendix G) prior to the start of any focus group activity. The informed consent form contained demographic questions that were identical to the demographic questions contained in the on-line survey. The act of handing over the completed informed consent form constituted each individual’s consent to participate in the study. All forms were collected by the investigator and no copies were made for distribution to college personnel. This process was approved by the Old Dominion University, Darden College

of Education, Human Subjects Review Committee and by each college's Institutional Review Board or President, as appropriate. Participants were assured that only the investigator and the dissertation committee members would have access to the completed forms. Placing the demographic questions on the informed consent form allowed for the collection of these data while maintaining the confidentiality of the focus group participants. A total of 41 individuals participated in focus group activities (see Table 6).

Focus group activities began with a warm-up question to get participants immediately into discussing the topic of the study and to make them comfortable with the process. In addition to the warm-up question, the focus group members were asked to respond to 13 more questions. Responses consisted of verbal discussion and some written comments, which were collected for later analysis. Much rich information was analyzed for common, "emergent" themes using the content analysis method.

A second investigator was utilized to determine consistency of this analysis for qualitative questions where there were written responses from each of the study participants. His credentials included: a) an earned Ph.D. from the Old Dominion University Community College Leadership Program, b) over 20 years of community college experience, including classroom teaching and senior administration, c) an interest in the topic of helicopter parents, and d) his experience with helicopter parents, both as a faculty member and as an administrator. The purpose of using a second investigator in the qualitative data analysis was to more accurately code data. According to Stemler (2001), inter-rater reliability of multiple coders may be calculated using Cohen's Kappa; an adjusted percentage of agreement between coders after accounting for chance.

As noted in Table 8, if the Kappa statistic is between 0.61-0.80, there is “substantial” strength of agreement and anything greater than 0.80 is “almost perfect,” (Stemler, p.6). Cohen’s Kappa was determined for the questions for which there were written responses from each study participant.

Table 8

Suggested Benchmarks for Cohen’s Kappa^a

Cohen’s Kappa Statistic	Relative Strength of Agreement
<0.00	Poor
0.00 – 0.20	Slight
0.21 – 0.40	Fair
0.41 – 0.60	Moderate
0.61 – 0.80	Substantial
0.81 – 0.99	Almost Perfect

^aAdapted from Stemler, 2001.

Qualitative and quantitative data were derived from the responses to an on-line survey (Appendix F) distributed to all student services employees at the six subject colleges who had not participated in the focus group activity. Completing the survey was voluntary as was participation in the focus group. The survey instrument consisted of both forced choice (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions that aligned with the focus group questions (see Table 7). Demographic information was also collected and used to verify that the focus group and survey populations used in the study were similar in composition and representative of the student services population. There were 58 survey respondents and 41 focus group participants (see Table 6). Both the survey respondent and focus group participant populations contained all three categories of employees (administrators, counselors/advisors, and support staff). In addition, each

study population contained individuals with less than three, to over 15, years of experience working at community colleges and who had served in their current role at the time they participated in the study for the same range of less than three, to over 15, years.

Data analysis has been grouped according to the relevant research question(s), as indicated in Table 7. The results are presented in the following sequence, as appropriate: 1) qualitative analysis of focus group responses, 2) qualitative analysis of survey responses, 3) quantitative analysis of survey data, and 4) triangulation of the preceding results. Responses to both the focus group warm-up question and the first numbered focus group question related to research questions 1 and 2. Therefore, responses to these two questions are presented primarily under research question #1, but are also referred to in the research question #2 section, below.

Research Question 1 - How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?

Qualitative Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Focus group warm-up question

For the warm-up question “In a word or phrase, how would you characterize the relationship between today’s college student and their parents?” four themes emerged from the participant responses as detailed in Table 9. The investigators had a “substantial” Cohen’s Kappa value of 0.70 for the responses to this question, which are listed in Table 9.

The most frequent comments related to parents being controlling, over-involved and/or over-bearing. Some sample comments from focus group participants, about their personal interactions with parents, include hearing statements such as: “*We* need to come

in and register Johnny.” Another response was “Parents tend to be overbearing with a child who has ‘messed up’ at a prior institution...now the parent will get him/her ‘on track.’”

Table 9

Emergent themes for the focus group warm-up question - In a word or phrase, how would you characterize the relationship between today's college students and their parents?

Theme

Parents controlling, over-involved and/or overbearing

Constantly connected either physically and/or electronically

Students overly dependent on parents

Many parents uninvolved

Another emergent theme related to the degree of connectivity between parents and their college-age children. One participant stated the parents “are very involved in the academic choices of their children, unlike what ‘we’ experienced” when we (Boomers and GenXers) attended college. Another focus group participant stated that current college students and their parents are “connected constantly – even if not physically together – through an electronic umbilical cord” the cell phone and/or computer.

The third emergent theme related to students who were overly dependent on their parents. One focus group participant stated “Students want the parents to complete all of the paperwork and ask all of the questions.” In these cases, students forced their parents to take on the active decision-making role by default since the students refused to act on their own behalf.

The final theme that emerged from the warm-up question discussions was that parents often exhibited extreme behaviors – if they were not over-involved in their child's academic life, they tended to be uninvolved. Extreme behavior requires little

effort; decisions are unilateral and do not require discussion, negotiation, or compromise between parents and students to reach an agreed upon action. One participant stated that she frequently heard from parents that “I pay so I am in charge” but she had experienced the range of parenting from “little to no relationship, all the way to over the top.” Other comments pertaining to the level of parental involvement focused on the age of the student. The younger, or more traditional-aged students, tended to have more parental involvement than older students even if the older students were first generation college students.

Focus group question 1

After the warm-up question, respondents began discussing the focus group topic questions. Question number one was “In your opinion, how involved are parents currently in their child’s collegiate experience?” Three themes emerged and are listed in Table 10.

Table 10

Emergent themes for focus group question #1 – In your opinion, how involved are parents currently in their child’s collegiate experience?

Theme

Too involved or controlling

Many back off after the first semester

Many parents uninvolved

The predominant comments pertained to the issues of parental control and over involvement. The remaining themes pertained to varied levels of parental involvement – either extreme or shifting over time. Parental control was described by one participant as having two consequences: “Students generally are weak in two areas: 1) self-advocacy and 2) decision making because the parent has never allowed the child to learn these

skills.” Other comments included: “An instance was reported where a parent withdrew a student from a class without the student knowing,” and parents “register for the student, sometimes without the student being aware that it is happening.”

On the other hand, parental involvement may not have started out as a deliberate behavior but may have developed as a result of a student’s refusal to handle his or her own collegiate affairs. As pointed out by one participant, “Sometimes parents become ‘helicopters’ because their children won’t share information or (attempt to) deceive their parents.”

The second emergent theme related to decreasing parental involvement transitioning, after the first semester, from being over-involved at the beginning to backing off as the student continues. One comment that illustrated this transition was: “In the beginning, parents often make calls to Student Services on behalf of the student.”

The last of the emergent themes for this question related to the extreme levels of parental involvement; some parents are uninvolved, others are over-involved. As summarized by one participant, parental involvement: “Goes from one extreme to the other. It varies. No typical college student or parental relationship. We see it all. It is hard to quantify.”

Additional comments related to these varying levels of parental involvement (extremes or changing over time) addressed the fact Virginia community college student populations were highly varied both in terms of student ages and family situations. Concern was expressed by one participant that it was important to “...better define the student population when asking (or answering) this question: traditional aged students; older, independent students; or dual enrolled students.” For example, it was noted at one

college that 50 – 75% of parents of traditional aged students “...are directly involved in enrollment/registration of the student.” At another college it was stated that, “Students with disabilities (regardless of their age) seem to have a lot more parental involvement; some to the point of being overbearing.”

In alignment with the writings of Coleman (1988), Carney (2004), and Sil (2007), which respectively related to social capital, community college students attending college close to home, and parental expectations of their own level of involvement and influence in their child’s education, student services staff members who participated in this study were very aware of regional differences in the level of parental involvement. As explained by participants at a multi-campus institution, in general, suburban parents seemed to be the most involved, urban parents seemed to be the least involved, and rural parents tended to be more involved for the first semester, but then stepped back. This generalization was supported by comments made in focus group discussions at other participating colleges.

Focus group question 2

Question number two was “What behaviors do you perceive to be characteristic of parental involvement in a student’s collegiate experience?” Three themes emerged and are listed in Table 11.

Table 11

Emergent themes for focus group question #2 – What behaviors do you perceive to be characteristic of parental involvement in a student’s collegiate experience?

Theme

Controlling, with parents handling everything

Parents acting inappropriately as student advocates

Parents very involved with financial aid issues

The most common theme concerned parents who were controlling and handled everything. Some examples of parents handling everything, as noted by focus group participants, included: “When you ask the student a question and the parent answers or the student continually looks to the parent for an answer,” and “When the student actually leaves (it to) the parent to complete all of the paperwork.” In reaction to controlling parents, one participant stated “Parental involvement becomes uncomfortable to college staff members when it is obvious that the parents are driving the student’s educational plans. Staff members wonder about the parent’s motivation in trying to control the student’s education.”

Parents serving as inappropriate student advocates emerged as the second emergent theme. Statements about this behavior included: “Parents will either go directly to the top, or work their way up, until they get the answer they want.” As mentioned above (Question #1), parents of students with disabilities tended to be very involved in their students’ college education. While some school systems have instituted transition from high school to college procedures for parents and students, not all have done so and problems have resulted from this lack of knowledge and preparation. One participant explained:

Parents had to be advocates for (their) student in elementary and secondary school. The secondary school system and the parent never prepared the student to self-advocate. Now in college, the parent does not want to relinquish the advocacy role and the student is ill prepared to assume the role.

The final theme that emerged in response to this question related to parental involvement in the financial aid process. As noted by two participants: “Parents are not participating on the academic side, but they are very diligent on the financial aid side,” and “Parents are impatient with their student and the (financial aid) process.”

Focus group question 6

Question number six was: “What is your interpretation or definition of a ‘helicopter parent?’” Two themes emerged and are listed in Table 12. These two themes are closely linked. The overprotection/control identified by many participants leads to the impediment of the student’s ability to mature and establish independence.

Table 12

Emergent themes for focus group question #6 –What is your interpretation or definition of a “helicopter parent?”

Theme
Overprotective and/or controlling; makes all decisions in the place of the child
Impedes student’s independence and ability to mature

While both emergent themes were somewhat negative in nature, by far the most common responses contained the terms “overprotective” and/or “controlling” in the definitions. Responses that contributed to this theme spanned the range of parents who took control due to their child’s inaction, up to parents who actively assumed the child’s identity and fought all of their child’s battles. Some sample responses that illustrated this range described a parent who was “...overly involved, with the student standing in the background doing nothing” to describing a parent who “...essentially becomes the student (and) who makes all decisions.”

The remaining responses related to parents who impeded a student’s independence and stifled his/her ability to mature. Responses that echoed this theme

included: “Those parents that are unable to ‘let go’ of their children and allow them to be responsible or have a voice of their own,” and “A parent who does for their student what the student could/should do for him/herself.”

The definition given by one respondent at a relatively small college was considered by her colleagues to be very descriptive. She stated that a helicopter parent was: “One whose action and involvement prevents and paralyzes a student from (developing) healthy self-advocacy, decision making, and problem solving (skills) and becomes a barrier to the student’s achievement.” This sentiment was confirmed at all of the other five colleges.

Some respondents mentioned there was no way to know whether this behavior of control was due to wanting to “protect” their adult child, or just an unwillingness to let go. For example, one participant described a helicopter parent as one “...who wants to protect his/her student from bad grades, getting in trouble, (or) talking to a professor for a variety of reasons and motives.” Another stated that helicopter parents are: “Those parents (who) are unable to ‘let go’ of their children and allow them to be responsible or have a voice of their own.” Regardless, the child has not developed appropriate skills for adulthood.

Focus group question 13

The final question asked of the focus group participants was: “How would you now operationally define parental over-involvement or helicopter parents?” Due to the multifaceted nature of many of the written responses provided by the focus group participants, the responses were not suitable for content analysis to determine emergent themes (see Appendix I for complete text of all responses).

According to Stemler (2001), one of the necessary conditions for data to qualify for content analysis is that the response categories must be mutually exclusive. However, several of the responses to question 13 contained multiple components that could not be separated out without invalidating the response. Therefore, the information contained in the responses was used by the investigator to construct a comprehensive, operational definition of “helicopter parents” based on synthesizing various elements contained in the focus group responses to this question, other focus group and survey responses, literature review, and informal discussions with colleagues who had an interest in this topic and who participated in pilot and/or review of the pilot for the study.

There were several comprehensive definitions provided by focus group participants. However, it was not their task to determine the operational definition. The development of the operational definition, utilizing a variety of research methods and data, was the responsibility of the investigator. The investigator understood that, although the development of an operational definition was a subjective process, synthesis of a comprehensive definition (discussed in Chapter V) was strongly influenced by focus group responses. Some sample responses provided by the focus group participants included:

- “One whose actions and involvement prevent and paralyze a student from healthy self-advocacy, decision-making, and problem solving and becomes a barrier to the student’s achievement.”
- “Helicopter parents are over-involved with the academic and psychosocial development of their students, often manifested through constant contact

with the student, the student's professors, and staff members of the college."

- "A parent who is involved in the student's academic business to the point where the student is not able to make independent decisions, or carry out academic tasks."
- "A parent who expects to be involved to a high degree with their child's life, including asking and answering questions as well as decision making on behalf of the adult student."
- "A parent who is unable (or unwilling) to allow their child to make decisions. Parent refuses to let go and let the son or daughter assume the role of an adult."

Qualitative Analysis of Survey Responses

Survey question 2

The first of six qualitative questions in the on-line survey asked respondents to define parental over-involvement. Many responses consisted of single words such as: controlling, intrusive, hovering, pushy, obsessive, annoying, detrimental, harmful, smothering, etc. Some examples of longer definitions were: "Parent not allowing student to be more involved in determining education concerns," "Hovering to the detriment of student's independence," and "Acting in the place of the student."

Survey question 35

The final open-ended question on the survey asked respondents to state: "In one or two sentences, how would you define the term 'helicopter parents' as it relates to community college students?" As with the first open-ended question on the survey

(question 2, above) the vast majority of responses were of a negative nature. However, due to the instructions to provide a longer answer this time, it became feasible to separate the answers into three, related emergent themes as specified in Table 13. The investigators had an “almost perfect” Cohen’s Kappa value of 0.88.

The first emergent theme was composed of responses regarding parents engaging in activities that should be done by the student. Some examples of responses were: “Parents that do everything for their student,” “Parents who have determined the precise course their child’s education would take and don’t allow the student to make decisions or take responsibility for their own actions,” and “Includes inappropriate interaction ‘on behalf’ of the adult child under the guise of helping or assisting them.”

Table 13

Emergent themes for survey question #35 - In one or two sentences, how would you define the term “helicopter parents” as it relates to community college students?

Theme

Parents who do everything and are controlling

Parents who prevent students from maturing

Over-involved to the point of harm

For the second emergent theme, nearly as many responses referenced parental repression of their child’s ability to mature. Illustrative comments related to this theme were: “Emotional crowding so that the student cannot spread his/her own wings,” “Parents who have thwarted in their child a healthy developmental progression from dependence to independence,” and “Parents who stunt the development of their child by performing tasks for the student because the parent has a fear of the child failing.”

The last emergent theme focused on over-involvement to the extent wherein parents create harmful effects on their college-age children, as stated by a few

respondents: “A parent who is overly and continuously involved in the educational process of their child to the extent it is detrimental to the child” and “A parent who doesn’t think their child is capable of making the ‘right’ choice so they must make decisions for them.” Appendix J contains the complete text of all responses to this question.

Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data

Survey question 3

The first quantitative section of the on-line survey (Appendix F) asked respondents to check all behaviors they had observed that illustrated parental over-involvement at their colleges. A check-off list of 10 behaviors was supplied by the investigator as well as providing an option to choose “none of the above” behaviors or to list other behaviors not included in the list. Response frequencies and percentages are included in Table 14. Other behaviors noted by the respondents included “choosing the student’s course of study,” “parent blaming the school for lack of (student) success,” “parent repeating instructions,” “parent, sole attendant at orientation,” and “(parent) signing student signature [on] documents.” It is worth noting that none of the 58 respondents chose the “no such behavior observed” option, indicating that parental over-involvement is common across Virginia’s Community Colleges.

Table 14

Response frequencies and percentages for survey question #3 – What behaviors do you see that illustrate parental over-involvement at community colleges?

Behavior	# of Responses ^a	% of Responses ^b
Parents speaking on behalf of the student when the student is present.	56	97
Parent taking charge or the lead in asking questions.	55	95
Parent organizing and keeping track of all forms regarding enrollment, registration, and curricular materials.	54	93
Parent calling on behalf of the student because the student is working or otherwise unable to come to campus to handle a process.	54	93
Parent emailing or calling to complain about a situation or concern.	52	90
Parent performing the processes of enrollment and registration.	50	86
Parent demanding the disclosure of confidential information protected by <i>FERPA</i> .	47	81
Parent demanding preferential treatment or a waiver of college policy on behalf of the student.	44	76
Parent emailing on behalf of the student.	42	72
Parent sitting in the chair closest to the counselor, advisor, or administrator.	32	55
Parent demanding to sign the release form to allow disclosure of student information.	25	43
Other behaviors you have observed.	5	9
No such behavior observed.	0	0

^aTotal does not equal 58 since respondents were allowed to select all behaviors that applied. ^bTotal does not equal 100% since respondents were allowed to select all behaviors that applied.

Triangulation of Focus Group Responses and Survey Data

This study utilized the *convergence model variant* of triangulation design by separately collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data on the same phenomenon, then converging (comparing and contrasting) the results (Patton, 2002). The responses and data collected from the electronic survey (including objective and open-ended questions), along with the responses from the focus groups, were triangulated to enhance validity, and then evaluated as they pertained to each of the four research questions as shown in Table 7.

Survey respondents and focus group participants overwhelmingly used negative terms in their definitions of parental over-involvement. Common words or phrases included: controlling, demanding, intrusive, hovering, pushy, obsessive, annoying, inappropriate, over-protective, detrimental, harmful, smothering, etc. Some examples of longer definitions were: “Parent not allowing student to be more involved in determining education concerns,” “Hovering to the detriment of student’s independence,” and “Acting in the place of the student.” Over-involved parents were also described as acting in a fashion that prevented their children from developing independence, maturity, and responsibility. Behaviors cited as characteristic of over-involved parents included: parents speaking and/or acting on behalf of the student whether or not the student was present, serving as inappropriate advocates, and maintaining constant communication with their children (physically and/or technologically).

Research Question 2 - To what extent does parental over-involvement
exist in Virginia community colleges?

Qualitative Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Focus group warm-up question

For the warm-up question “In a word or phrase, how would you characterize the relationship between today’s college students and their parents?” four themes emerged from the participant responses as detailed in Table 9 (above): 1) parents being controlling, over-involved and/or over-bearing, 2) parents constantly connected either physically and/or electronically with their student, 3) students overly dependent on parents, and 4) many parents are uninvolved in their child’s education. Collectively, a majority of the focus group responses fit into one of the first three themes indicating that parental involvement is perceived to be present to a great extent in Virginia’s community colleges.

Focus group question 1

After the warm-up question, the next question was “In your opinion, how involved are parents currently in their child’s collegiate experience?” Three themes emerged and are listed in Table 10 (above): 1) parents are too involved or controlling, 2) many parents back off after the first semester, and 3) many parents are uninvolved.

The predominant comments pertained to the issues of parental control and over involvement. The remaining themes pertained to varied levels of parental involvement – either extreme or shifting over time. The responses to this question were also detailed and elaborated upon in the research question #1 section, above.

Focus group question 4

Focus group question number four was “Based on your experiences, to what extent does parental over-involvement exist at your community college?” One theme emerged – parental over-involvement is wide-spread. This response appeared in approximately one-half of the recorded comments; the remaining comments did not fit into any other themes.

Comments that helped to illustrate the wide extent of parental over-involvement included: “At our institution, there seems to be too much involvement,” and “Parental over-involvement is reasonably wide spread.” Other participants added details such as: “50% of traditional students have helicopter parents,” and “50% of nontraditional students have spouses who can be helicopters as well.” Another perspective was provided by a participant who stated: “The issue is not restricted to parents, however, as spouses, grandparents, etc. sometimes assume the role of the over-involved party.”

Focus group question 5

Question number five was: “If you are familiar with the term, to what extent are ‘helicopter parents’ a concern at your college?” Focus group participants were asked to write their responses to this question and the investigator collected and analyzed the responses. Two themes emerged and are listed in Table 15. The investigators had an “almost perfect” Cohen’s Kappa value of 0.92 for the responses to this question.

Table 15

Emergent themes for focus group question #5 – If you are familiar with the term, to what extent are ‘helicopter parents’ a concern at your college?

Theme

Moderate to high

Low

Helicopter parents were of moderate or high concern in nearly one-half of the focus group responses to this question. For example, one participant stated: “Helicopter parents are a huge concern” and members of another focus group seconded this opinion, but also felt they had the situation reasonably under control. At still another college, it was noted: “The biggest concern is the time spent dealing with helicopter parents and documenting the interactions so staff can defend themselves if the parent attempts to go over their heads.” It was also stated that helicopter parents are: “...really a problem in the financial aid process.”

For those individuals who were familiar with this term, the remaining comments were either miscellaneous or implied low concern about helicopter parents. At one college, it was noted that helicopter parents were not much of a concern now since staff had received some professional development training on how to deal with them.

Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data

Survey questions 4, 5, and 8

Survey questions 4, 5, and 8 all asked respondents to indicate any changes in their interactions with parents over the previous five years. Question 4 asked respondents to provide a directional assessment as to whether or not the extent of parental involvement had increased, decreased, or remained the same. Question 5 asked respondents to quantify the extent to which their offices had seen a change in parental *over-involvement*. Question 8 simply asked whether or not interactions with parents had changed. As shown for question 4 in Table 16, 64% of the respondents stated they had experienced an increase in parental involvement, and 59% of the respondents stated that the level of

parental *over-involvement* had increased as well. In addition, 93% of the respondents indicated that their interactions with parents had changed over the previous five years.

Table 16

Response percentages for survey questions #4, 5, & 8.

Survey Question	Decreased	No change	Increased
4 – Over the last five years, to what extent has your office seen a change in parental involvement with respect to their student’s education?	10	26	64
5 – Over the last five years, to what extent has the level of parental over-involvement increased at community colleges?	29	12	59
8 – Have your interactions with parents changed in the last five years?	7	N/A	93

Survey question 10

In an effort to determine if parents followed the expected chain of command, respondents were asked to indicate which college offices were utilized as the first point of contact by parents. Table 17 shows the frequencies and percentages of the responses to this question.

“Other” offices identified by more than one respondent included four for the Student Center, and two each for the Testing Center, Departmental/Division Deans, and individual faculty members. While the majority of respondents (57 – 78%) indicated that most parents did make student services staff their first point of contact, a large percentage of respondents (22 – 57%) also indicated their awareness of parents who made their first point of contact with a dean, vice president, or the college president, thus attempting to bypass the chain of command.

Table 17

Response frequencies and percentages for survey question #10 – At your institution, which office(s) have parents contacted first? (Select all that apply.)

College Office	# of Responses ^a	% of Responses ^b
Enrollment Services/Admissions & Records	45	78
Financial Aid	37	64
Counseling	33	57
Dean for Student Affairs/Services	33	57
President	25	43
Vice President for Student Affairs/Services	22	38
Dean for Academics	17	29
Vice President for Academics	13	22
Other	13	22

^aTotal does not equal 58 since respondents were allowed to select all offices that applied. ^bTotal does not equal 100% since respondents were allowed to select all offices that applied.

Survey question 11

Respondents were asked to identify the frequency with which parents contacted them for specific reasons. Answer choices consisted of: daily, often, sometimes, rarely, and never. The most frequent reasons given by at least half of the respondents for parental contact occurring on an “often” or “daily” basis were: 1) for general information (67%); 2) to handle processes for the student with the student present (61%); 3) to seek advice (56%); 4) to handle processes for the student with the student absent (54%); and 5) out of concern for their student (51%) as detailed in Table 18.

Table 18

Response frequencies and percentages for survey question #11 – How often do parents contact you (either daily or often) for each of the following?

Reason	# of Responses ^a	% of Responses ^b
General information	39	67
To handle processes for the student with the student present	35	61
Seeking advice	32	56
To handle processes for the student with the student absent	31	54
Concern for their student	29	51
To resolve an issue	25	43
To complain	22	39
Seeking referral	9	16
Disability services	7	13
Other	4	7

^aTotal does not equal 58 since respondents were allowed to select all reasons that applied. ^bTotal does not equal 100% since respondents were allowed to select all reasons that applied.

Survey questions 12 – 20

In order to determine the level of parental contact experienced by the student services employees and to evaluate the ways in which their colleges had (or had not) responded to parental involvement, respondents were asked a series of questions (see Table 19). Over 25% of the respondents indicated they had experienced over 10 parental interactions in the previous two weeks. In addition, the survey asked respondents to identify the level of concern at their institutions regarding parental over-involvement. The majority (53%) of respondents selected “increasing concern” with an additional 5%

stating that parental over-involvement was a “serious concern” at their institution.

However, 57% of the respondents indicated their college did not offer any programs specifically for parents and only 5% of the respondents said their college had an office specifically tasked with handling parental concerns. Additionally, when asked if any policy changes had been made at their institutions to address parental involvement, only a small number (12%) indicated their awareness of any changes even though all of these individuals agreed that the changes were “slightly” or “moderately” helpful.

Table 19

Response percentages for survey questions #12 - 20.

Survey Question	% of Responses
12 – Approximately how many interactions have you had with parents over the last 2-week period?	
5 or less	49
6 – 10	25
More than 10	26
13 – How would you rate the level of concern regarding parental over-involvement at your institution?	
Not a concern	7
Minor concern	35
Increasing concern	53
Serious concern	5
14 – Does your college offer any programs specifically for parents?	
No	57
Yes	43
15 – Does your college have an office that has responsibility for parental relations?	

No	95
Yes	5
16 – The office that has responsibility for parental relations is a part of which office?	
Student affairs/student services	100 ^a
17 – The office that has responsibility for parental relations has been created in the last ____ years?	
3	50 ^a
5 or more	50 ^a
18 – How many staff members work in the office that has responsibility for parental relations?	
3 or more	100 ^a
19 – Has your institution made policy changes to address parental involvement?	
No	42
Yes	12
Not sure	46
20 – To what extent have the policy changes been helpful in dealing with parental involvement?	
Slightly	57 ^b
Moderately	43 ^b

^aOnly includes responses from the minority who answered “yes” to question 16. ^bOnly includes responses from the minority who answered “yes” to question 19.

Triangulation of Focus Group Responses and Survey Data

A definite majority of focus group participants and survey respondents indicated parental over-involvement is widespread in Virginia’s community colleges. The majority of the focus group participants stated parents are currently too involved or controlling in their child’s collegiate experience while 66% of the survey respondents stated their

interactions with parents have changed over the past five years, with 57% stating their experience of parental over-involvement has increased moderately or significantly over this time span.

Research Question 3 - How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?

Qualitative Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Question 7

Question number seven was “How comfortable do you feel in responding to parent concerns?” Two themes emerged; respondents were either “comfortable” or their comfort level was dependent upon the circumstances. None of the participants stated that they were “uncomfortable” (see Table 20).

Table 20

Emergent themes for focus group question #7 – How comfortable do you feel in responding to parent concerns?

Theme
Comfortable
Varies – depends on circumstances

The participants’ level of comfort was dependent on three factors: 1) the actual situation, 2) the participants’ level of experience, and 3) whether or not they had received any training regarding how to deal with difficult people. One participant stated: “I feel comfortable dealing with parents, however, *FERPA* can be a major issue and hard to explain.” As expressed by another participant: “Experience increases one’s comfort level as does providing a welcoming office to parents.” At the college that provided staff training on how to work with helicopter parents, all participants expressed a high level of confidence, which they attributed to their specialized training.

Focus group question 8

Question number eight was “What skills are needed to work with ‘helicopter parents’?” Four themes emerged and are listed in Table 21.

Table 21

Emergent themes for focus group question #8 – What skills are needed to work with “helicopter parents?”

Theme

Good listening skills (including patience, tact, & diplomacy)

Confidence and knowing one’s own limits

Conflict resolution skills (including the use of humor as a stress release mechanism)

Professionalism

Nearly half of the respondents mentioned good listening skills (including tact, diplomacy, and patience) were by far the most important skills needed. They also indicated that confidence and understanding the limitations of one’s role, conflict resolution ability, and professionalism were important attributes as well. Some comments that illustrated staff reliance on these skills when working with helicopter parents included: “Good listening skills are essential,” and the word “patience” was also mentioned repeatedly. Other comments included: “If you are wishy-washy, they will walk all over you,” and staff needed to convey “...a calm, confident demeanor.” Staff members were also expected to: “Know what your boundaries are and when (you need) to call for help” and to be “...knowledgeable with respect to policies and procedures.”

Focus group question 9

Question number nine was “In your opinion, what official changes to processes, procedures, or policies should your institution make to address over-involved or ‘helicopter’ parents?” Two themes emerged and are listed in Table 22.

Table 22

Emergent themes for focus group question #9 – In your opinion, what official changes to processes, procedures, or policies should your institution make to address over-involved or “helicopter” parents?

Theme

Administrative support for colleagues and consistent documentation processes

Appropriate sharing of information with parents

Responses fell into either of two similar, yet distinct, categories related to sharing information; either to 1) administrators should provide support for student services employees and institute consistent documentation processes or 2) institute appropriate communication with parents and students. With respect to the first recommended change in college processes, procedures or policies, comments reflected the need to develop a college: “Culture of support/understanding for fellow staff members who are dealing with helicopter parents,” “Provide support for staff decisions,” and “Front line employees need to be trained on how to deal with angry customers.” When it came to processes, procedures or policies for parents, sample statements included: “I think an official parent orientation would be helpful,” “If we could communicate with parents earlier that would be beneficial,” and the college “...needed to provide more information geared to the parents.”

Qualitative Analysis of Survey Responses

Question 9

The first on-line survey item that required an open-ended, qualitative response that pertained to research question 3 was question #9, which asked: “How have your interactions with parents changed in the last five years?” As shown in Table 23,

responses were almost equally distributed between four emergent themes as well as a grouping of miscellaneous answers.

Table 23

Emergent themes for survey question #9 – How have your interactions with parents changed in the last five years?

Theme

Parents more demanding, abrasive, etc.

Employees must be more assertive & get student involved

Increased time spent dealing with each parent

More common or frequent interactions with parents

Some sample statements that emphasized the behavioral aspect of interacting with parents included: “Parents are more demanding and get grumpy if you cannot give them what they want,” “I have noticed that parents who do speak for their kids tend to be more abrasive and demanding,” and “Parents are more demanding and get angry when they don’t get an answer they like.”

Several respondents stated they had to be more assertive with over-involved parents in order to get the student involved in the conversation about the student’s education. Some comments illustrating this concept were: “Sometimes I must tell the parent that I will be addressing my questions to the student and I must set boundaries in a more direct way with over-involved parents,” “I instruct parents where to sit and if the parent starts talking for the student I stop them and ask the student to tell me in their own words,” and “I will immediately stop parents from speaking on behalf of students, fully explain *FERPA*, and ask parents to leave if I sense differing agendas or if parents continue to attempt to co-opt meetings.”

Another group of respondents mentioned the increased amount of time they spent with parents: “I am much more careful in how I deal with parents in terms of the information I give. I assume they will not remember what I said, or will remember only part of it. Therefore, I document my conversations,” and “I have had to spend more time explaining to parents that I will not register their child for classes without advising the student directly. I also hear ‘Well if I’m paying for it, I deserve to have my student...’ much more often.”

The remaining emergent theme concerned the increased frequency of parental interactions experienced by the respondents: “More parents want to make decisions for students who are 20+ years of age,” “Parents have become more and more involved with their children, partly to do with the advancement of technology,” and “Working more with home-schooled students whose parents are accustomed to making all of the educational decisions for their children.” All three of these aspects of increased parental interactions were discussed in the section titled “The Influences of Sociological Trends on Higher Education” in Chapter II of this dissertation.

Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data

Survey questions 21 – 24

In response to a set of questions pertaining to the presence or absence of a college philosophy related to working with parents (Table 24), a minority of survey respondents (27%) stated their college had a clearly established philosophy regarding its relationship with parents. Of these respondents, 28% felt the college philosophy had been adopted by all campus offices. Similarly, a small portion of the participants (16%) indicated their

college student services incident protocols had been updated to include parental notification of student issues (injury, illness, behavior, etc.).

Table 24

Response percentages for survey questions #21 - 24.

Survey Question	% of Responses
21 – Does your college have a clearly established philosophy about its relationship with parents?	
No	37
Yes	28
Not sure	35
22 – Has the philosophy been adopted by ALL campus offices?	
No	19 ^a
Yes	31 ^a
Not sure	50 ^a
23 – If the philosophy has not been adopted by all campus offices, to what extent has it been adopted?	
Slightly (up to 33%)	43 ^a
Moderately (34 – 67%)	36 ^a
Significantly (more than 67%)	21 ^a
24 – In the last 5 years, have your student services incident protocols been updated to include parental notification (ex: student injuries, illness, behavioral issues, accidents, etc.)?	
No	27
Yes	16
Not sure	57

^aOnly includes responses from the minority who answered “yes” to question 21.

Survey question 26

Respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of various skills needed to manage parental concerns (Table 25). The answer choices consisted of “not important,” “somewhat important,” “important,” and “very important” with responses having an ordinal value of one through four, respectively.

Table 25

Response frequencies^a and combined percentage^b of “important” and “very important” for survey question #26 – Rate the following skills needed to manage parental concerns.

Skill	Not Important (1)	Somewhat Important (2)	Important (3)	Very Important (4)	% of Important and Very Important
Listening	1	0	19	34	98
Oral communication	1	1	20	30	96
Conflict management	1	2	27	23	94
Patience	1	3	19	30	92
Counseling	0	4	27	21	92
Leadership	1	3	27	21	92
Crisis management	3	4	19	26	86
Problem solving	1	7	18	27	85
Public relations	1	7	27	19	85
Written communication	1	8	22	21	83
Mediation	3	6	26	19	83
Administrative	1	12	24	17	76
Technology	2	12	24	15	74

^aFrequency totals do not always equal 58 since respondents were not forced to answer each question.

^bCombined percentage of “important” and “very important” responses for each skill.

All skills were identified as being “important” to “very important” with “listening,” “oral communication,” and “patience” as the most highly-rated skills. Table 25 contains the response frequencies and the combined percentage of “important” and “very important” responses for each of the identified skills.

Survey questions 27 through 31

When asked to rate their comfort level in their own ability to handle all types of parental interactions (Table 26), 81% of the survey respondents said they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” in their ability. However, only 76% of survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” when interacting with over-involved parents. Despite this difference in staff comfort level, only 26% of respondents indicated their division/department provided training sessions for staff on how to manage parental concerns. For those respondents whose colleges did not provide staff training on how to manage parental concerns, nearly two-thirds (66%) indicated such training should be provided. However, only about one-third (36%) said they thought it was time for a policy change at their institution in response to a change in the level of parental involvement.

Table 26

Response percentages for survey questions #27 – 31

Survey Question	% of Responses
27 – How comfortable do you feel in your abilities to handle all types of parental interactions?	
Somewhat comfortable	16
Comfortable	50
Very comfortable	34

28 – How comfortable do you feel in your abilities to handle over-involved parents?	
Somewhat comfortable	21
Comfortable	47
Very comfortable	32
29 – Does your division/department provide training for staff on how to manage parent concerns?	
No	52
Yes	27
Not sure	21
30 – Do you think your division/department should provide training for staff on how to manage parent concerns?	
No	10
Yes	66
Not sure	24
31 – Do you think that it is time for a policy change at your institution in response to a change in parental interaction?	
No	21
Yes	38
Not sure	41

Triangulation of Focus Group Responses and Survey Data

The colleges had made few policy and/or official procedural changes in response to the increase of parental over-involvement, and 61% of the survey respondents did not think it was time to implement any policy changes. However, student services staff members had adjusted their manner of working with parents in order to function in this

changing environment. While staff members (76% of survey respondents and nearly one-half of focus group participants) were generally comfortable when working with parents, 66% of survey respondents and almost one-half of focus group participants indicated training was necessary on how to communicate appropriate information to parents.

Research Question 4 - How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?

Qualitative Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Focus group question 3

Question number three was “What do you (a) like and (b) what concerns do you have related to the current level of parental involvement with their community college student?” Two themes emerged and are listed in Table 27. There was one theme for what the participants liked, and another theme for what concerned them about parental involvement at their colleges.

Table 27

Emergent themes for focus group question #3 – What do you (a) like and (b) what concerns do you have related to the current level of parental involvement with their community college student?

Theme

Supportive and respectful of boundaries

Controlling and not respectful of boundaries

College staff members were appreciative of parents who were supportive of their children and respectful of boundaries. As indicated by the participants at one of the colleges, they: “...liked it when parents pushed/encouraged students to be independent.” At another college, it was stated: “It’s great to see parents and students come to information events together.”

Participants were also concerned about parents who are controlling of their students and not respectful of boundaries. One participant stated: "I like that they do care for their students, but it irritates me when they do everything for the student" and another one noted "Some parental involvement is good, but boundaries are key."

Focus group question 9

Question number nine was "In your opinion, what official changes to processes, procedures, or policies should your institution make to address over-involved or 'helicopter' parents?" Two themes emerged, which are listed in Table 22 and the corresponding narrative of the research question #3 results section: 1) administrative support for colleagues and consistent documentation processes and 2) appropriate sharing of information with parents.

Focus group question 10

Question number 10 was: "How would you describe the ideal collaborative role between the community college and parents?" One theme emerged that was expressed in nearly all of the responses – a partnership that focused on parental and staff support of student maturation and responsibility.

Comments provided in response to this question included: "It needs to be a partnership between parents and college staff," "Parents should have a 'healthy participation' in the process," and "Recognizing that everyone – parents and student services – are here to support the student." One participant took a slightly different approach, stating: "Parents should come in as information seekers; not as transaction drivers. They need to be supportive of the student and not attempt to be the decision

makers.” However, that response also demonstrated a desire for parents and staff to work together to support student success.

Focus group questions 11 and 12

Due to the amount of time the focus group participants spent on the previous questions, Questions 11 and 12 were discussed together and there was no differentiation made between the responses to the two questions other than when there was a cost factor associated with the recommendation. Question 11 asked: “If you had to select the single most important thing **your college** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with ‘helicopter parents,’ what would it be?” Question 12 asked the very similar question: “If you had to select the single most important thing **the VCCS** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with ‘helicopter parents,’ what would it be?” If implementation of the suggestion would be cost-prohibitive for an individual college to sustain, then it was expressed that such a measure should be supported system-wide by the VCCS Central Office. Or, if the policies were to be implemented across the system, the VCCS Central Office should be responsible for providing financial and professional development support. Otherwise, each college should be allowed to implement changes at the local college level.

Collectively, two themes emerged in response to the combined question “If you had to select the single most important thing **your college (or the VCCS)** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with ‘helicopter parents,’ what would it be?” Table 28 details the two emergent themes. The investigators agreed on the classification of all responses to this question and, therefore, had a “perfect” Cohen’s Kappa value of 1.00 for the responses to this question.

Table 28

Emergent themes for focus group questions #11 & 12 – If you had to select the single most important thing your college (or the VCCS) could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with ‘helicopter parents,’ what would it be?

Theme

Provide staff training on what information can be shared with parents, and provide appropriate informational materials to the parents

Make parents welcome and provide an environment where they are invited to participate

Almost half of the responses referenced training staff and sharing informational materials with parents. Comments ranged from: “Train staff in what they can/cannot share with parents” to “The more information parents get the better; we need to do a better job communicating.” The other emergent theme related to inviting parental participation and included statements such as: “...invite parents and make them feel welcome,” “Give them a place to put their energies; we don’t give them a chance to participate,” and “It would be good to have a ‘meet and greet’ so that parents and college personnel can connect.”

Qualitative Analysis of Survey Responses

Survey question 32

The first open-ended survey question that required a qualitative answer pertinent to research question #4 was question #32, which asked: “How would you describe the ideal collaborative relationship between the college and the parents of community college students?” Three themes emerged in response to this question with the idea of a “partnership” receiving the majority of responses, followed by “parents respecting college staff,” and a few responses focused on students deciding when to seek out involvement of parents and/or staff. Table 29 provides the detailed results for this

question. The investigators had an “almost perfect” Cohen’s Kappa value of 0.87 for the responses to this question.

Table 29

Emergent themes for survey question #32 - How would you describe the ideal collaborative relationship between the college and the parents of community college students?

Theme
Partnership between parents, college staff, & students
Parents respecting staff and their responsibilities
Parents only involved when students desire

The primary emergent theme was one of partnership between all interested parties of the parent/student/college staff relationship. One respondent described an ideal three-part relationship between parents, students, and college staff in these words: “Parents assist their students at home and even accompany their student to talk with college officials, but the student should do the talking and take responsibility.” Other responses were simpler, but similar: “Cooperative but working towards student independence” and “Parents are supportive on the sidelines, but the student takes ownership for all aspects of his/her education.” The second emergent theme centered on parents respecting college staff members and their responsibilities. Supporting comments included: “For the parents to understand that we have to adhere to certain laws and regulations and for them to respect the staff” and “The ideal collaborative relationship would be an understanding that we both want what is best for the student.” The remaining emergent theme focused on putting the student’s wishes first: “Due to the age of students, it is important that students decide on the parents’ involvement” and “The ideal relationship should be guided by the student. Do they want their parents involved?”

Survey question 33

The next open-ended question that required a qualitative answer was question #33, which asked: “What is the single most important thing that **your college** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with over-involved parents while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement?” Three themes emerged in response to this question as detailed in Table 30. The investigators had an “almost perfect” Cohen’s Kappa value of 0.90 for the responses to this question.

Table 30

*Emergent themes for survey question #33 - What is the single most important thing that **your college** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with over-involved parents while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement?*

Theme

Train staff and help communication with parents

Emphasize to parents that students are responsible

Make parents welcome and let them participate

Nearly half of the respondents suggested that training for staff was the most important thing their college administration could/should provide to help student services personnel in their interactions with over-involved parents. The suggested training centered on the type of information that could/should be shared with parents and how to deal with demanding parents. As stated by the survey respondents: “I think there should be a ‘parent of a new student packet’ which addresses (parental) concerns and their role in the academic process” and “I think training staff on how to interact with parents and how to verbally explain and set boundaries to over-involved parents” would be helpful. Another respondent suggested a different aspect of this concern by stating: “Staff and

faculty training, and backing up those staff and faculty when they are following policy” is needed.

The majority of other responses to this question focused on working collaboratively with parents to emphasize that students need to be responsible for their educational concerns. Some illustrative comments made by survey respondents were: “Address parental concerns while emphasizing that students must be responsible for their own decisions, actions, and education,” and “Educate staff on how to encourage students to advocate for themselves without being rude to the parent.”

The remaining emergent theme to this question involved making parents feel welcome and allowing them to participate in their child’s collegiate experience. Examples of relevant statements from the respondents included: “I think having parental education throughout the student’s college experience would help quite a bit. This way, the parents can feel involved without micromanaging the student” and “Begin at the high school level to educate parents and set expectations of the college experience so students and parents understand shared processes and individual responsibilities.”

Survey question 34

Question 34 asked for a slightly different response, which was: “What is the single most important thing **the VCCS** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with over-involved parents while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement?” The majority of the responses to this question were quite similar to the responses made to the preceding question, but the remaining responses resulted in the emergence of one additional theme, as detailed in Table 31. The investigators had an “almost perfect” Cohen’s Kappa of 0.87 for the responses to this question.

Table 31

*Emergent themes for survey question #34 - What is the single most important thing **the VCCS** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with over-involved parents while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement?*

Theme

Train staff and help communication with parents

Help stress to parents that students are responsible

Provide central location/person to work with parents

Again, nearly half of the respondents suggested training was the most important thing that could be provided to help staff with communicating and dealing with over-involved parents. They also sounded a note of caution regarding the value of system-wide, versus local, efforts: "The VCCS could provide ideas for parental education programs and even materials we can distribute to parents. I don't think having the VCCS too involved would be helpful since every college and every parental interaction is unique." Other related comments included: "Provide training and guidance for college staff members," "Have a book of policies for parents to follow regarding their child's enrollment in college," and "Work with high school counselors to explain to parents about over-involvement." The remaining two emergent themes were: "help enforce to parents that students are responsible" and "provide a central location/person to work with parents." Some responses related to student responsibility were: "Carry out the initiative from the top, with senior administration implementing effective techniques for parents to be a part of their child's education without hindering their growth," "Establish policies that support students advocating for themselves," and "Let [parents] know we are there to help out in any way, but also at the same time let them know that their children should take responsibility." Statements regarding the establishment of a central location/person

with the responsibility of dealing with over-involved parents were: “Each school needs a contact person to...provide parents an opportunity to be a part of their child’s college experience in a controlled, helpful manner,” and “Designate an office for parent issues and concerns.”

Triangulation of Focus Group Responses and Survey Data

A large majority of focus group participants and survey respondents agreed that an ideal relationship consisted of a partnership in which parents and college staff respected each other’s roles and worked together to support the development of student maturation and responsibility. Staff also stated training would be helpful for communicating exactly what information they could share with parents and how staff could make parents feel welcome and involved in their child’s educational experience.

Summary

Focus group data responses from 41 participants consisted of verbal discussion and some written comments, which were collected for later analysis. Much rich information was analyzed for common, “emergent” themes using the content analysis method. A second investigator was utilized to determine consistency of this analysis for qualitative questions where there were written responses from each of the study participants. The purpose of using a second investigator in the qualitative data analysis was to more accurately code data. According to Stemler (2001), inter-rater reliability may be calculated using Cohen’s Kappa.

Qualitative and quantitative data were derived from the responses to an on-line survey (Appendix F) distributed to all student services employees at the six subject colleges who had not participated in the focus group activity. Completing the survey was

voluntary as was participation in the focus group. The survey instrument consisted of both forced choice (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions that aligned with the focus group questions (see Table 7).

Demographic information was also collected and used to verify that the focus group and survey populations were similar in composition, and representative of the survey population. There were 58 survey respondents (see Table 6). Simple descriptive statistics (response frequencies and percentages) were used to analyze quantitative survey responses, and content analysis was used on qualitative responses. This type of analysis permitted the comparison of both quantitative and qualitative survey response data with qualitative focus group data via the triangulation process.

Qualitative data from both the focus group and survey responses and quantitative data from the survey responses were grouped according to their relevance to each of the research questions (Table 7). The results were then compared for similarities, with convergent responses – from two different sub-populations of the study population, two different types of data, and two different data collection methods - enhancing validity to conclusions.

Research Question 1 - How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?

- A term used to describe a parent/guardian who is over-involved with the academic and psychosocial development of their child to the extent that the child is not able to carry out academic tasks or make independent decisions, regardless of the child's age. (Appendices I and J contain verbatim transcriptions of all focus group

participants' and survey respondents' contributions to this comprehensive definition.)

Research Question 2 - To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges?

- Parental over-involvement is widely evident across Virginia's community colleges.
- None of the participants in this study were unfamiliar with the concept, nor had they escaped interactions with over-involved parents.
- Student services employees were also concerned about the large amount of time they had to spend dealing with helicopter parents.

Research Question 3 - How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?

- There have been very few policy or procedural actions taken at the colleges in response to the increased level of parental over-involvement.
- There has been some employee training at some colleges.
- Study participants suggested that their colleges (and the VCCS) could help by providing information for parents and training for employees on how to work with helicopter parents.

Research Question 4 - How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?

- A collaborative rather than an adversarial relationship should exist between the college, student, and parent.

- Parents and college employees should work together to support student academic success and psychosocial development.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine if parental over-involvement, expressed at four-year institutions, was also found to be a concern at Virginia's community colleges. Peer-reviewed literature on parental over-involvement was almost non-existent when this study began, and much of what had been written on the topic was found in the popular press. In the time interval between the start and completion of this study, there have been a few studies reported in the literature (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2013; Parrott, 2010; Vianden and Ruder, 2012) that utilized university students as subjects. Of these recent studies, only Parrott (2010) examined parental over-involvement from the perspective of community college students, their parents, and community college employees. The bulk of the available literature examined parental involvement at the levels of compulsory education or four-year higher education institutions. Only one recent study was found that used community college students as subjects (Moore, 2009).

The current study utilized both quantitative and qualitative forms of data. A focus group session and an on-line survey were conducted at each of the six colleges which were chosen to be representative of the 23 Virginia community colleges. Only student services employees were involved in the study and they could only participate in one or the other of the two activities. Focus group and survey participation was completely voluntary and confidentiality was observed by the researcher and stressed to all recipients. Results of the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study were compared

using the *convergence model variant of triangulation* to answer the four research questions listed below:

1. How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?
2. To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges?
3. How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?
4. How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?

Significant findings are discussed below as related to the literature and to practical applications for student services employees at the college and/or Virginia Community College System (VCCS) level. Limitations of the study are presented, suggestions for further study on this topic are made, and implications for college/VCCS policy and practice are addressed.

Triangulation Results

Triangulation is a comparative analysis of data. “Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (Patton, 2002, p. 247). The purpose of triangulation is to find areas of convergence in multiple data sets, which implies increased credibility of the findings. This study used the *convergence model variant* of triangulation, which consisted of separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on the same phenomenon, followed by comparing and

contrasting the results. The purpose of this model was to arrive at well-substantiated and valid conclusions about the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Of the four basic types of triangulation studies 1) data, 2) investigator, 3) theory, and 4) methodological (Patton, 2002), this study utilized three of the four approaches. Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained and analyzed, two investigators evaluated the qualitative data to ensure validity and reliability, and two methods of data collection were employed – focus group discussion and on-line survey. Only the theoretical type of triangulation was not utilized in this study.

Regardless of the college characteristics (size, community type, and campus nature – see Table 1) and geographic location, all student services employees were familiar with the concept of, and had experience with, over-involved parents. Involvement was seen as positive, but when involvement became controlling and detrimental to the growth and development of responsibility skills on the part of the young adult student, the controlling parent was seen as exhibiting negative behavior. The literature stated basically the same thing, although the literature (Merriman, 2006; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2013; Parrott, 2010; Somers, 2007; VanFossen, 2005; Vianden and Ruder, 2012; Young, 2006) only addressed compulsory or four-year higher education institutions.

The Research Questions

Research question 1 - How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?

Regardless of the method of data collection (focus group discussion or on-line survey), the type of data (qualitative or quantitative), or the actual question asked of the

study participants, the over-riding theme that emerged from this study was that parental over-involvement was viewed negatively. Over-involved, or “helicopter” parents were repeatedly described by study participants at all six colleges as controlling, demanding, intrusive, hovering, pushy, obsessive, annoying, inappropriate, over-protective, detrimental, harmful, smothering, etc.

Other comments about over-involved parents included:

- Assumes responsibility for decision-making
- Will not permit or forces their child to make decisions for his/her own future
- Takes the lead in meetings
- Has desire to take care of all logistics; more common among parents who have attended college
- Either extreme behavior - too involved or not involved at all
- Having an involved parent is fine for the first semester, but after, the student should develop some independence.

It is doubtful that anyone would find fault with loving and supportive parents of young adult college students. There is, however, a limit. When the parent takes the lead in meetings, registration, dropping classes, or posing as the student on email, a dangerous precedent has been set. At best the student is immature and lacks problem-solving skills. At worst the student may feel incapable of handling tasks on his/her own. Careful consideration and synthesis of all of the words, phrases, and definitions offered by the focus group participants and survey respondents has allowed the researcher to derive the following operational definition of an over-involved, or “helicopter” parent.

Helicopter parent, operational definition:

A term used to describe a parent/guardian who is over-involved with the academic and psychosocial development of their child to the extent that the child is not able to carry out academic tasks or make independent decisions, regardless of the child's age.

Research question #2 - To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges?

The results of this study support the expectation stated by this author in Chapter I: "...since more millennial students see the community college as their first or second postsecondary institution of choice, the concerns regarding the increasing number of over-involved parents as expressed by student affairs professionals at four-year institutions (Merriman, 2006; VanFossen, 2005), also existed at community colleges." Parental over-involvement is highly prevalent across Virginia's community colleges. None of the participants in this study were unfamiliar with the concept, nor had they escaped interactions with over-involved parents. A definite majority of focus group participants and survey respondents indicated they personally had encountered parental over-involvement at their college. Therefore, as previously noted, although there is a scarcity of published research-based information on the presence or absence of helicopter parents at the community college level, this study shows helicopter parents are as common at Virginia's community colleges as they are at senior, residential institutions as indicated by Merriman (2006), Parrott (2010), Somers (2007), VanFossen (2005), and Young (2006).

The student services employees were primarily concerned about the negative effects helicopter parents had on their students (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001). Secondly, as expected based on the literature (Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Merriman, 2006; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), student services employees were also concerned about the large amount of time they had to spend dealing with helicopter parents. Not only was helicopter parenting a familiar topic, but as one vice president said: “The amount of time spent with just one helicopter parent is excessive.” It would not matter if an employee was dealing with one or five, an exorbitant amount of time is spent that could (and probably should) be spent with other students, faculty, departments, and duties. Often if the VP or President asks the parent to follow a proper chain of command, the request is ignored; the parent plans to start at the top. Rather than randomly sending parents from one department to another, colleges should identify, and provide training for, one or more individuals at each campus to serve as the resource person(s) for parental contact and concerns (Kennedy, 2009).

Research question #3 - How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?

When faced with the reality of having to work with over-involved parents, colleges could choose to respond in a variety of ways such as: refuse to interact with parents at all (Jacobson, 2003; Wills, 2005), provide literature designed specifically for parents, create parent-focused orientation sessions (Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Wills, 2005), provide training to employees on how to work collaboratively with parents, work one-on-one with advising/counseling parents, or revise college procedures and/or policies for employees to follow when interacting with parents (Hunter, 2006; Kennedy, 2009).

As stated by Kennedy (2009, p. 17), "...the institutional relationship with parents is too important to alienate them." Ignoring and/or refusing to work with over-involved parents is neither a practical solution nor is it advised. Not only would this be bad manners, there would be repercussions when the helicopter parent complained to the college president or other upper level administrator (as they are known to do). Parents, educators, agencies, and legislators agree that parental involvement in education is vital (Perna & Titus, 2005; Sil, 2007). Therefore, working with parents is the only feasible response, and that is what the colleges have done.

Kennedy suggests that colleges need to develop policies because "In the absence of clear policies, many parents are defining their role in higher education in the same ways they did during their child's primary and secondary school years" (2009, p. 22). However, based on the results of this study, Virginia's community colleges have made few policy and/or official procedural changes in response to the increase of parental over-involvement. It is not surprising that a majority of college employees are leery of "policy" changes unless they involve legal issues such as *FERPA*. Study participants believe that when new problems arise they should be addressed immediately rather than through the development of new policies. They are also quite adamant that each community college campus is unique. Like people, local communities have their own personalities. This was emphasized by employees who worked at multi-campus colleges. Therefore, student services employees have to adjust their manner of working with parents in order to respond to the parental concerns in their specific community.

Parental involvement has been shown to influence all aspects of a child's development (Hoover, Dempsey, & Sandler, 1995; Melby & Conger, 1996), but it

appears to be the *level* of parental involvement, either too much or too little, is at the root of concern expressed by student affairs personnel (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; White, 2005). The two primary concerns of parental over-involvement expressed by student affairs practitioners and college administrators are (a) the legal ramifications associated with the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974* (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) and (b) the student's inability to develop autonomy (Bauer, C. J., 2005; Coburn & Woodward, 2001). As stated by Vianden & Ruder (2012, p. 63) "Despite knowing that parents affect student experiences, institutions often miss opportunities to involve parents." Student services employees have learned to spend more time working with parents in an attempt to help parents provide appropriate support for student success.

As noted by Howe (2010), when it comes to dealing with helicopter parents and other more aggressive "stealth fighter parents," schools need to "Assume no trust. Market to them, spell out the rules, and start relationships early" (p. 20). Student services employees have learned to spend more time working with parents in an attempt to help parents provide appropriate support for student success. Some colleges have developed parent-focused literature, web pages, and orientation sessions to harness parental energies in the proper direction. While study participants were generally comfortable when working with parents, roughly half of survey respondents and focus group participants indicated training was necessary on how to communicate appropriate information to parents. Colleges are still figuring out how to best work with over-involved parents, and there is no "one size fits all" solution. Each college will have to determine what approaches work best for their student/parent population in their own community.

However, the goal should be to develop a collaborative approach in which parents and college employees work together to support student academic success and the development of each student's personal growth and maturity.

College employees who participated in this study did not have a problem with their college responding to over-involved parents, providing materials, or conducting workshops. They did, however, feel that student services employees should be a part of the process, and that either the college or the VCCS should pay for producing and distributing informational materials for parents, training/workshops for college employees, and any proposed policy changes. Funding for these efforts should not come from individual college student services departmental budgets.

Research question #4 - How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?

There is little doubt that parents are part of the equation, as they should be, for community college students. A collaborative rather than an adversarial relationship should exist between the college, student, and parent. It should not cause a feeling of dread when parents are seen accompanying students.

Although it was widely known that students of all ages attended community colleges, it was also evident that there has been an increase in the traditional-aged (17 – 24 year-old) students. The community college is no longer seen as an option of last resort, but often as an option of first choice. With an increase in dual enrollment, many high school students are earning community college credit which ultimately saves time and money. Articulation agreements strengthen partnerships between two- and four-year institutions. On the surface it was (and still is) a win-win for all concerned. However, as

with any great idea or implementation, negative aspects also exist. With more traditional-aged students come parents who cannot, or refuse to, let go of their child. According to Bers and Galowich (2002), parents expect to not only be involved with their child's decision to attend a community college, but also in the advising and registration processes. In addition, research by Somers, Haines, and Keene (2006) found that second to reduced tuition costs, parents indicated that an interest in continued involvement in their child's postsecondary education experience was a primary reason why they suggested community college enrollment to their children.

Based on the results of this study, an ideal collaboration with parents consists of a partnership between parents and college employees. In this ideal arrangement parents and college employees respect each other's roles in the partnership and work together to support the development of student maturation and responsibility. See Appendix K for a matrix of a collaborative model between parents and student services employees to provide student support.

Significant Findings

Regardless of the type of college (single- or multi-campus), geographic region (north, south, east, or west), type of community setting (rural, suburban, or urban), or the gender or race of the study participants, all student services employees were familiar with the term "helicopter parent." They described the term using negative words or phrases, and all had memorable experiences interacting with helicopter parents.

In addition, while several colleges have provided some training for staff on how to work with over-involved parents, study participants expressed concerns that they should be doing more to work collaboratively with parents in an effort to improve student

success and maturation. More training and informational materials would be welcomed by Virginia's community college student services employees.

Limitations

This study only took place in the Commonwealth of Virginia and, therefore, may not be applicable to other states. A variety of criteria were used, but what was reported in Virginia may not necessarily apply to other states. A significant amount of control did exist with the study, but that does not mean it can be applied universally. By design, only student services employees participated in the study. Their experiences may not be reflective of all community college employees such as faculty, other staff members, and administrators who are not directly involved in student services operations.

Focus group discussions were conducted using a common script to regulate the flow of each session, but the use of five different co-moderators may have resulted in slightly different discussion dynamics. The principle investigator interpreted each co-moderator's reports and notes, so there may be some bias introduced into the data analysis. Therefore, a second investigator was used to verify coding of data collected from each focus group to help control for that bias.

Suggestions for Further Study

In order to determine whether or not the results of this research are universal, community college employees from other departments (including faculty) should also be studied regarding their interactions with, and perceptions of, helicopter parents. Community colleges in or outside of Virginia should be surveyed to determine whether or not they have developed any policies or procedural changes directly in response to the pervasiveness of helicopter parents and their interference with the academic and

psychosocial development of their adult-aged college students. That is, colleges should be studied to determine if the actions of helicopter parents have led to any permanent changes in the ways that college employees interact with parents. Is *in loco parentis* back in force as a result of the influence of over-involved parents, as maintained by Hirsch & Goldberger (2010)? Additionally, community college students and their parents should have an opportunity to provide input on this topic through similar research methods.

Implications for the Colleges and/or the VCCS

Community college employees should be aware that parental over-involvement is not only a possibility, but a likely behavior to be encountered. Getting “ahead of the curve” by providing training for employees and an orientation for parents (complete with educational and policy materials) are possible and necessary. Relying on the student’s “word of mouth” or the college’s website is simply not good enough. Having a person/office designated specifically to field questions from parents, would also be helpful. The college president and administrative team should meet to develop ways to support and implement such a position or office that is designed specifically to work with parents or other family members of students. This office should be located in the student services department in order to integrate this function into the student advising process.

Change and the need for training was evident, but participants were reluctant to have any official policy change(s) made, especially if their own departments had to bear the cost of personnel time and effort required to undergo training or to pay for bringing in outside consultants/trainers. Perhaps the colleges or the VCCS could provide funding for the consultants/trainers hired to conduct employee training and/or provide a meal or refreshments when training occurs.

Training is needed for college employees on: a) how to work cooperatively with parents or other family members, b) what information may legally be shared with parents or other family members, and c) how to encourage students to become their own advocates so they take responsibility for their own educational decisions. Certainly the training would need to be personalized to each campus and not just the college. Employees at each campus should be consulted prior to any training to determine their specific needs, focus, and concerns. Study participants also suggested that training and informational materials should be created for parents and provided (i.e. paid for) by the VCCS to ensure that a consistent message was disseminated system-wide to college employees and parents.

Currently, the *VCCS Policy Manual* does not contain any policies related to working with students' parents or other family members with the exception of specifying "directory information," which is not protected by *FERPA*. Therefore, it is recommended that the VCCS develop one or more policies that establish a requirement for college student services personnel to receive training on working collaboratively with parents to support student academic and psychosocial growth and development, as suggested by Kennedy (2009). The required training must include information on *FERPA* and exactly what information may be shared with others without documented student permission. Additionally, strategies should be provided to college employees for working with students on developing their independence from parental control.

Conclusions

As a result of conducting this research the following conclusions were drawn:

- The lack of peer-reviewed research publications available at the start of this study (Somers, P. & Settle, J., 2010a, 2010b) has not changed much over the time span of this study. As with previous articles, three recent studies by Padilla-Walker & Nelson (2013), Parrott, J. D. (2010), and Vianden & Ruder (2012) utilized university students as subjects. Only one recent study was found that used community college students as subjects (Moore, N. A., 2009). However, according to recent academic literature on the issue, helicopter parents are still a factor to be reckoned with at four-year educational institutions (Howe, 2013) and, as this study showed, they are also widely present at Virginia's community colleges,
- An operational definition of "helicopter parent" was developed by the researcher:

A term used to describe a parent/guardian who is over-involved with the academic and psychosocial development of their child to the extent the child is not able to carry out academic tasks or make independent decisions, regardless of the child's age.
- It was determined that student services employees in Virginia's community colleges were not only very familiar with the term "helicopter parent" but they also had almost universal, memorable experiences dealing with such individuals.
- Very few colleges had provided training for their employees on how to work with over-involved parents. Staff members were left to use their own judgment when dealing with difficult parents often without administrative support. Training for employees on how to work with over-involved parents is needed at the college and system level. Therefore, it is recommended that the VCCS develop one or

more policies that establish a requirement for community college student services personnel to receive training on working collaboratively with parents to support student academic and psychosocial growth and development. The required training must include information on *FERPA* and exactly what information may be shared with others without documented student permission. Additionally, strategies should be provided to college employees for working with students on developing their independence from parental control.

- It was suggested that colleges designate an individual or department to serve as the primary contact for family members. Ronen (2011) made similar recommendations regarding the creation of a single point of contact for parents and providing training for college employees on how to respond to family members' concerns.
- As defined by study participants, the ideal collaboration between parents and college employees involves both groups working together to support student growth, development, and academic achievement. The author has developed a Collaborative Model of Student Support (Appendix K) to operationalize this concept. This model is based on years of practice as a licensed professional counselor, college counselor, contributions by participants in this study, and a review of the literature on student support and development.

As stated throughout this dissertation, specialized training for parents, employees, and students is needed. Student services employees have done a good job adapting to working with helicopter parents despite a general lack of training for this task, but they would all benefit from specific training/guidance on how to work collaboratively

with over-involved family members and under-involved students. Training should also lead to administrative support, consistency of message, and common practices by which college employees interact with students and their family members. While helicopter parents are a pervasive presence in Virginia's community colleges, there are ways to capitalize on their interest and enthusiasm in order to provide appropriate support for their college-aged students.

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Appendix A
Email Correspondence to College Presidents

Dear Dr. _____:

In a few days, you will receive by mail my formal request for your permission to contact members of the Student Affairs division at your institution for their participation in a mixed methods research study. I am a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University (ODU). Your participation and support would be most appreciated as I complete the final step in earning my Ph.D. The title of my dissertation is: *Helicopter Parents of Community College Students: How Community College Professionals Operationally Define and Address This Phenomenon*.

I have selected six institutions that represent the various types of community colleges throughout the VCCS and _____ Community College is one of the six I wish very much to include in my research. I would like to invite members of your Student Services departments to either complete an on-line survey or participate in a focus group, which I would like to conduct at your college on a mutually convenient date this September.

You have my assurance that (1) the time needed to complete the survey or participate in the focus group will be kept to a minimum, (2) I will work with a college contact person to coordinate a convenient time to visit your college, (3) survey participants will remain anonymous, (4) only aggregate data will be reported in my dissertation, and (5) the results will be shared with you. My study has already received approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee of ODU.

For your convenience, a postage paid card will be included in the letter you will receive or you are certainly welcome to contact me through email if you prefer. I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Respectfully,

Helen C. Hightower, M.A.Ed., LPC, NCC
Professional Counselor
John Tyler Community College
ODU Doctoral Candidate
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Appendix B
Letter to College Presidents

[date]

_____ Community College

Address

City, State, Zip code

Dear Dr. _____:

As a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University, I am seeking your permission to survey the members of the Student Services departments at your institution and to conduct a small focus group of six to eight members within those departments. The purpose of my dissertation, entitled *"Helicopter Parents of Community College Students: How Community College Professionals Operationally Define and Address This Phenomenon,"* is to fill a significant void in the literature by providing research on the timely issue of "helicopter parents" as it relates to community colleges; an area of higher education that has not been previously included in the limited research. I have selected six VCCS colleges and _____ Community College is one I wish to include in my study.

With ten years of service in the VCCS, and a member of Student Services myself, I am very sensitive to the "crunch times" of fall registration and therefore would like to meet your staff in the month of September after the drop/add period. You have my assurance that I will (1) keep to a minimum the amount of time needed for your employees to complete the survey or participate in the focus group (2) only report aggregate data in my dissertation, (3) keep survey respondents anonymous, and (4) share the results of my study with you. My study has already received approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee of ODU.

May I have your permission to survey and conduct a focus group at your institution with members of the Student Services departments? Enclosed is a postage-paid card for your convenience in responding to this request. If you have further questions, please contact me or my dissertation chair at the contact information below. I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Respectfully,

Helen C. Hightower, M.A.Ed., LPC, NCC
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Appendix C
Email Correspondence to College Vice-Presidents and/or Deans

Dear _____:

Recently, I received permission from your president to include your college in the research I am conducting toward my dissertation. I am a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University. The title of my dissertation is: *Helicopter Parents of Community College Students: How Community College Professionals Operationally Define and Address This Phenomenon*. The purpose of my study is to fill a significant void in the literature by conducting research on the subject of “helicopter parents” from the perspective of community college Student Services staff and administrators. My research includes inviting members of Student Services departments at your institution to either complete an on-line survey or participate in an on-site focus group (from six to eight members will be needed).

Would you be willing to assist me in the following areas: (1) encourage your staff to participate in my study; (2) provide me with a current list of names, email addresses, and job titles/departments of employees in the following departments: enrollment management services, counseling, academic advising, financial aid, placement testing, tutoring services, disability services, student activities, and student services in general; and (3) select a contact person with whom I may coordinate logistics for the focus group activity? You have my assurance that participation time will be kept to a minimum (approximately 15 minutes for survey completion and 60-90 minutes for the focus group activity). I hope to schedule the focus group on a mutually convenient date in September that doesn't conflict with your “crunch period” of fall registration. As a member of Student Services myself, I am most sensitive to this time period.

If you have further questions, please contact me or my dissertation chair, Dr. Dennis Gregory, at the contact information below. My study has already received approval from the Human Subjects Review Committee of ODU. I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Respectfully,

Helen C. Hightower, M.A.Ed., LPC, NCC
Professional Counselor
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Appendix D

Email Correspondence to Student Services Study Participants

Dear Colleagues:

Recently, I received permission from your president to include your college in the research I am conducting toward my dissertation entitled: *Helicopter Parents of Community College Students: How Community College Professionals Operationally Define and Address This Phenomenon*. To date, the only research that has taken place on parental over-involvement or “helicopter parents” and college-aged students has occurred at senior institutions; creating a significant void in the segment of higher education that currently educates over half of all undergraduate students – community colleges. I wish to study this phenomenon from your perspective as Student Services professionals.

Only six representative community colleges within the VCCS will be included in this study. My mixed methods research involves inviting all members of the Student Services departments at your institution to either complete an on-line survey or to participate in an on-site focus group (six-eight participants are needed). I hope to visit your college during September as I too, am a member of Student Services and am well aware of how busy it will be before long.

Your input and support would be most appreciated as I complete the final step in earning my Ph.D. You have my assurance that: (1) the time to complete the survey or to participate in the focus group will be kept to a minimum, (2) survey participants will remain anonymous, (3), focus group comments will be confidential, and (4) only aggregate data will be reported in my dissertation.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you wish to be a part of this study, please contact your vice president by _____ and indicate your preference for participating in the focus group activity or completing an on-line survey. If you have questions, please contact me or my dissertation chair, Dr. Dennis Gregory. I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Respectfully,

Helen C. Hightower, M.A.Ed., LPC, NCC
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Appendix E
Request for Participation and Internet Link to Survey Instrument
(Email Attachment)

PARENTAL OVER-INVOLVEMENT AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine if parental over-involvement is occurring at Virginia community colleges and if so, how it is being addressed. The objective of this study is to provide community college professionals with a framework to identify, address, and revise, their policies and methods for responding to parental involvement.

SURVEY INFORMATION

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Helen Hightower - investigator, under the direction of Dennis Gregory, Ed.D., faculty advisor from the Darden College of Education of Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. The results of the research study will contribute to Helen Hightower's dissertation toward her Ph.D. in Community College Leadership.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you volunteer to be included in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this survey, we ask you to access the designated link provided at the end of this attachment. The survey contains multiple-choice, Likert-type scale ranking, and open-ended questions which should take about 15 minutes to complete.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts with participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The limited research that has been conducted to address the concern of parental over-involvement has occurred at the research university level of higher education. This is a study to identify the extent of parental over-involvement in six representative institutions of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). To date, no such research has been conducted at the community college level. By addressing the research questions of the study, it is believed that community college student services staff and administrators could benefit from the results by developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of “helicopter parents” and by identifying potential means of improving collaborative relationships with parents.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There is no guarantee you will receive payment or financial compensation for participating in this study; however, you will have the opportunity to enter a drawing for a \$25 Visa gift card (two per college).

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. The investigator will be the only one with access to the data and will keep it secure on a password-protected computer. Ms. Hightower is a Professional Counselor with 22 years of experience; including 13 years in community college education.

Only aggregated data will be reported. You will be asked to provide demographic information such as your institution, position title, years of community college and/or related experience, and supervisory departmental responsibilities,

however, neither individuals nor their affiliation with a specific institution will be identified in the dissertation. This will allow data to be grouped based on respondents' demographic information and/or institution size (small, medium or large), geographic location (urban, suburban or rural), and college type (single or multi-campus status).

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose whether or not to participate. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Also, you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

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If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact:

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To access the survey instrument, click here: <https://survey.vccs.edu/ss/wsb.dll/s/41g744>

Your participation is crucial to this study and is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Appendix F
Survey Instrument

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. I agree to the terms and conditions of this study as outlined in the disclaimer.
 - ☐ Yes, I agree to the terms and will participate.
 - ☐ No, I choose not to participate in this study.

Colleagues at senior institutions have expressed concern about parental over-involvement. The following questions focus on parental over-involvement from the community college perspective.

Working Definition of Parental Over-Involvement

2. In one word or a short phrase, how would you **define** *parental over-involvement*?

3. What **behaviors** do you see that illustrate parental over-involvement at community colleges? (Select all that apply.)
 - ☐ Parent speaking on behalf of the student when the student is present.
 - ☐ Parent organizing and keeping track of all forms regarding enrollment, registration, and curricular materials.
 - ☐ Parent demanding preferential treatment or a waiver of college policy on behalf of the student.

- ☐ Parent demanding the disclosure of confidential information protected by *FERPA*.
- ☐ Parent performing the processes of enrollment and registration.
- ☐ Parent sitting in the chair closest to the counselor, advisor, or administrator.
- ☐ Parent taking charge or the lead in asking questions.
- ☐ Parent calling on behalf of the student because the student is working or otherwise unable to come to campus to handle a process.
- ☐ Parent emailing on behalf of the student.
- ☐ Parent emailing or calling to complain about a situation or concern.
- ☐ Parent demanding to sign the release form to allow disclosure of student information.
- ☐ No such behavior observed.
- ☐ Other behaviors you have observed.

Extent of the Problem of Parental Over-Involvement

4. Over the last five years, to what extent has your office seen a change in *parental involvement* with respect to their student's education?
- ☐ Large increase (between 50% and 100%)
 - ☐ Slight increase (between 5% and 49%)

- ☐ No noticeable change
- ☐ Slight decrease (between 5% and 49%)
- ☐ Large decrease (between 50% and 100%)

5. Based on your experience, to what extent has the level of *parental over-involvement* increased at community colleges?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Slightly
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Significantly

6. Have you worked in a similar position at (an)other: (Check all that apply.)

Community college(s)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Four-year institution(s) of higher education? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Governmental agency(ies)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. To what extent did you notice a change in the level of parental involvement at any previous post-secondary or agency job you held?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Slightly
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Significantly

8. Have your interactions with parents changed in the last five years?

- ☐ Yes – continue to question 9.
- ☐ No – skip to question 10.

9. If so, please explain how your parental interactions have changed.

10. At your institution, which office(s) have parents contacted first? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Office of the President
- ☐ Office of the Vice President for Academics
- ☐ Office of the Dean for Academics
- ☐ Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs/Services
- ☐ Office of the Dean for Student Affairs/Services
- ☐ Enrollment Services/Admissions and Records Office
- ☐ Counseling Office
- ☐ Financial Aid Office
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

11. How often do parents contact you for each of the following? (Check only one for each row.)

- ☐ General information: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never
- ☐ Disability services: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never
- ☐ Seeking referral: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never

- ☐ Concern for their student: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never
- ☐ To complain: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never
- ☐ Seeking advice: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never
- ☐ To resolve an issue: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never
- ☐ To handle college processes for the student (i.e. register/enroll/etc.) – with
the student present: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___
Never
- ☐ To handle college processes for the student (i.e. register/enroll/etc.) – on
behalf of the student: ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely
___ Never
- ☐ Other: _____ ___ Often ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely

12. Approximately, how many interactions have you had with parents over the
last two-week period?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1 – 2 interactions
- ☐ 3 – 5 interactions
- ☐ 6 – 8 interactions
- ☐ 9 – 10 interactions
- ☐ More than 10 interactions

13. How would you rate the level of concern regarding parental over-involvement at your institution?

___ Serious concern ___ Increasing concern ___ Minor concern ___ Not a concern

Community College and Departmental Responses to Parental Over-Involvement

14. Does your college offer any programs specifically for parents?

☐ Yes – please provide title(s) of the program(s):

☐ No

15. Does your college have an office which has responsibility for parental relations?

☐ Yes – continue to question 18.

☐ No – skip to question 21.

16. The office which has responsibility for parental relations is a part of:

☐ Student affairs/student services.

☐ Institutional advancement.

☐ Other (please specify) _____

17. The office which has responsibility for parental relations has been created in the last ___ year(s):

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5 or more

18. How many staff members work in the office that has responsibility for parental relations?
- ☐ 1
 - ☐ 2
 - ☐ 3 or more
19. Has your institution made *policy* changes to address parental involvement?
- ___ Yes ___ No ___ Not sure
20. If so, to what extent have the policy changes been helpful in dealing with parental involvement?
- ☐ Not at all
 - ☐ Slightly
 - ☐ Moderately
 - ☐ Significantly
21. Does your college have a clearly established *philosophy* about its relationship with parents?
- ___ Yes ___ No
- ___ Not sure
22. If yes, has the philosophy been adopted by ALL campus offices?
- ___ Yes ___ No ___ Not sure
23. If the philosophy has not been adopted by all campus offices, to what extent has it been adopted?
- ☐ Slightly (up to 33%)
 - ☐ Moderately (34 – 67%)
 - ☐ Significantly (more than 67%)

24. In the last five years, have your student services incident protocols been updated to include parental notification? (Ex: student injuries, illness, behavioral issues, accidents, etc.) ___ Yes ___
 No ___Not sure
25. If you answered “yes” to question 25, please briefly explain how parents are addressed in your student services incident protocols:

Staff Skills and Individual Responses to Parental Over-Involvement

26. Rate the following SKILLS needed to manage parent concerns: (Check only one for each row.)
- a. Administrative
 ___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not important
- b. Conflict management
 ___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not important
- c. Counseling

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

d. Crisis management

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

e. Leadership

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

f. Listening

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

g. Mediation

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

h. Oral communication

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

i. Patience

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

j. Problem solving

___Very important ___ Important ___Somewhat important ___Not
important

k. Public relations

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not
important

l. Technology

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not
important

m. Written communication

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not
important

n. Other: _____

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not
important

27. How comfortable do you feel in your abilities to handle all types of parental interactions?

☐ Very comfortable ☐ Comfortable ☐ Somewhat comfortable ☐ Not
comfortable

28. How comfortable do you feel in your abilities to handle over-involved parents?

☐ Very comfortable ☐ Comfortable ☐ Somewhat comfortable ☐ Not
comfortable

29. Does your division/department provide training for staff on how to manage parent concerns?

☐ Not sure

☐ Yes ☐ No

30. If not, do you think your institution/department should provide training for staff on how to manage parental concerns? ___ Yes ___ No
___ Not applicable
31. Do you think it is time for a policy change at your institution in response to a change in parental interactions? ___ Yes ___ No
___ Not sure

Ideal Collaborative Relationship with Parents

32. How would you describe the ideal collaborative relationship between the college and the parents of community college students?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
33. What is the single most important thing that **your college** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with over-involved parents while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
34. What is the single most important thing the **VCCS** could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with over-involved parents while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement?

Operational Definition of Parental Over-Involvement or “Helicopter Parents”

35. In one or two sentences, how would you define the term “helicopter parents” as it relates to community college students?

Respondent Demographics

36. The name of my institution is: _____.

37. What is your job title? _____

38. How many years have you worked at a community college?

☐ Less than 3 years

☐ 3 – 6 years

☐ 7 – 10 years

☐ 11 – 14 years

☐ 15 years or more

39. How many years have you worked in your current position?

☐ Less than 3 years

☐ 3 – 6 years

- ☐ 7 – 10 years
- ☐ 11 – 14 years
- ☐ 15 years or more

40. Do you wish to add any information in response to this survey?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY!

Appendix G
Demographic Questions for Focus Group Participants
(requested prior to scheduled activity)

PARENTAL OVER-INVOLVEMENT AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine if parental over-involvement is occurring at Virginia community colleges and if so, how it is being addressed. The objective of this study is to provide community college professionals with a framework to identify, address, and revise, their policies and methods for responding to parental involvement.

STUDY INFORMATION

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Helen Hightower - investigator, under the direction of Dennis Gregory, Ed.D., faculty advisor from the Darden College of Education of Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. The results of the research study will contribute to Helen Hightower's dissertation toward her Ph.D. in Community College Leadership.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you volunteer to be included in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will take part in a focus group activity that will take between 60 – 90 minutes. Refreshments or lunch will be provided by the researcher depending on the scheduled time.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts with participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The limited research that has been conducted to address the concern of parental over-involvement has occurred at the research university level of higher education. This is a study to identify the extent of parental over-involvement in six representative institutions of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). To date, no such research has been conducted at the community college level. By addressing the research questions of the study, it is believed that community college student services staff and administrators could benefit from the results by developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of “helicopter parents” and by identifying potential means of improving collaborative relationships with parents.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive payment or financial compensation for participating in this study; however, you may enter a drawing for a door prize (one per college).

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. The investigator will be the only one with access to the data and will keep it secure on a password-protected computer. Ms. Hightower is a Professional Counselor with 22 years of experience; including 13 years in community college education. The co-moderators of the focus groups are also doctoral students in the Community College Leadership program of Old Dominion University who have completed their coursework, and are at the candidacy stage of their program.

Only aggregated data will be reported. You will be asked to provide demographic information such as your institution, position title, years of community

college and/or related experience, and supervisory departmental responsibilities, however, neither individuals nor their affiliation with a specific institution will be identified in the dissertation. This will allow data to be grouped based on respondents' demographic information and/or institution size (small, medium or large), geographic location (urban, suburban or rural), and college type (single or multi-campus status).

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose whether or not to participate. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Also, you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

INFORMED CONSENT

1. I agree to the terms and conditions of this study as outlined in the above disclaimer.
 - ☐ Yes, I agree to the terms and will participate.
 - ☐ No, I choose not to participate in this study.
2. The name of my institution is: _____.
3. What is your job title? _____
4. How many years have you worked at a community college?
 - ☐ Less than 3 years
 - ☐ 3 – 6 years
 - ☐ 7 – 10 years
 - ☐ 11 – 14 years
 - ☐ 15 years or more
5. How many years have you worked in your current position?

- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ 3 – 6 years
- ☐ 7 – 10 years
- ☐ 11 – 14 years
- ☐ 15 years or more

6. What other positions have you held at the community college?

7. Have you held similar positions in institutions other than community colleges?

If so, what type of institution?

8. Which departments, if any, presently report to you? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ None
- ☐ Academic divisions
- ☐ Admissions and enrollment services
- ☐ Career coaches
- ☐ Counseling services
- ☐ Disability services
- ☐ Dual enrollment
- ☐ Financial aid

- ☐ International student services
- ☐ Parent programs
- ☐ Student activities
- ☐ Testing centers
- ☐ Tutoring center

Appendix H Moderator's Guide

Parental Over-Involvement and Virginia's Community Colleges Fall 2009

The four major research questions that will be addressed are:

5. *How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges define parental over-involvement?*
6. *To what extent does parental over-involvement exist in Virginia community colleges?*
7. *How do Virginia community colleges respond to over-involved parents?*
8. *How do student services staff and administrators in Virginia community colleges describe an ideal collaboration with parents?*

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

- A. The purpose of this focus group is to explore your perceptions as staff members working in a community college in characterizing various aspects of parental involvement. Specifically, this focus group will explore how you as community college student services professionals (a) assess the extent to which parental over-involvement exists in community colleges, (b) identify the skills needed in working with parents and how community colleges respond to over-involved parents, (c) describe an ideal collaboration with parents, and (d) define parental over-involvement.
- B. Moderator introductions: "My name is _____ and this is _____. Our job is to facilitate your discussion, record your responses, and keep time to make sure that we thoroughly cover ALL of the topics."
- C. Group Guidelines
 1. Moderator should speak less than 1/3 of the time.
 2. While one moderator facilitates the discussion the other will be taking notes for analysis BUT NO NAMES will be recorded.
 3. Respect the confidentiality of each participant by not quoting or attributing comments to anyone outside of the group.
 4. All should participate.
 5. Discussion and disagreement are encouraged; no need to reach consensus.
 6. No right or wrong opinions; just different points of view.
 7. Only one person should speak at a time -- no side conversations.
 8. Please be open and honest about your attitudes, opinions, and experiences -- we want to hear it all.

D. Audio recording for data analyses

1. **ONLY** the research team will have access to the tapes.
2. Will be used **ONLY** for data analyses.
3. **ONLY** group results will be reported; no individuals will be identified, however we may use some direct quotations to emphasize a particular point.
4. **Confidentiality**: Please keep confidential all information that others share with the group when you leave.

E. "Do you have any questions or concerns about this process? If not, then let's begin!"

II. Introduction of Participants and Warm-up (5-10 minutes)

- A. First name, job title and length of time in current position, and the participant's current discipline or department.
- B. **Warm-up question** – Ask everyone to answer the following question on the yellow 4x6 card. Make sure *everyone responds* to this item AND *record responses* on newsprint. (Note: 4x6 cards facilitate analysis while newsprint facilitates group processing.)

In a word or phrase, how would you characterize the relationship between today's college students and their parents?

III. Topic Discussion (60-72 minutes; 15-18 minutes per topic)

First, we would like to explore the **involvement of parents** in their child's collegiate experience.

1. *In your opinion, how involved are parents currently in their child's collegiate experience?*
2. *What behaviors do you perceive to be characteristic of parental involvement in a student's collegiate experience?*
3. *What do you (a) like and (b) what concerns do you have related to the current level of parental involvement with their community college student?*

Next, we would like to explore the **extent of over-involved parents at community colleges** and how they are perceived by the staff and administrators.

4. *Based on your experiences, to what extent does parental over-involvement exist at your community college?*

5. *If you are familiar with the term, to what extent are “helicopter parents” a concern at your college?*

Ask everyone to answer the following question on the blue 4x6 card. Make sure everyone responds to this item. Then ask the participants to share their responses.

6. *What is your interpretation or definition of “helicopter parents?”*

Next, we would like to address **staff skills and community college responses**.

7. *How comfortable do you feel in responding to parent concerns?*

8. *What skills are needed to work with “helicopter parents?”*

9. *In your opinion, what official changes to processes, procedures or policies **should** your institution make to address over-involved or “helicopter parents?”*

Next, we would like to discuss your definition of the **“ideal collaboration”** with parents of community college students.

10. *How would you describe the ideal collaborative role between the community college and parents?*

11. *If you had to select the **single most important thing** your college could/should do to minimize the negative effects of interacting with “helicopter parents” while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement, what would it be?*

12. *In your opinion, what is the **single most important thing** that the **VCCS** could/should do to assist colleges to minimize the negative effects of interacting with “helicopter parents” while maximizing the positive benefits of parental involvement?*

IV. **Wrap-up (10-15 minutes)**

Finally, how would you now *operationally* define parental over-involvement or **“helicopter parents?”**

The participants can use the items recorded on the newsprint from previous questions, or they can identify something different. Ask everyone to briefly record his or her definition on the violet 4x6 cards. Make sure **everyone responds** to this item. (4x6 cards facilitate analysis while newsprint facilitates group processing.)

THANK YOU!!!

Appendix I

Focus Group Operational Definitions of Over-Involved or “Helicopter” Parents

- One whose actions and involvement prevent and paralyze a student from healthy self-advocacy, decision-making, and problem solving and becomes a barrier to the student’s achievement.
- Parents that prevent students from making decisions and problem solving effectively.
- A helicopter parent is a parent that acts on the behalf of their child to their detriment. This causes them not to develop in healthy adult ways.
- Parents that do not execute appropriate boundaries.
- A parent that inhibits the independence and growth of the student.
- For parents, it's similar to learning how to drive a car with a clutch and knowing you're doing it right when your car (student) doesn't shut down.
- A sense of caring about their child-student.
- Those parents unwilling to participate in the academic side of their students career and only the financial side.
- They are an under-utilized force that can and could be used to motivate and ensure student success.
- They are concerned parents who just need a place to be involved in their child's education.
- Parents that want to see their students achieve in life but really want them to take the "bull by the horns." Parents want involvement but not run the show.
- Over-involved: Don’t involve student or do work for them when it comes to student services or academic side of things.
- A parent who takes over by asking questions, competing forms or ‘micro-managing’ the student as if they were still in high school.
- A parent that overshadows a child in a given process.
- Making sure procedures are followed that allow both parents, administrators, and students support in the academic process.

- Helicopter parents are over-involved with the academic and psychosocial development of their students, often manifested through constant contact with the student, the student's professors, and staff members of the college.
- Parents speaking for the students during advising sessions, registering students for classes, calling and making inquiry seeking to do for the student what the student should be learning on their own through interacting with the college and its staff.
- Helicopter parents operate under the guise of protector, defender – the one whose personal image is attached to their students' success in life!
- A parent that has a need/desire to assist their student succeed, often times to the detriment of the student's independence.
- Parents who want to conduct all the business for their child; they talk for them; ask questions for them and even make decisions for them.
- A parent who "hovers over" their child, usually to protect them & assure that things go well, but in the process limits the child's ability to function independently. Reflects a need for education & reassurance.
- A helicopter parent is protective and involved but can be educated to learn to let student fly solo and succeed on their own.
- Prior to today I saw helicopter parent as a negative term. Now I see a helicopter parent as a positive influence on a student or child for the most part. A better alternative than no parent.
- After our conversation, is there a difference in how you would define Helicopter parenting to those who may never have heard that term?
- Helicopter parent is protective & involved, and can be educated to learn how to advocate appropriately
- VCCS can help play role in educating parents.
- A helicopter parent is one that hovers - is overinvolved with their child's education.
- Parents who do not trust that their child will follow thru or get things done.
- Parents who are overstepping their relationship with their child with whom I need to support the student and respect the parent and stay within my job role and expertise using patience, empathy and accurate appropriate knowledge.

- A parent who is involved in the student's academic business to the point where the student is not able to make independent decisions, or carry out academic tasks themselves.
- Parents who answers questions directed at their child before the child can answer it. Parents who make decisions that should be made by their child.
- Parent who expects to be involved to a high degree with their child's life, including asking and answering questions as well as decision making on behalf of the adult student.
- Parents that want to take charge of their child's educational choices.
- A parent who takes control of the financial aid and/or the academic plans of a student.
- Parents who are involved in their child's higher educational experience, whether it be a positive or a negative involvement.
- Parents who do not let the child make his/her own decisions. They (parents) make all the contacts for the student.
- They are the ones that answer all the questions. They don't let the student do anything for themselves. Over protectors. They just want what is best for their child they just go about it wrong.
- Over involvement by parents to make sure student is okay. Can be seen as over protective.
- Parent who is unable to allow their child to make decisions. Parent refuses to let go and let the son or daughter assume the role of an adult.

Appendix J

Survey Respondent Definitions of “Helicopter Parents”

- Parents that do everything for their student.
- Hovering over their child and not allowing them to be responsible.
- Hovering and controlling.
- A parent who is overly and continuously involved in the educational process of their child to the extent it is detrimental to the child.
- Helicopter parents "hover" around to ensure success of students but should be able to let students become more independent in the educational process.
- Helicopter parents are parents who still treat their adult children as minors by insisting they be a part of decision-making and all communications.
- Parents who have thwarted in their child a healthy developmental progression from dependence to independence.
- The helicopter parent wants to hover and still oversee what the child to doing.
- They talk and make the decisions for the student.
- Parents that become overly involved in their children life by not letting their kids have a say about what they feel is important in their education.
- Typically a parent who is concerned, wants what is best for their child and is consumer savvy....they are paying us to provide a service.
- Helicopter parents "shadow" the student preventing them to experience the full effect a community college can provide.
- A parent who thinks it is their job to run the student's life, even after the student is of age, by making decisions of programs, classes, schedules, etc. that the student should be deciding. Parents try to 'rescue' the student .
- Because we are not residential, the helicopter parent is more the over-functioning type who is doing things for the student that the student should be doing for herself. I can only imagine what these parents do in the four-year environment.
- The children of these parents have not been taught responsibility for their choices, or time management; this lack of adult skills carries over into their college life,

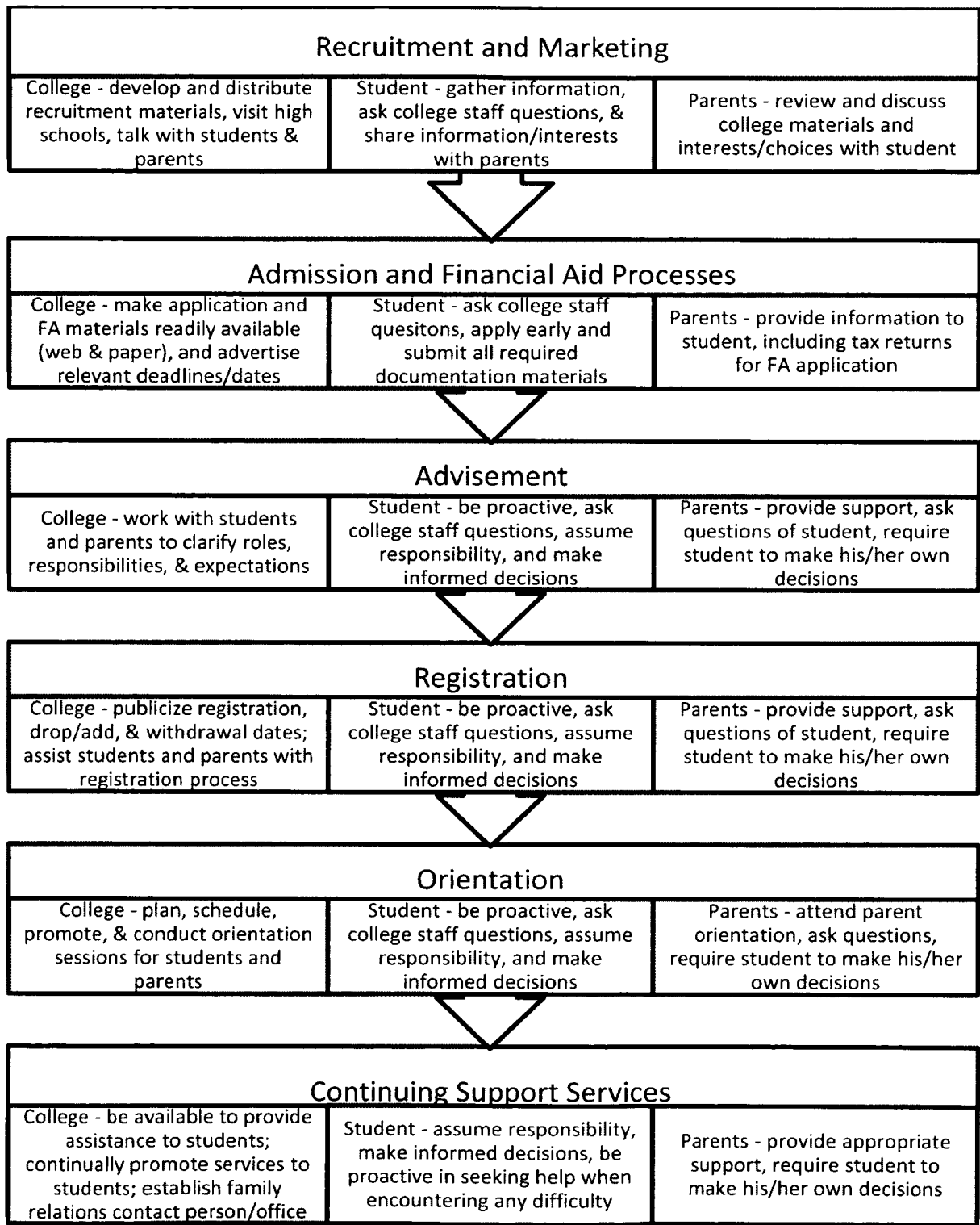
affecting their chances to succeed in college and beyond.

- Parents who are over-involved to the extent that it extremely reduces (or even eliminates) the student's autonomy and responsibility for decisions, actions, etc.
- Parents who continue to hover over their student after they have first engage with the college.
- A parent who tries so hard to protect and advocate for their child so much they end up enabling that child.
- Parents that have determined the precise course their child's education would take and don't allow the student to make decisions or take responsibility for their own actions.
- Concerned but unfamiliar with college process or concerned and think they know what is best for their child and are resistant to allow student independence. An unwillingness to, or fear of, trust professional educators to be the "go to" person for their child.
- They are sometimes rude, demanding, overbearing and overwhelming, and have a strong sense of entitlement. They think their student is the only student.
- Parents who stunt the development of their children by performing tasks for the student because the parent has a fear of the child failing. Parents who are unwilling to allow students to demonstrate their ability to be competent.
- Parents who are unable to observe and only "help" if students request it.
- Includes inappropriate interaction "on behalf" of the adult child under the guise of helping or assisting them. Can include communicating, enrolling, registering, advising, making decisions, coordinating, and organizing the student academic program and life.
- Emotional crowding so that the student cannot spread his or her own wings.
- Helicopter parents are often uncomfortable with putting their trust in the student to be responsible. They still see the student as a child who "needs them." Helicopter (parents) are often pushy and demand special treatment for their student which sets a poor example.
- A parent who takes on the responsibilities of his or her student and does not allow or require the student do anything to take on these responsibilities for themselves. A parent who hovers over their student and their student's educational contacts.

- A parent that demands that he/she be present at meeting their child and faculty/staff member, enrolls their child in college for them, speaks on their behalf, and is uncooperative.
- Parents over seeing day to day needs of students that ultimately stunts or delay the growth. This may be disabling a student to mature into independent beings that can be responsible and held accountable for their own lives and decisions.
- "Helicopter parents," are parents who feel that have an obligation and a need to be involved in their child's education however; their involvement hinders the students growth by revoking the ability to be a self-advocate and responsible student.
- A parent who cares deeply about their child's academic success however does not understand their boundaries.
- Frustrated parents trying to guide students who may not be ready or desiring to attend college; or perhaps those parents trying to guide students who were not admitted to the college or university of their choice; they want to control the situation.
- Parent who interferes with the student's ability to engage with and learn from their college experiences.
- The parent who doesn't know how to cut the apron strings and allow the student to become independently self-sufficient in managing the affairs of their college educational experience. Let Go and Let them Grow!!!
- Parent looking out for and protecting interests of young student. These circumstances manifest themselves where large numbers of students make it difficult to offer a personalized service to students; community college processes are geared to the masses.
- Parents who are doing things for their students that the students should be doing (i.e.: deciding what courses to take, applying to college, setting passwords).
- The parent who walks in doing all of the talking, even stating the student's name, stating why the student is there and telling the student what to do and how to act. The student stands there looking either overwhelmed or angry.
- The parent that does not let their student make decisions.
- Parents who take the leadership role in the student's education instead of allowing students to get acclimated in the higher education process. Refusing to let students to be independent learners.

- A distraction.
- Hovering over their students not allowing them to manage important personal and professional decisions.
- Well traditionally they are parents that hover. But in a community college we have an overwhelming number of students that are first generation. I feel that part of the job is educating the parents as well and parents that want to be involved should be.
- Demanding, Belligerent, Controlling.
- A parent that doesn't think their child is capable of making to 'right' choice so they must make decisions for them.
- Helicopter parents take on all of the responsibility for their child's transactions with the college.

Appendix K
Collaborative Student Support Model for Student Services Employees,
Students, & Parents



Additional details on next two pages.

Appendix K
**Collaborative Student Support Model for Student Services Employees,
 Students, & Parents (continued)**

Student Support Event	College Employee Contribution	Student Contribution	Parental Contribution
1) Recruitment and Marketing	Develop and distribute college informational materials: - post on the college website - share with high school counselors - share with career coaches in the high schools - attend college day events - college employees visit high schools to recruit students - college staff conduct financial aid workshops and participate in Super Saturday events.	- Visit with high school counselors and career coaches. - Attend college recruitment/information events. - Take home materials and discuss with parents. - Bring parents to Super Saturday event so all are aware of financial aid opportunities and application requirements. - Do research to learn about college choices, expectations, application requirements, etc.	- Read college recruitment/informational materials brought home by the student. - Discuss with student the steps involved in going to, and being successful at, college. - Attend Super Saturday event with the student so all are aware of financial aid opportunities and application requirements (such as parental tax returns to verify eligibility). - Encourage student to do research to learn about college choices, expectations, application requirements, etc. and discuss what s/he learns.
2) Application for Admission and Financial Aid	Make sure the college application and financial aid application (FAFSA) and information is readily available: - on the college website - at area high schools - at all college locations and offices Clearly post all deadlines associated with admission, financial aid, and class registration, etc. Notify student of admission status ASAP following receipt of the application and supporting materials (if any).	- Apply early and submit final high school transcript plus transcripts of any college work (if applicable). - Be sure to submit all application materials BEFORE the advertised application deadlines. - Apply for federal financial aid (FAFSA) and local college scholarships.	- Provide emotional support and provide any necessary documents (such as parental tax returns for financial aid and local college scholarship consideration). - Encourage student to apply BEFORE college deadlines.
3) Advisement	- Work with student and parents to clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations for all parties going forward. - Help student to select program of study and appropriate courses based on program & placement test results.	Be proactive; assume responsibility for their educational pathway, make informed decisions, and know that they are personally responsible for their academic endeavors.	Be supportive of their student and require the student take responsibility for their own academic success and personal development.

Appendix K
**Collaborative Student Support Model for Student Services Employees,
 Students, & Parents (continued)**

Student Support Event	College Employee Contribution	Student Contribution	Parental Contribution
4) Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publicize registration and drop/add dates. - Assist students with the registration process, including providing financial aid information. 	Assume responsibility for knowing and adhering to registration and drop/add dates. Register for classes on time. Ask college staff for help as needed.	Be supportive of their student and require the student take responsibility for their own academic success and personal development.
5) Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan, schedule, promote, and conduct new student orientation for students AND parents (some information should be specific for each audience). - Remind students, that as adults, they are personally responsible for their own academic success and personal development (not college employees or parents). - Encourage parents to be appropriately engaged in the educational process of their student (i.e. "do's and don'ts"). - Provide literature and materials outlining all available services for students and their parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assume responsibility for knowing and adhering to college processes and expectations for appropriate behavior. - Be aware of the variety of services available to students and how to access those services. - Be proactive in seeking help from college employees as soon as necessary - don't delay seeking help. 	Be supportive of their student and require the student take responsibility for their own academic success and personal development.
6) Continuing Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be available for assistance as advertised/promoted. - Make opportunities to promote services to students whenever possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assume responsibility for knowing and adhering to college processes and expectations for appropriate behavior. - Be aware of the variety of services available to students and how to access those services. - Be proactive in seeking help from college employees as soon as necessary - don't delay seeking help. 	Be supportive of their student and allow/make the student take responsibility for their own academic success and personal development.