CHAPMAN, ELIZABETH A. (BETSY), Ph.D. A Quantitative Examination of the Ways Parents and Families Interact with their Students' College Following Campus-Sponsored Engagement Opportunities: Events, E-newsletters, and a Daily Blog. (2019)
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Historically, a college or university's main constituencies of interest were students, faculty, staff, and alumni (Bok, 2013; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). In recent years, parents and families have claimed their own place in the university ecosystem: "the student-parent-institution dynamic has evolved from the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, with parents expecting the university to take care of their children, to this new situation where parents have a direct relationship with the university" (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 220). Colleges have responded to families' desire for engagement by creating parent and family relations offices that provide programs and services for families (Savage & Petree, 2017). However, little empirical research exists to measure the relationship between parents and families and their student's college, or the ways in which parent and family engagement could impact behaviors of interest to the school.

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which parents and families interact with their students' college following institutionally-sponsored engagement opportunities, and the resulting behavioral outcomes or attitudes that follow. This study used two-step cluster analysis to classify undergraduate parents and families (N = 1,001) at Wilson University (a pseudonym), the Southern, mid-sized university that was the focus of this study. Clustering of families was based on three types of school-sponsored engagement: attendance at Orientation (one-time engagement), readership of a monthly

e-newsletter (semi-regular engagement), and readership of the Family 411 (pseudonym) daily blog (continuous engagement). Specific outcomes that were measured were parent and family intervention with administrators on the student's behalf, sense of satisfaction with the institution, and charitable giving. This study draws upon Uses and gratifications theory and Organization-Public Relations (OPR) in examining family behaviors.

Findings from the study show that there were statistically significant differences in intervention, satisfaction, and charitable giving among six clusters of Wilson University families. Post hoc pairwise comparisons revealed that those differences tended to be concentrated among clusters who had sizeable differences in their consumption of the Family 411 blog, or who did or did not attend Orientation. Overall, the families who were most engaged via Orientation attendance, blog reading, and e-newsletter reading intervened less, were more satisfied with the school, and made more charitable contributions. Further research is needed to determine how demographic differences between clusters may have contributed to those family behaviors.

This study contributes to the literature by being the first known empirical study that investigates how a daily blog relates to the behavior of college parents and families, and begins to fill a gap in the knowledge of how to use blogs as a family engagement tool. Implications for practice include encouraging family relations offices to consider adding blogs to their family engagement offerings to create continuous engagement and using cluster analysis to understand the unique needs and behaviors of segments of their parent and family population.

A QUANTITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE WAYS PARENTS AND FAMILIES INTERACT WITH THEIR STUDENTS' COLLEGE FOLLOWING CAMPUS-SPONSORED ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES: EVENTS, E-NEWSLETTERS, AND A DAILY BLOG

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

To Jeremy, in whom my universe begins and ends,
and to Ian, the brightest star in that universe

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For much of American higher education history, the primary constituencies of a college or university were students, faculty, staff, and alumni; parents and families were generally not considered as having a significant role to play in college life, aside from paying tuition (Bok, 2013; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). However, since the early 2000s, parents and families have been increasingly interested in being involved with their students' college experiences, demanding attention from and interaction with their students' schools: "the student-parent-institution dynamic has evolved from the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, with parents expecting the university to take care of their children, to this new situation where parents have a direct relationship with the university" (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 220).

As colleges have seen a rise in families' desire to be involved, they have worked to engage them in ways that are productive and appropriate to their students' development (Sax & Wartman, 2010; Wartman & Savage, 2008; White, 2005). To meet families' needs, many colleges have responded by forming parent and family relations offices or having staff dedicated to working with families. In fact, there has been a proliferation of parent and family relations offices at 4-year American colleges over the past 20 years: in the 2017 National Survey of College and University Parent/Family Programs, Savage and Petree (2017) found that 70% of respondent schools formed their

parent and family relations office since 2000. This reflects the "intentional paradigm shift toward promoting collaborative relationships between parents and institutions" (Lowe & Dotterer, 2017, p. 34).

Parent and family relations offices serve as a means of engaging college parents and families by providing programs, communications, and other guidance to help families understand their students' college journey and to foster student success (Coburn, 2006; Cutright, 2008; Kennedy, 2009; Ward-Roof, Heaton, & Coburn, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Typical services provided by these offices include family orientation, parent and family weekend, e-newsletters, social media, and more. These communication channels allow colleges to share important messages with families and influence familial behavior, including how to support their students, when to intervene (and when not to), how students can access needed resources, and more (Alfaro, 2018; Amienyi, 2014; Price, 2008).

Despite the fact that the majority of colleges have a parent and family relations office and offer specific programming and communication for college families, there is a distinct lack of research on the impact of these programs. Little is known about how institutional communications and programming affects parent and family behaviors or the relationship that college families have with their students' institutions. Because colleges are spending both staff time and precious financial resources to equip family relations offices, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services offered to families and see whether they produce positive outcomes for parents, students, and/or the institution.

This chapter discusses the context of parent and family engagement with their students' colleges, and focuses on Millennial student parenting, orientation to involvement, Organization-Public Relations (OPRs), and behaviors of presumptive interest to colleges. Next, the conceptual framework is explored. This leads to the purpose of this study, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms. Finally, the chapter concludes with the assumptions and limitations for this study, as well as researcher positionality.

Parenting and Orientation to Involvement

There are many reasons why parents and family members have become more involved in their students' college experiences. One is that the parents of Millennials—people born between 1982 and 1995—parent differently than previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Before discussing Millennial parenting, it is important to mention briefly Gen Z, or the students born from around 1996 to 2009 (Sladek & Grabinger, 2018). Gen Z is the current generation of college students and a distinct generation, but preliminary research suggests "they will bear more similarity to than difference from the Millennials" (Rue, 2018, p. 11). Some of the shared characteristics between parents and families of Gen Z and Millennials include an increased focus on and intentional closeness with their children, anxiety about security and their children's future, and overprotection (McQueen, 2015; Rue, 2018; Sladek & Grabinger, 2018). The notion of close relationships is illustrated by the fact that "eighty-eight percent of those in Generation Z feel they are extremely close to their parents, whom they see as playing roles more like friends and advisers" (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 89). Generation Z sees "their parents

and family as sources of emotional and financial support" and "more than half take the opinions and perspectives of their family into consideration in their decision making" (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 89).

Seemiller and Grace (2016) assert that "Generation Z parents are important institutional stakeholders. Building strong relationships with Generation Z will also include building strong relationships with their parents and families" (p. 194). This stance represents a continuation of the ways that colleges engaged Millennial families through the creation of parent and family relations offices. So even though Gen Z is the newest generation of college students, we must look to the research on the parents and families of Millennials to help us understand how campuses responded to families' desire for involvement with their students' college experience.

Parents and family members of Millennials are characterized as having been more child-focused, spending more time with their children than previous generations of parents, and fostering close and intimate communications with their children (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennial families were preoccupied with a multitude of worries, particularly about safety and whether their child was developing at the right pace. Families were also anxious about their children's futures (Wartman & Savage, 2008). This anxiety led some parents and families to take an active, almost curatorial role in shaping their children's experiences; parents focused particularly on activities that would enhance their children's college applications (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

But Millennial parents are just one example of orientation to involvement. There is also a wide range of identities that can have an impact on familial involvement. For

example, a family's ethnicity may predispose them to involvement: "parental support has consistently emerged as an important contributor of Mexican origin students' academic outcomes in the K-12 system and the transition into college" (Alfaro, 2018, p. 3). In fact,

> parent and family involvement/engagement among first-generation and students of color represents an emerging area of research, contributing to a better understanding of the role parents play, particularly among Latino (Nuñez & Kim, 2012; Strayhorn, 2010), African American (Strayhorn, 2010), and American Indian (Makomenaw, 2014) families. (Kiyama & Harper, 2018, p. 373)

A family's socioeconomic status may also influence engagement, with some studies showing families with greater wealth being more involved with their student's college experience (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009).

Another reason for families' orientation to engagement comes from their perception of what it means to be good, supportive parents. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) proposed that families become involved in their students' educations due to their parental role construction, sense of efficacy, perceived invitations to involvement, and parental and familial life context. Parental role construction is a parent or family member's belief about what they are "supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the patterns of parental behavior that follow" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107). Parental involvement at the K-12 level is "positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades, and achievement test scores" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 105). Because parents and families consistently heard the message that parental involvement at the K-12 level was critical to student success (Kennedy, 2009), this may have created an expectation that

involvement at the college level is also beneficial and expected. For families of other identities, particularly immigrant families, first-generation college families, or those who might not speak English, they may perceive invitations to involvement differently and base their engagement accordingly; it is important not to assume a "monolithic" model of engagement (Kiyama & Harper, 2018, p. 374).

Finally, families' orientation to involvement draws on their own life context. Given the significant cost of college tuition, some parents and families can have a consumer mentality, or the desire to protect their financial investment and get the most for their money (Carney-Hall, 2008; Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001; Kennedy, 2009). As more and more families have attended college themselves, they might feel they have the expertise to help their student navigate college and provide assistance when their students need it (Daniel et al., 2001). Some families might elect to be involved because they believe in the power of higher education as a bridge to a better life (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). No matter the families' identity, their cumulative ways of knowing and experiences help create an environment where parents feel that they can be involved with their students' college experience in ways that feel appropriate to their family's values (Kiyama & Harper, 2018).

Organization-Public Relations

As Millennial students began to enroll in college, schools realized that they needed to find a way to respond to the groundswell of interested and involved families (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). Like it or not, colleges were going to be in a relationship with their students' families, so they needed to find a way to make those relationships as

productive as possible. The formation of parent and family relations offices or functions was an overt expression of a college's commitment to relationships with families. Those relationships can be interpreted through the lens of Organization-Public Relations (OPR), which is seen in public relations research.

The field of public relations can be defined as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 56). This presumes that every organization has a relationship with its "publics" (customers of key audiences), which is valuable to maintain. OPR can be further defined as "the state that exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). Good OPR is central to high-functioning organizations: when an organization has productive relationships with its publics, that can contribute to that organization's overall success (whether financial success, public perception, etc.).

In a consumer products setting, good OPR produces loyal customers who will continue buying the company's product. Using the example of a college, if parents and families are happy with their student's school and feel trust and confidence in the school, the administration's time and resources are freed up to focus on the mission of the institution—educating students. If families are unhappy, staff time, effort, and/or financial resources must be spent to interact with unhappy families and resolve issues. Good college OPR can result in positive word-of-mouth about the school and potentially

increased enrollment, college rankings, or donations. Conversely, bad OPR could negatively influence those areas. Therefore, it is important to have mutually productive and beneficial relationships between the college, its students, and their families.

Because families are typically not present on campus, save for a few annual events (Orientation, Move-In, Family Weekend), colleges often try to generate positive OPR through electronic means. Information, advice, or guidance is disseminated by colleges through websites, e-newsletters, and the emerging practice of parent and family blogs. Research about blogs has revealed that organizational blogs, particularly when they reflect a conversational human voice, "may have value in efforts aimed at building and maintaining relationships" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 408). This current study examined the various ways colleges attempt to build good OPR through various communication channels, particularly blogs.

Desirable Parent and Family Behaviors

Much has been written about 'helicopter parents,' who constantly hover over their children, or 'bulldozer parents,' who intervene with colleges to clear the way any time their children have problems (Carney-Hall, 2008; Coburn, 2006; Cutright, 2008; Somers & Settle, 2010). College administrators have reported increased amounts of unwelcome familial intervention, and some student research has suggested parental involvement limits students' autonomy development (Cullaty, 2011; Lantz, 2016). Therefore, many colleges try to educate families about appropriate involvement (such as how parents and families can offer supportive messages to their students), versus interference that could impede students' development (such as doing tasks the student should do themselves)

(Alfaro, 2018; Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Price, 2008; Ward-Roof et al., 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). In a study by Lampert (2009), families who felt they had been educated by the school on how to approach students' issues felt better able to assist them. Through their various communication channels, programs, and events, colleges can try to shape desired parent and family behavior by encouraging families to interact with their students in ways that benefit student development or autonomy.

In addition to parent and family behaviors that foster student success or independence, there are also secondary behaviors or attitudes related to OPR that colleges might want to influence. Due to the competition for the best students (and their families' tuition dollars), colleges have to sell both students and their parents and families on the merits of their school. Colleges who engender positive relationships with families and high satisfaction rates can benefit from positive word of mouth from happy customers and national rankings, which can impact future students' interest in the school. One study found that being named a top 20 party school reduced admissions applications by 8-9%, whereas being listed as a top 25 school led to a 6-10% increase in applications (O'Shaughnessy, 2014).

Families can also positively impact a college through philanthropy. A 2011 article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* indicated that

> while parents' donations still make up a small share of overall giving to colleges, they contributed some $539 million last year, up more than 50 percent from 2001. . . . With other sources of revenue drying up, impressing private donors is becoming ever more important. (Quizon, 2011, para. 4)

Fundraising from parents and families can provide significant support for colleges, so encouraging donations can be an important part of institutional strategy (Cash, 2001; Gearhart, 1995).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was derived from the researcher's experiences as a practitioner in higher education as well as theories from other disciplines that relate to this research. Figure 1 outlines the various components of the conceptual framework. The left side of Figure 1 represents parents' and families' relationship to the college experience and focuses on their desire for involvement as predicated by their Millennial parenting, K-12 experiences, parental role construction, and life context. The right side of Figure 1 illustrates the college's relationship with parents and families, which assumes that schools are motivated by a desire for positive OPR, as good relationships with key constituencies benefit the organization (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). The interests of the families and parents converge in the center of the diagram, which outlines the types of engagement opportunities that many schools offer families.

Colleges have a variety of communication and engagement tools at their disposal. At the top of Figure 1 are one-time interventions, which at many schools are face-to-face events such as Orientation, Family Weekend, or summer send-off parties, which are events that bring students and families together in their home areas to meet each other before move-in day. At these one-time events, representatives from the college have the opportunity to share institutional messages, advice, policies, guidelines, etc. that will be of benefit to the families and the students, and introduce new students to current students.

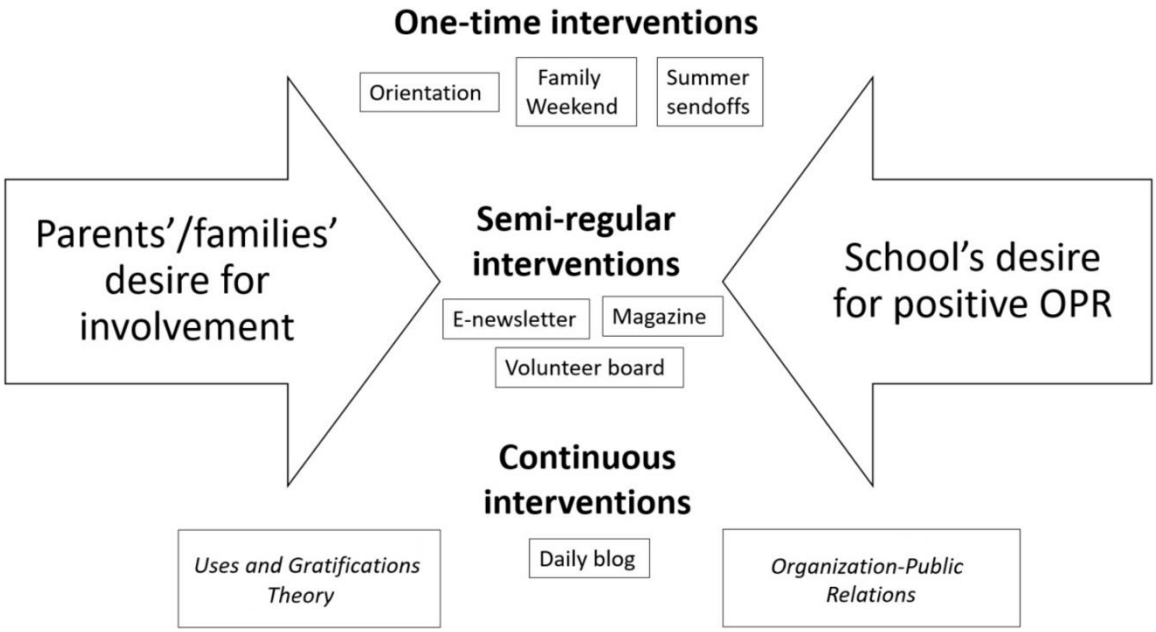


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Because parents and families are not residential members of a college campus, more of their interaction with the university is virtual via email, websites, or blogs. The researcher of this study drew upon communications theory, specifically the Uses and gratifications theory, to help explain families' motivations for electronic engagement (Kaye, 2010). Uses and gratifications is built on the following assumptions: "(a) individuals seek out media, (b) media use is goal directed, (c) media exposure fulfills a variety of human needs, and (d) individuals seek out media that will gratify those needs" (Kaye, 2010, p. 105). College parents and families, having been so closely connected with their students in their K-12 years, want to continue that connection during college (Henning, 2007). Because physical connection is much more limited than in the K-12 years, consuming media and messaging from the school serves as a connection point to

their students; the Internet and electronic media can provide "very specific high-value information to very specific high-consumption audiences" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 20).

The center of the diagram shows the semi-regular interventions such as the sending of an e-newsletter or magazine to families. Some schools also have parent and family volunteer boards or associations, which may offer periodic in-person meetings, conference calls, and/or email communications. In this researcher's professional experience, most parent and family relations offices rely on electronic, semi-regular interventions to engage families because they are inexpensive and easy to produce.

The bottom of Figure 1 represents an emerging area of practice in parent and family relations—the use of continuous interventions such as a daily parent and family blog. Blogs, or frequently updated online journals, can represent a media channel in which a school can share advice, provide a sense of connection to the student experience, introduce school traditions, and more (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004). In a study of social media use by university communicators, Kelleher and Sweetser (2012) found that practitioners believed

> their organizations—both individual units and whole institutions—held a wealth of knowledge and resources on campus that were not being fully shared with the world. Participants indicated a desire to better serve their publics by further opening up the university. (p. 118)

Blogs can provide timely information throughout the academic year, allowing families to understand more fully their students' experiences in and out of the classroom. Blogs can also serve as an official institutional information channel, which could offset the growing trend of parents and families creating their own means of information-sharing via private

Internet message boards or GroupMe texts; GroupMe is a group text messaging platform that allows people to connect with each other and discuss topics (Group Me, n.d.). The presence of these informal channels of communication can be problematic for administrators, as sometimes they can spread rumors and misinformation, whereas formal channels of institutional communication presumably only convey official, verified information.

While family relations practitioners' focus has traditionally been on the effectiveness of one-time or semi-regular interventions for families, virtually no scholarship exists on the influence of continuous interventions like a daily blog. Currently, Wilson University (a pseudonym for the private, Southern, mid-sized university that was the focus of this study) is the only known school to produce a daily college blog for families; although there are a few other schools that offer a blog, most are offered only once or twice a month. The Wilson University daily parent and family blog, Family 411, provides an opportunity to study the influence of a more continuous method of engagement for families and can be a first step in filling the knowledge gap about college-produced blogs and family engagement.

Purpose of the Study

Though there is prolific research about higher education in the areas of legal issues, student development and identity growth, academic achievement and outcomes, the impact parents and families can have on student autonomy, and the important emerging research on diversity and equity, considerably less is known about the relationship that parents and families have with their students' college (Kiyama et al.,

2015; Wartman & Savage, 2008). And yet, parents and families increasingly assert their presence as a member of the university ecosystem, albeit a virtual or distant member. This represented a distinct opportunity to study the role of parents and families as they relate to the college proper so that this gap in the literature could begin to be filled.

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which parents and families interact with their students' college following institutionally-sponsored engagement opportunities and the resulting behavioral outcomes or attitudes that follow. Specific outcomes to be measured were parent and family intervention with the college on the student's behalf, sense of satisfaction with the institution, and charitable giving. This current study sought to determine whether there were differences between the types of interactions families have (no engagement, one-time, semiregular, or continuous) and the ways in which those families engage with the college.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What clusters (i.e., groups) of Wilson University parents and families emerge based on their level of engagement with the school, as measured by event attendance, e-newsletter reading, and blog reading?
    1a. What are the main differentiators of each cluster (e.g., demographic categories)?
2. Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters contact college officials to help solve problems their student is having?

3. Are there statistical differences in the various clusters' reported satisfaction with the school?
4. Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters make gifts to the school?

Significance of the Study

There have been numerous studies that show the ways in which college parents communicate with their students (Chen & Katz, 2009; Hofer, 2011; Lepp, Li, & Barkley, 2016) or the impact that familial involvement has on autonomy development, emotional resilience, or K-12 academic achievement (Cullaty, 2011; Fan & Chen, 2001; Weintraub & Sax, 2018). Some scholarship discusses faculty and administrators' perceptions of interactions with college parents (Garrett, 2016; Watson, 2007; Winegard, 2010) and how today's college parents perceive their level of involvement with their students as compared to their own parents (Bastian, 2010). However, the body of research on families' relationship to the college proper—particularly following campus-sponsored engagement opportunities—was much more limited.

While there was some research on how institutional communications are received by college parents (Daniel et al., 2009; Price, 2008), there was virtually no research on the effects that a daily college blog has on parent and family readers' behavior (Chapman, 2017). This study begins to fill that gap by examining the influence that a daily college blog has on parents and families, as opposed to the semi-regular or one-time institutional communications that have traditionally been used to engage families. The study also sheds light on whether the frequency of family communications and programs

influenced families in important ways such as their impression of the school/satisfaction with the school, level of intervention on their students' behalf, and/or donation behavior. Findings from this study suggest implications for practice that will help other college administrators better serve their parent and family constituency as well as their school.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are central to the understanding of this paper:

Blog is short for "weblog," or "a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 396). Blogs are further defined as "frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence" (Herring et al., 2004).

College is a term being used to represent a 4-year institution of higher education that an undergraduate student attends. While there are technical differences between a college and a university, in this study college is used to represent both colleges and universities.

Family 411 is a pseudonym for the daily blog for parents and families of Wilson University students. The Family 411 blog is typically produced every weekday, year-round. It is an organizational blog that conveys information of interest to parents and families yet retains a sense of a personal blog through the use of first-person language and sharing of personal anecdotes.

Gen Z refers to the generation after the Millennial generation. Gen Z includes people born between 1996 and 2009 (Sladek & Grabinger, 2018).

First-person voice is defined as "the form of a verb or pronoun that is used when people are speaking or writing about themselves" ("The First Person," n.d.) First-person writing uses "I," "me," and "my" pronouns.

Millennial(s) refers to the Millennial generation, or people who were born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019).

Organization-Public Relations (OPR) is a term that comes from public relations and communications research. Organization-public relations are defined as "the state that exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). Positive OPR is central to high-functioning organizations; an organization needs productive relationships with its publics in order to be successful and profitable.

Organizational blogs are written by employees in an "official or semi-official capacity" and are used as a means to connect a company to its key audiences (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 397).

Parent and family refers to a student's primary familial support person(s) while in college and is inclusive of all family constructs. While the heteronormative view assumes students go to college having two biological parents of the opposite sex, students may have one or more adoptive parents, stepparents, grandparents, same-sex parents, aunts, uncles, or other guardians who act as a means of financial and emotional support (Kiyama et al., 2015).

Parent/family engagement refers to parents'/families' mindset and orientation to the world as well as any actions they may take (Kiyama et al., 2015). Parent/family engagement is a broader category than involvement (see definition below).

Parent/family involvement refers to specific things a parent would *do*, often in a K-12 educational context, such as helping a student with homework, communicating with a teacher, attending a school program for parents, etc. (Kiyama et al., 2015).

Parent/family relations office refers to a specific office or staff member(s) whose function at a college is to interact with parents/families of undergraduate students.

Parental life context encompasses the time, knowledge, skills, and energy families have to become involved with their students; socioeconomic status and family culture also play a role in life context (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Parental role construction is "parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the patterns of parental behavior that follow those beliefs" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107).

Perceived invitation to involvement is any action (overt or indirect) that signals to families that they are "welcome . . . and that their involvement is important, expected, and supported" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 110).

Personal blog is defined as a blog that tends to reveal the thoughts, feelings, or activities of an individual (and not a corporation or organization) (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Publics is a term from public relations and organizational communications research and refers to "communities of people . . . that have a direct or indirect

association with an organization: customers, employees, investors, media, students, etc." (Business Dictionary, n.d.). Parents and families would be a "public" of colleges: "from a public relations standpoint, parents meet the description of a 'key secondary audience'" (Savage, 2008, p.4).

Sense of efficacy is one's belief that their actions will result in desirable outcomes; a parent with a higher sense of efficacy would be more likely to be involved with their student's education than a parent with a low sense of efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Wilson University is a pseudonym for the private, Southern, mid-sized university that is the subject of the study.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study was conducted with parents and families of Wilson University undergraduate students, because Wilson University was the only known college with a daily blog that provided continuous messaging to families. Wilson University's undergraduates are predominantly White and approximately 59% of undergraduate families pay full tuition (W. Wells, personal communication, March 21, 2019). Therefore, the population in this study may not have been representative of the population of other colleges, and familial behavior may be different at other schools. Moreover, this study was predicated on the assumption that families would (a) accurately recall how they engage with their student's college, (b) be able to delineate their level of interaction with the school (one-time, semi-regular, or continuous), and (c) honestly report their behaviors. While the research subjects were anonymous, aggregate data from

past parent and family behavior were used to help serve as a reliability check on their responses in regard to consumption of institutional communications, charitable giving, and event attendance. Because no names or personally identifiable information were collected, the researcher has no reason to believe that survey respondents would not complete the survey in good faith.

Researcher Positionality

Responsible, ethical research dictates that researchers engage in a process of self-examination to see how their personal experiences, epistemology, and ways of knowing might implicate their research, including assumptions and conclusions they may make (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, it was important for the researcher of this study to consider her own positionality as it related to the study topic.

The researcher has worked at one institution for nearly 20 years, and has never worked at another institution. The researcher's institution represents a distinct population of both students and parents/families, which may not be similar to the families of other institutions, such as public institutions, or institutions that have historically served underrepresented students. Though the researcher engages in information-sharing with parent/family relations professionals at other schools (most often their counterparts in other regional schools or members of AHEPPP, the Association of Parent/Family Programs Professionals), the researcher's frame of reference reflects her own experiences.

In the researcher's career as a college administrator, she has served in a variety of capacities, including alumni and parent/family relations, event planning,

communications, and volunteer board management. As part of the researcher's communications function at her institution, she created a college parent/family blog, which she has authored since 2009. Over time, the researcher has seen the positive response of parent/family blog readers and resulting benefits to her institution, such as anecdotal reports of parent/family satisfaction as well as measurable impacts such as increased financial donations.

It was also important to examine the role of axiology and how it undergirded the researcher's professional life. There were several key values that inform the researcher's work; the researcher believes that parents and families can be wonderful partners in their students' education. While some of them can be "helicopter parents," the researcher believes in treating each family with dignity and respect. As a parent herself (to a 14-year-old), the researcher feels a great deal of compassion for families' sense of love for their students, desire for connection, and worry and anxiety about their students living away from home. The researcher approached the writing of the parent/family blog as a bridge to help families feel connected to their students and to reassure them that the researcher's institution has ample resources and caring administrators willing to help students when needed. The researcher also feels that whether the student was from a full-pay family or received significant financial aid, their family is still making sacrifices (financial or otherwise) for their student to attend the institution. Therefore, families deserve to have an advocate who is responsive to their questions or concerns.

The style and voice of the blog may have influenced readers' perception of the researcher. The researcher elected to write their parent/family blog in a conversational,

informal, first-person voice, and signs her name to the blog so that families feel they knew a real person at the institution should they need it. The researcher's policy is to respond to all emails/calls/texts from families (as long as they are not abusive or profane). As a result, many of the blog readers at the researcher's institution report feeling a connection to the researcher personally or that the researcher is a sort of 'Internet friend.' The connection families reported feeling could have stemmed from the fact that they liked the researcher's writing style or the advice she gave. It may also have been that families feel an affinity with the researcher's race, class, and/or educational background; the researcher's institution's parent/family population tended to be college-educated, White, and middle- to upper-class, which reflects the researcher's own identity.

Because so much of the researcher's professional life has been associated with the parent/family blog, the researcher acknowledges being personally invested in the blog's reception, its success, and the impact it had on her institution. This is an existing bias to which the researcher was attentive and monitored throughout the research process. The researcher has always strived for objectivity, well-thought-out reasoning, and ethically-informed research. Therefore, she offers this positionality reflection so that readers of this study could contextualize how the researcher's professional and personal values impact her work and how they could have influenced this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which parents/families interact with their students' college following institutionally-sponsored engagement opportunities, and the resulting behavioral outcomes or attitudes that follow, specifically parent/family intervention with the college on the students' behalf, sense of satisfaction with the institution, and charitable giving. In order to do so, one must understand the key concepts upon which this study relied. As outlined in Figure 1, the key concepts for this study included parents'/families' desire for engagement, uses and gratifications theory, schools' desire for positive Organization-Public Relations (OPR), and the types of engagement opportunities that colleges create for families (including the emerging area of blogs).

To conduct this literature review, the researcher looked primarily at scholarship dating from 2001 through 2018; because the literature is so scarce, the researcher had to rely on articles that were older than five years. The literature on parent and family engagement represented a combination of scholarly research studies and commentary from student affairs practitioners. It should be noted that while there was ample literature about the impact that parent/family engagement has on college student independence, autonomy, or emotional resilience, there was little empirical literature on college parents/families and their relationship with the college proper (Kiyama et al., 2015).

Furthermore, many of the extant studies were conducted from the students' point of view, not the families' perspective (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Therefore, the articles in this literature review drew from a number of areas related to college students and their parents/families, though they may not have mapped directly to this study.

Theories of Parent/Family Engagement

In order to consider parents' and families' desire for engagement, as expressed in Figure 1, one must first look at the literature related to engagement models, student development theory, and existing empirical studies. Some of the articles were based on theories from the K-12 level, but those could still inform our understanding of college parent and family behavior, frames of reference, and ways of knowing.

K-12 Model of Family Engagement

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) advanced a K-12 model of family engagement, positing that parents/family members become involved in their students' educations based on parental role construction, sense of efficacy, perceived invitations to involvement, and parental/familial life context. Parental role construction is parents'/ families' beliefs about "what they are supposed to do" relative to their children's education, and any associated behaviors that "follow those beliefs" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107). Role construction is socially constructed and can be influenced by the families' own background, experiences, and social network, all of which can influence how they perceive what "good parenting" is (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). For example, parents/family members may believe they should consult with their students before the students register for classes; this could be because their own parents did that

when they were in college and/or because the other families in their social network are doing so for their children.

Sense of efficacy is parents' belief that they have the ability to make a difference and produce a "desirable outcome"; parents with a higher sense of efficacy are more likely to be involved with their students' education than parents with a low sense of efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 108). Self-efficacy is also socially constructed: "schools and important others (family members, social groups) exert significant influence on parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 109). Perceived invitations to involvement are also a key construct in the Hoover-Dempsey et al. model, as they suggest to the parents that "parents are welcome . . . and that their involvement is important, expected, and supported" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 110).

At the K-12 level, perceived invitations to involvement from teachers are especially valued by parents because families are looking for suggestions on how specifically to be involved for the benefit of their students (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). At the college level, colleges can show a perceived invitation to involvement by educating families on appropriate ways to support their students, for example, when to intervene if their student has a problem and when not to (Kiyama et al., 2015). Similarly, at the K-12 level, when students ask their family for help, most families tend to be responsive and assist their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). If that is the mindset that families bring with them when their students go to college, families could misconstrue students' venting about a problem as an invitation to involvement (even

when it is not meant as one). A longitudinal study conducted by NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) found that while only 19% of parents had contacted the college to intervene for their students, 70% of those parents "reported that it was their students who had asked the parent to intervene" (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 244). More research is needed in the area of perceived invitations to intervene on college students' behalf, as there is little extant literature (Sax & Wartman, 2010).

The final part of the Hoover-Dempsey model is parental/familial life context, which encompasses the time, knowledge, skills, and energy families have to become involved with their students (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Socioeconomic status and family culture also play a role in life context (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The literature is mixed on the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) and engagement; while some studies show that SES affects a family's level of engagement, other studies "suggest SES is not routinely related to involvement" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 113). There is a challenge inherent to first-generation families' engagement that relates to knowledge, which may impact their sense of efficacy—families "may have misinformation about involvement options or might be unsure of where and how to find resources to help support their students' success" (Kiyama et al., 2015, p. 58). Parental life context can also enhance (or reduce) a student's ability to navigate college:

> In the college-going process, cultural and social capital are defined as knowledge of the campus environment and campus values, access to human and financial resources, and familiarity with terminology and the general functioning of a higher education setting (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Coleman, 1988; McConnell, 2000; McDonough, 1997). This knowledge, which may generally be transmitted through parents, may be lacking among first-generation students as their parents

> did not attend college. This lack of knowledge may contribute to a sense of college "culture shock." (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006, p. 535)

It is important that administrators, particularly at the K-12 level, not look at family life context with a deficit-lens; often there is home-based familial engagement "in ways that schools do not notice or recognize," but that are appropriate to the family's culture and norms (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 116). Family life context and family support have been studied in relation to college students' gender and racial/ethnic identities. While it was beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full exploration of this topic, some key findings could be noted. Familial support can be a critical component in student outcomes, as "some researchers have found that this environmental variable of 'family,' in the form of parental encouragement and involvement, is one of the best predictors of postsecondary educational aspirations" (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006, p. 536). With regard to Latinx students' educational attainment, Cabrera and Padilla (2004) found that "students also credited their parents with supporting and encouraging them in their educational pursuits even though their parents had little formal schooling" (p. 168). Additionally, in relation to first-generation female students' transition to college, Sy, Fong, Carter, Boehme, and Alpert (2011) found that "supportive relationships help individuals navigate environments with which they are unfamiliar or have little experience" (p. 385).

While this research was at the K-12 level, it is relevant because it helps reveal the parental/familial engagement mindset that many families bring to the college experience. Parents/families in the K-12 system are encouraged to be involved with their children's

learning because parental engagement leads to student success (Kennedy, 2009). Research has consistently shown that parental engagement at the K-12 level "has been positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades, and achievement test scores" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 105). At the K-12 level, school-initiated invitations to engagement encourage "parents' effectiveness in helping their children learn" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 124). At the college level, school-initiated invitations to engagement are often less about helping students with academic coursework and more about how families can support their students' burgeoning independence and autonomy (Henning, 2007).

The Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model is a useful lens for viewing K-12 parent and family engagement, illustrating how families relate to younger students and their schools. The next section specifically examines college parent and family engagement, particularly as it relates to student development and the parents'/families' relationship with the college.

Foundational Student Development Theories

Much of the existing literature on college family engagement builds from theories related to student development. Some cite Chickering and Reisser's 1993 theory of psychosocial development, which states that students must separate from their parents in order to begin becoming autonomous, with the goal of "learning to function with emotional independence or without the need for reassurance, affection, or approval" (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 24). The development of students' autonomy "signals maturity" and appropriate individuation from their parents (Kennedy, 2009, p. 22). Other

scholars view college as a place where students could develop autonomy and separation from parents through a combination of challenges (in and out of the classroom) and the various support mechanisms colleges offer (Cullaty, 2011; Kennedy, 2009).

Some research draws upon Tinto's theory of student departure, suggesting that strong relationships with a student's "community" (including parents/families) "can serve to facilitate adjustment and retention" (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 225). In this vein, Wartman and Savage (2008) suggest that secure attachment is critical to student development. Secure attachment to parents/families provides a secure base for students; they feel the support and love of their families, which helps them feel confident in the new setting of college (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The idea of secure attachment is equated with "parental support giving," which can fall into "tangible (e.g., financial, practical) and non-tangible (e.g., advice, emotional, listening) support during emerging adulthood" (Lowe & Dotterer, 2017, p. 36). Coburn (2006) reveals one of the practical reasons that secure attachment is so important: sometimes a student in distress will only confide in a parent or family member, and so it can be critical—and appropriate—to have a parent's or family member's assistance and intervention.

The results across the literature were mixed in regard to students' identity and attachment. In one study, secure attachment was found to be more salient for young women's successful adjustment to college, but in other studies, differences in attachment were more attributable to race (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Socioeconomic status (SES) was found to impact attachment in some studies, especially for first-generation college students who are trying to "straddle two worlds"—college and their family culture (Sax

& Wartman, 2010, p. 241). More research is needed so that we have a clearer understanding of the intersection of race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc., and the idea of attachment.

Overall, the literature suggests that separation-individuation and secure attachment is not an 'either-or' but a 'both-and' situation, where both theories can work in harmony (Josselson, 1987; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994; Schwartz & Buboltz, 2004; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Lowe and Dotterer (2017) express the complementary notion of attachment and separation in terms of "interdependence," or the notion that "transitions in one person's life often involve transitions for other people" (p. 32). As the student is in the new environment of college, the parents/families also have to navigate the change in family structure and dynamics, which speaks to interdependence (Lowe & Dotterer, 2017). It is also important to note that as students become more autonomous, parental "behaviors are less hierarchical and directive" (Lowe & Dotterer, 2017, p. 32). Cullaty (2011) refers to this as students having a "growing equality with their parents" (p. 432). As the parent-student relationship transitions, ideally students and parents "develop adult-to-adult relationships" where both the student and the parents jointly settle on the terms of the relationship to ensure their emotional and other needs are met (Cullaty, 2011, p. 427).

Though there is variation among the theories, the common thread is that parents and families do have an important role to play in college students' development, even if that role looks different than during the K-12 years (Carney-Hall, 2008). Whether that comes from necessary individuation (to develop student autonomy) or providing a secure

attachment from which students feel supported and comfortable in exploring their new environment, parents and families are central players in students' development, and by extension, their college experiences.

Practitioner or Observational Theories

One of the challenges of this particular study was that there was scant empirical literature on college parent/family engagement that was directly related to familial intervention on behalf of their student, sense of satisfaction in the college, or charitable giving. However, there was a body of work, largely from a practitioner standpoint, that provided a lens from which to view family engagement at the college level. From her own experience as an administrator, the researcher of this current study had seen great variation in the staff with whom families interact at the college; those practitioners could include staff from the parent/family engagement office, orientation, residence life, student conduct, academics, the dean of students, and more. This section examines those practitioner perspectives.

Some of the literature suggests that families are involved with their college students due to the emotional investment they have in their students' success; they believe student outcomes reflect on their success as parents (Kennedy, 2009). Families feel the need to be engaged in their students' experiences because they feel like they will be judged by their friends and peers and they want to guarantee their student excels (Kennedy, 2009). Other articles on family engagement point to the high cost of college, positing that families become engaged to safeguard the financial investment they are making in their students' education (Cullaty, 2011; Daniel et al., 2001; Kennedy, 2009).

Tuition at private colleges rose 179% between 1995 and 2015 (McKenna, 2017). Familial engagement thus becomes an attempt for parents to ensure their students are making academic choices that will lead to graduation and the attainment of high-paying jobs (McKenna, 2017). There is some research which suggests that students with more highly engaged parents land better jobs, and that first-generation students with less involved parents/families have lower GPAs and complete fewer classes (McKenna, 2017). McKenna (2017) notes that parent engagement "has intensified . . . among middle-class and wealthy families whose children attend selective colleges" (para. 5). This suggests that parents whose life context affords them the free time to curate their students' educations have the ability to be involved at a greater rate; in other words, wealth and leisure appear to be key ingredients in some families' engagement (Sax & Wartman, 2010).

One can also look at familial engagement through the lens of social capital theory; this is the notion that parents/families help students gain access to things of value, which could be "tangible and/or symbolic" (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 224). Coburn (2006) reflects this notion of social capital by proposing that parents and families are often involved at the K-12 level in an advocacy role (e.g., for students managing mental illness or physical challenges). Carney-Hall (2008) affirms this advocacy role by noting that parents "often see themselves as the primary problems solvers for their children"; social capital (by way of having familial advocacy) can open doors for students to access needed services (p. 8). More recently, the 2019 admissions scandal—where wealthy families were willing to pay for cheating on standardized tests and bribing college

coaches to get their less-qualified students admitted to elite institutions—suggests that the lure of the presumed social capital students would gain at an elite college was worth the risk of being caught in unethical behavior (Carey, 2019). The issue of fraudulent admissions aside, if being highly involved was the way families acted in the K-12 setting, they might not see a reason to change their involvement at the college level. Given that familial mindset, administrators are challenged to find ways to channel appropriate parent/family involvement (Coburn, 2006).

This section of the literature review examined practitioners' perspectives on why families become engaged with their students' college experience. The next section focuses on empirical studies.

Empirical Studies on College Student-Parent Engagement

As the researcher looked to the empirical literature on family engagement, there was very little research directly related to this topic. Lowe and Dotterer (2017) note that there is scant empirical research on whether "parental participation in [college sponsored] educational programming is related to student outcomes" (p. 34). Therefore, it can be hard to infer where family engagement influences specific student behavior. Much of the existing research draws from students' perceptions of their parents' engagement, not the parents' perceptions (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Additionally, there was even less research about whether parents and families behave in ways that are of presumptive interest to the college, such as what motivates families to intervene (or not) on their students' behalf, or to make a charitable donation to the college. This represented a distinct gap in the literature that this study has begun to fill.

Because of the paucity of directly related research, this section examines some of the empirical research related to college students and their parents/families, though the connection may be more tangential. Specifically, the next section reviews studies on college parent-student communications, autonomy development and decision-making, and institutional communications.

Parent-Student Communications

One measure of the college student-parent/family relationship involves communications. Ubiquitous electronic technology is frequently cited as a reason for family involvement in the lives of college students (Kennedy, 2009; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017). Popular culture has suggested that the overconnected "helicopter" parent (who is always hovering close to their student, eager to swoop in at any time) is a detriment to the student (Carney-Hall, 2008; Coburn, 2006; Cullaty, 2011; Cutright, 2008; Lantz, 2016; Somers & Settle, 2010). However, some of the research refutes that stereotype.

Hofer (2011) reviewed studies from Middlebury College and the University of Michigan which showed that students were communicating with their parents/family members about 13 times per week and that 75% of students were "not dissatisfied" with that amount of contact. On the one hand, the student satisfaction with that contact seems to support Wartman and Savage's (2008) claim that secure attachment is beneficial to students' development. However, the findings also showed that students with higher parent/family contact were less emotionally autonomous, suggesting that frequent contact could be antithetical to healthy student development (Hofer, 2011).

Parental/family communication specifically with first-year college students was the focus of Sax and Weintraub's (2016) study, in which they examined the results of two surveys, the CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program) Freshman Survey, and the Residential Life Survey, which was administered to first-year students from a selective, public, Western research university. Results showed that 71% of respondents felt like they had "just the right amount" of contact with their mothers/female family members as compared to 54% who had "just the right amount" of contact with their fathers/male family members (Sax & Weintraub, 2016). The study suggests that parent/family member communication is valued by first-year students and plays a role in their college adjustment, though there were differences in how adjustment and a sense of belonging related to communication with male vs. female family members (Sax & Weintraub, 2016).

The CIRP survey also revealed that there were racial and SES differences in levels of involvement, with students of color, Latino students, and first-generation college students reporting lower levels of parental engagement than they would have liked (Sax & Wartman, 2010). One of the interesting results of the CIRP study was that it leant "support to the notion that encouraging higher quality student-parent communications is a worthwhile goal for college and university administrators" (Sax & Weintraub, 2016, p. 88). Although some colleges had historically been in the mode of trying to keep families at an arm's length, this study suggests that it may be more beneficial to encourage parent-student communications, arming families with "knowledge and resources from which

they can draw in encouraging their children to engage productively with the college environment" (Sax & Weintraub, 2016, p. 88).

Weintraub and Sax (2018) investigated first-year students' communication with their parents/families and the impact on student academic performance. Students were generally satisfied with the amount of communication they had with their parents, and students with higher GPAs reported having more support from their fathers and more quality interactions with their mothers (Weintraub & Sax, 2018). Some students wished they had more communication with their fathers (Weintraub & Sax, 2018). The study cautions about "interpreting directionality" about the frequency or quality of student-parent communications and its impact on academic success, because some studies have shown that more frequent contact can be detrimental to GPAs (Weintraub & Sax, 2018, p. 69). The delicate balance that needs to be maintained is having the right amount of high-quality communication—enough so that students feel connected to home and supported, but not so much so that it impedes students' independence or development (Weintraub & Sax, 2018).

Chen and Katz (2009) interviewed college students about their mobile phone usage. The researchers concluded that phones are like an umbilical cord connecting them with their parents (Chen & Katz, 2009). Students called their parents to ask for timely advice, help, answers, or even to buy things for them at the store; this creates a kind of dependency that is antithetical to student independence, since the phone contact with parents negates the need for students to figure out answers to their problems or to take actions on their own (Chen & Katz, 2009). The study also noted a kind of dual-

dependency—parents want to be able to call their children to ease their own anxiety about their safety or because they miss them, and students want to call their parents for emotional support or comfort (Chen & Katz, 2009). These findings seem to lend support to the observations of Howe and Strauss (2000) about Millennial parenting, especially as they relate to parental anxiety and the deliberately close relationship cultivated between parents and children.

While the Chen and Katz (2009) study did reveal themes in parent-student communications, there are two issues with this study that bear mentioning. One of the hallmarks of great qualitative research is the use of thick, rich description, often in the form of participant quotes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher of this current study believed the study was potentially less credible because the researchers provided very few high-quality quotes, which would be key for a reader to have faith in the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, this researcher believed the authors of this study overused words such as "many," "some," "most," "a few," and "a lot" instead of quantitative numbers; one example is "Most of the participants appreciated this 'perpetual contact'" (Chen & Katz, 2009, p. 185). "Most" is a subjective word; it would have been clearer (and more persuasive) to say "75% of the participants appreciated this 'perpetual contact.'" Therefore, it may be helpful to approach Chen and Katz's (2009) findings with that critical lens.

In recent literature, Alfaro (2018) examined how Mexican-origin college students communicated with their parents. Findings revealed that over 85% of Mexican-origin college students communicated with a parent weekly, that students communicated more

with mothers than fathers, that fathers with higher education levels communicated more often with students, and that only paternal relationship quality was related to communication frequency (Alfaro, 2018). It is important to note that this article addresses a gap in the literature about the role parents and families play in the lives of Mexican-origin college students, particularly after the first year of college and in relation to the types of supportive messages offered. This is noteworthy because far more research on parental support is done on majority/Caucasian parents' messages (Alfaro, 2018).

Alfaro (2018) finds that "the frequency of communication with parents suggests that parents can serve as a resource for Mexican-origin students and are a practical way through which universities can reach a large amount of students" (p. 12). This study is important from an equity perspective because it begins to explore the ways in which college families of different racial or cultural backgrounds function in the area of parent-student engagement. More research in this area is needed so that practitioners can understand the nuances of race or culture (or SES, or first-generation status, etc.) and how that might impact parent/family education and engagement. A better understanding of different family cultures could lead to more equitable practices in how colleges serve families of all identities and origins.

Autonomy Development and Decision-Making

There is also a body of research on the relationship between college students and their families as it relates to autonomy development and decision-making. There is a perception in the media (and among some college administrators) that helicopter parents are directing students' lives and hampering their development (Carney-Hall, 2008;

Coburn, 2006; Cullaty, 2011; Cutright, 2008; Lantz, 2016; Somers & Settle, 2010). The following section examines some empirical studies that shed light on these key areas.

Pizzolato and Hicklen (2011) examined how college students interacted with their parents/family members when making important decisions. The researchers surveyed 747 traditional-age college students at a large, Midwestern university using the Experience Survey (ES) and found that 44% of college students involved their parents/family members in significant decision-making processes (Pizzolato & Hicklen, 2011). However, the two most frequent types of involvement were consultative (53%) or "thought" (36%); "thought" means students *considered* parent/family beliefs but did not overtly ask for help in making the decision (Pizzolato & Hicklen, 2011, p. 677). Very few students (7%) actually asked their parents to provide an answer or direction (Pizzolato & Hicklen, 2011). This study debunked the myth that parents/families are actively directing students' decision-making and showed the majority of students in this survey were acting more autonomously (Pizzolato & Hicklen, 2011).

Cullaty (2011) interviewed students about their parents' engagement with their college experiences and students' feelings of autonomy. The study found that students "perceived their parents promoted their autonomy by actively redefining the parent-student relationship, encouraging responsibility, and relinquishing unnecessary control" (Cullaty, 2011, p. 435). Students felt less autonomous when their parents would "overreach" and try to control students' decisions (Cullaty, 2011, p. 435). One effect of parental overreach is that students felt "conflicted about their choices instead of self-assured" (Cullaty, 2011, p. 434). A goal of student development is independence and

autonomy, so any time familial involvement undermines students' growth in these areas, it can be seen as detrimental (Cullaty, 2011).

The aforementioned articles dealt primarily with communication between the parent/family and the student; the following articles investigate communications between parents/families and their students' college. A 2006 survey of college administrators found that "93 percent indicated an increase in interactions with parents in the last five years" (Carney-Hall, 2008, p. 4). Cullaty (2011) described unwelcome parental engagement as seen by administrators; their perception was that "support" does not equal "intervening" for students, and that overreach is when "parents do things students should do themselves" (p. 435). Knowing that "faculty and administrators expect college students to take adult responsibility for their actions," it is incumbent upon schools to make sure parents/families understand how important it is for students to have the opportunity to make their own choices and learn from them (Cullaty, 2011, p. 435). What administrators really want to see is "umbrella families," who "stand next to their students, rather than in front of their students; they hold the umbrellas, thus freeing students' hands to do to their own work at the college" (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008, p. 386). Interestingly, a dissertation about faculty perceptions of parental involvement found that faculty were rarely contacted by parents/families—only about once or twice a semester (Garrett, 2016). Garrett (2016) did not conclude that faculty saw the same kind of increase in familial involvement that Carney-Hall's (2008) study of administrators did, suggesting that families treat contact with faculty as more taboo than contact with administrators. Perhaps parents/families have received the institutional message that they

should not intervene with faculty on their students' behalf, or perhaps faculty simply do not make themselves easily accessible for parents/families.

Daniel et al. (2009) investigated whether the number of times students and parents/families received institutional messaging influenced the frequency with which they discussed those messages with each other. Messages about student success were sent to first-year students and their parents/families in varying frequencies, with the encouragement to discuss the topic with each other. Results found that parents/families who received more frequent messages were able to recall having received the messages (and their content), as compared to parents who received fewer messages (Daniel et al., 2009). This suggests that "parents are attentive to communication from the university and that more frequent communication in relatively massed dosages is effective in directing parental attention toward issues of potential importance" (Daniel et al., 2009, p. 295). However, students who received more frequent messages did not have better recall of message content (Daniel et al., 2009). Interestingly, parents/families overestimated the amount of communication they had with their students on the topics, compared to their students' perception (Daniel et al., 2009). One critique of this study is the fact that two different modes of communication were used: postcards for parents/families and email for students (Daniel et al., 2009). The 2009 National Survey of Parent Programs established that 78% of responding schools offered e-newsletters to parents/families (Savage & Petree, 2009), so it interesting that Daniel et al. (2009) chose not to use email as the method to survey parents. One might ask, "Would their results have been different if they had not mixed their data collection methods?"

National Longitudinal Studies

There have been some national, longitudinal surveys of college students that attempted to understand parent/family engagement with their college students. The 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (n.d.c) had an experimental section on "Friends and Family Support" that investigated parent/family involvement. With respect to decision-making, the NSSE survey revealed that "about 75% of students said they frequently followed the advice of a parent or guardian," which contradicts the findings of Pizzolato and Hicklen (2011) (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 243). Interestingly, the NSSE data found that students with highly involved parents/families had significantly lower grades as compared to students with less involved families (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Paradoxically, those same students "reported higher levels of engagement and more frequent use of deep learning activities" (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008, p. 394). One of the critical contributions of this particular study is that the survey distinguished between contact from mothers (or key female sources of support) and fathers (or key male sources of support), as opposed to lumping mothers and fathers into a single construct of "parent." This distinction helped shed light on whether students perceive important differences between the support they receive from the women and men who are important figures in their lives, providing a richer picture of the contributions of each.

The 2006 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) measured parental academic involvement, though it regrettably did not distinguish between male and female family members, as the NSSE study did (Wolf et al., 2009). Parental academic engagement was not "uniform across all groups"; instead, it varied

between identity groups (Wolf et al., 2009, p. 350). Female students were found to have more parental academic engagement than male students, and engagement was higher with first-year students than with seniors (Wolf et al., 2009). Students from wealthy or upper middle-class backgrounds had higher levels of academic engagement than did students of lower SES (Wolf et al., 2009). There were also significant differences in parental academic engagement based on race, with the highest engagement coming from East Indian/Pakistani families (Wolf et al., 2009). Other racial groups (Latino, Japanese, and Alaskans/Native Americans) had high levels of general parental contact with lower levels of involvement with academics (Wolf et al., 2009). Understanding that there can be nuanced behavioral differences among racial, cultural, and/or socioeconomic groups (and regarding the topic discussed) can inform practitioners of considerations in how best to reach various parent/family audiences in a culturally responsive way (Wolf et al., 2009).

Having looked at the empirical literature on family-student engagement in college, one can conclude that there is a great deal of family-student communication, and generally speaking, students seem content with that level of communication. Similarly, while research shows that students consult with families about decisions, many students still make their own decisions and feel autonomous (Cullaty, 2011; Pizzolato & Hicklen, 2011). An under-researched topic in the area of family-student communications is who initiates that contact, the student or the parent? It is also clear that contact between families and college administrators appears to be growing, particularly in the area of families intervening on their students' behalf. This study begins to fill the knowledge gap

about level of family intervention and whether differential levels of university-sponsored engagement have a relationship with intervening behavior.

The next section explores uses and gratifications theory, which is the theory in Figure 1 that purports to explain why college parents seek out media and messaging from their students' college.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory is based on the idea that "individuals actively seek out media, media use is goal directed, and that media consumption fills a wide variety of needs" (Kaye, 2005, p. 74). Additionally, uses and gratifications theory "posits that individuals are aware of their reasons for using media and selecting specific content, and that they use the media to gratify these needs" (Kaye, 2005, p. 74). In the context of college parents, a uses and gratifications approach would suggest that parents and families actively engage with communications from the school in order to satisfy their needs, such as to feel a connection with their student, to seek specific answers to questions, or for leisure (Kaye, 2005).

Ruggiero (2000) conducted an expansive literature review of uses and gratifications scholarship spanning back to the 1930s. Early work on uses and gratifications was done in the 1930s and 1940s and focused on radio, newspapers and print media, and later, television (Ruggiero, 2000). One of the hallmarks of Uses and gratifications theory is that it is based on the perspective of the consumer of the media, whereas many other communications theories examine "mass communication from the perspective of the communicator" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 7). The notion of an "active

audience" is key in uses and gratifications; the theory posits that individuals "display different types and amounts of activity in different communication settings and at different times in the communication process" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 8). One of the reasons that uses and gratifications is salient to this study is that the researcher wants to measure families' behaviors based on the exposure they have to particular communications. Knowing how actively parents and families engage with particular communications—such as a daily blog—will play a role in how we measure desirable outcomes, which is explored in the next chapter.

Uses and gratifications suggest that "media use is selective and motivated by rational self-awareness of the individual's own needs and an expectation that those needs will be satisfied by particular types of media and content" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 18). Whether a person chooses to engage with a communications medium to seek information, to be entertained, or to escape reality, uses and gratifications posits that at some level—conscious or subconscious—people are actively seeking what they need to fulfill a particular psychological or intellectual need (Ruggiero, 2000). Similarly, uses and gratifications suggests that when presented with a range of media outlets, people will select the medium that best suits their interests and needs. This relates to the current study because families were asked which engagement methods they use (one-time, semi-regular, and/or continuous), specifically their level of engagement with the daily blog. Applying a uses and gratifications lens to this study allowed the researcher to consider parent/family engagement as an active choice that families make to be as engaged as they

wish to be along a continuum of university-sponsored invitations to involvement, whether in person or via electronic media.

Looking specifically at blogs, a uses and gratifications perspective illustrates how blogs provide an array of engagement opportunities for readers. Blogs can serve as "both one-way and two-way forms of communication" (Kaye, 2005, p. 75). Blog users can choose their level of engagement; users can choose simply to read a blog and digest its content or they can choose to make comments and engage with the author or other readers (if the blog allows it) (Kaye, 2005). Blog readers also control the frequency with which they read the blog (Kaye, 2005). While uses and gratifications is a promising lens through which to view this study, one must note that a long-standing criticism of the theory is that it is so individualistic in nature that it is difficult to predict behavior in other groups (Ruggiero, 2000).

Some research has been conducted on blogs dedicated to specific topics, such as political blogs; those findings may be applicable to college blogs (Kaye, 2005). There are a host of potential theories on why people access blogs in general: a sense of community with like-minded individuals, convenience (blogs are "sort of like an online version of Reader's Digest"), and the desire to seek knowledge from insiders or people with expertise on a particular topic (Kaye, 2005, pp. 76–77). When looking at political blogs specifically, readers accessed blogs for information seeking and media checking, convenience, personal fulfillment, political surveillance (understanding politicians' actions), social surveillance (learning about other people's opinions), expression, and affiliation (which included interacting with like-minded people) (Kaye, 2005).

Kaye (2005) found that interacting with political blogs "gratifies excitement, entertainment, and relaxation needs" and that they may "empower users with general and inside information that they may then use to bring about change or to protect the political and social status quo" (p. 90). While this was a political study, one can extrapolate these concepts to a college parent blog. One can imagine college parents might use a college-produced blog for information seeking (to find out about events, resources, policies), convenience (to know what is happening at the school without asking their student and seeming intrusive), personal fulfillment (to feel a sense of connection to their student, who they presumably love and miss), surveillance (to follow administrative decisions), social surveillance (to have a sense of campus culture), and affiliation (to be part of a group sharing a common experience of being a college parent at that school).

Kaye conducted a more general study of blog users in 2010, looking at blog use from a uses and gratifications lens. The study was fairly consistent with the 2005 study findings; motivational factors for using blogs were "convenient information seeking, anti-traditional media sentiment, expression/affiliation, guidance/opinion seeking, blog ambiance, personal fulfillment, political debate, variety of opinion, and specific inquiry" (Kaye, 2010, p. 204). One of the interesting findings of this study was that readers formed attachments to particular bloggers of interest and wanted to feel connected to those bloggers. Blog readers "seek the personal accounts and analysis of favorite bloggers, they follow the interactions between bloggers and their supporters, and they find blogs humorous and well written" (Kaye, 2010, p. 205).

The findings of Rudolf and Sweetser (2009) echoed this notion: college student bloggers "said what they posted is how they garner their power, appeal, and authenticity" with their readers (p. 30). That feeling of connection or affiliation with a particular blog or blogger presumably gratifies a reader's needs. From a practitioner standpoint, the researcher of this current study saw distinct parallels between blog readers' desire for connection to the blogger and Uses and gratifications theory. With the researcher's own blog, there were readers who were quick to send personal messages to the researcher. Some readers appeared to be interested in connecting with the researcher because they trusted the researcher or perceived her as an expert, asking specific questions and seeking guidance. Other readers wanted to share reactions to the blog, suggesting their motivation was to engage in self-expression or affiliation with the blog's content. The reader's connection to the blogger seemed to deepen when there was a back and forth exchange of multiple messages; it created a sense of personal fulfillment, which represents another form of gratification.

Finally, Kaye's (2010) study also revealed some gender differences in motivation to read blogs. Educated women wanted convenient information seeking, and younger women who have less education and a lower SES read blogs more for expression/ affiliation (Kaye, 2010). By contrast, older male respondents sought out blogs because they distrusted mainstream media outlets (Kaye, 2010).

As we look ahead to Chapter III and the methods of this study, a cluster analysis might help reveal the characteristics of college families who engage in the differing levels of college engagement and what those subgroups have in common. While it was

outside the scope of this study to survey parents on which of their particular need(s) were filled by university-sponsored engagement opportunities, Wilson University has measured uses and gratifications informally by conducting a biannual communications survey with its undergraduate families to gauge how well they are meeting families' communications needs.

In 2015, 95.7% of respondent families rated the Family 411 blog as excellent, very good, or good; 97.3% rated the monthly e-newsletter as excellent, very good, or good; and 97.8% rated Wilson University's overall communications program as excellent, very good, or good. The 2017 survey added a question asking about frequency of Family 411 readership and found that 63% of respondents read the Family 411 blog daily or at least once a week. In 2017, 97% of the respondent families rated the Family 411 blog as excellent to good; 98.6% rated the monthly e-newsletter as excellent, very good, or good; and 90% rated that, overall, they were satisfied or very satisfied with Wilson University's communications program (N. Vinukonda, personal communication, September 5, 2017). While there was some basic information available about communications satisfaction at Wilson University, certainly an implication for future research would be to investigate which specific needs these college engagement opportunities fill for parents/families.

This section illustrated how Uses and gratifications theory could be salient to this study. Uses and gratifications gives us a lens through which we can view parent and family consumption of media, which represent engagement opportunities with their student's college. Uses and gratifications suggests that families have agency in how

engaged they wish to be and in choosing which communication methods best fulfill their needs. Uses and gratifications theory can be particularly salient in regard to blogs written in the first person, as those may help connect parents and families to the institution in a more personal way than traditional institutional communications (Kaye, 2005; Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016).

One of the central premises of this study's conceptual framework was that colleges desire to have positive and mutually beneficial relationships with parents and families. The next section of this literature review examines Organization-Public Relations (OPR), which is the theory that describes the institutional goal of positive relationships with its publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Organization-Public Relations (OPR)

Organization-Public Relations (OPR) is a term from public relations scholarship that is defined as "the state that exists between an organization and its key publics that provides economic, social, political, and/or cultural benefits to all parties involved, and is characterized by mutual positive regard" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). A key theme in OPR research is that it must involve mutual benefit to both the organization and the customer or public, suggesting a two-way, ongoing relationship (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Positive OPR is central to high-functioning organizations (Jo, Hon, & Brunner, 2005; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Organizations that have productive relationships with their publics can contribute to that organization's overall success, whether financial success, public perception, etc. (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

There are several components of OPR that have been identified in the literature. Hon and Grunig (1999) identified "trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality as relational outcomes" that lead to positive OPR (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 218). Kelleher and Miller (2006) further explored those variables:

> an organization's longer-term relationships with key publics can be evaluated by focusing on the following four indicators of the quality of an organization-public relationship: 1) control mutuality, the degree to which parties agree on issues of power and influence; 2) trust, which includes dimensions of integrity, dependability, and competence; 3) satisfaction, the degree to which parties feel favorably toward each other because positive expectations are met; and 4) commitment, the degree to which parties believe that the relationship is worthwhile to continue. (p. 401)

Furthermore, Brunig (1999) asserted that OPR is created when an organization demonstrates "trust, openness, involvement, and commitment" towards its publics, and the expression of those behaviors will in turn influence those publics' "attitudes and behaviors as outcomes" (as cited in Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 218). The ultimate goal of OPR is to foster desirable behavioral outcomes—purchasing a product, speaking well of an organization, or recommending the organization to a friend (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016).

The nature of OPR is such that it can be viewed in terms of a relationship between an individual and an organization, such as a college. Ledingham and Brunig (1998) assert that strong OPR is seen in relationships that have balance and where both parties feel the other is investing in the relationship and is committed to good relations. Trust between the parties is also critical (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). In a consumer relationship,

positive OPR can be seen when the public/customer opts to stay with the organization as opposed to buying a competitor's product (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Using a college example, good OPR could be seen in a student's decision to stay enrolled at that school as opposed to transferring. Similarly, positive OPR can be seen during and after crisis situations; if an organization demonstrates its commitment to the welfare of its publics and acts responsibly during a crisis, the organization can still maintain customer loyalty (Jo et al., 2005).

Ledingham and Brunig (1998) suggested that communication is critical to the development of positive OPR. It is not enough for an organization to simply behave positively towards its publics; the public must understand that the organization is deliberately cultivating that positive relationship (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). In order to engender good OPR, organizations must "communicate involvement of those activities/programs that build the organization-public relationship" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 63). One of the ways an organization can communicate its commitment to relationship building with its publics is through the use of organizational blogs, which can represent a kind of ongoing engagement between the organization and the public.

Kelleher and Miller (2006) noted that "research in public relations and marketing has recently turned its focus on quantifying this abstract notion of relationship management as a means of contributing to the success and well being of an organization, as well as organizational financial success" (p. 400). Specifically, research about blogs has revealed that organizational blogs, particularly when they reflect a conversational human voice, "may have value in efforts aimed at building and maintaining

relationships" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 408). A college parent/family blog could serve as a relationship maintenance tool, providing a connection to the institution and a means to convey important information. The presence of a college parent/family blog may also represent a perceived invitation to engagement, as seen in the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model.

OPR and Higher Education

This section reviews some articles about higher education that connect to the notion of OPR, though perhaps indirectly. One study described relationship marketing as a tool that was used to enhance OPR at colleges (Vander Schee, 2010). Relationship marketing is "a personal, ongoing relationship between the organization and its individual customers that begins before and continues after the sale" (Vander Schee, 2010, p. 136). Relationship marketing has been successfully used as an enrollment management technique at some small colleges (Vander Schee, 2010). College staff were trained on admissions, financial aid policies and procedures, and effective communications with prospective students and their families (Vander Schee, 2010). Forming a closer relationship with a trained staff liaison dedicated to a particular family cut down the need to transfer student or parent questions to several different offices for answers (Vander Schee, 2010). Additionally, it changed the tone of the relationship between staff and student/family from a transactional or functional relationship to a "loyalty relationship" due to the connection formed with their specific staff liaison (Vander Schee, 2010, p. 141). In other words, the school demonstrated its commitment to the family by adopting a

strategy that purposefully built an ongoing relationship between staff and the family (Vander Schee, 2010).

Positive OPR was gained as the family experienced an ongoing relationship with their dedicated staff member and felt the personal touch of consistent interactions (Vander Schee, 2010). There are parallels between the relationship marketing model of a dedicated staff person for one's family and a daily blog for college families: a daily blog could create a sense of having a virtual staff liaison—an expert to provide information about the school—and could engender a sense of loyalty. The work of Kaye (2005, 2010) illustrated that some readers gravitate toward particular bloggers and want to affiliate with them. This had been the researcher's experience with her own parent/family blog, where the researcher had become the 'go-to' person for families who wanted to connect on both an information-seeking level as well as a personal level.

To investigate OPR among college students and their school, Jo et al. (2005) adapted a measurement scale from Hon and Grunig (1999) which suggested the ingredients for a mutually successful relationship. Their survey instrument included items about four previously-mentioned components (control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment) as well as two new ones—exchange relationship ("the ratio of perceived rewards to perceived costs") and communal relationship ("the extent to which an organization is genuinely concerned with the welfare of publics [and vice versa])" (Jo et al., 2005, p. 17). Jo et al. (2005) found that these six factors effectively measured students' relationships with their university. One caution in the study was that trust, commitment, control mutuality, and satisfaction were "closely related to each other,"

suggesting these concepts are linked in some way and should be tested further (Jo et al., 2005, p. 25).

Because this current study relied heavily on blogs as a mechanism for continuous engagement with families, and because purposeful communication is such a vital part of creating positive OPR, it is important to review related blog literature. The next section examines blogs and OPR.

Blogs and Their Relationship with OPR and Trust

In a 2007 study, Porter, Sweetser Trammell, Chung, and Kim investigated bloggers and blog use for public relations and concluded that blogs were "not being used as a standard public relations tool" (p. 94). This is consistent with the findings of the National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, which did not include blogs as a service offered to parents and families until its 2019 edition (Petree & Savage, 2019). However, Porter et al. (2007) did find utility in blog use—for those public relations practitioners who blog, they believe blogging can position them as "prestigious experts," which can create trust with their customers (p. 95). Drawing a parallel to the college context, college bloggers could be viewed as experts in the college experience, which can create a sense of trust and authenticity with parent/family readers, and thus encourage family engagement.

Kelleher and Miller (2006) examined organizational blogs and the conversational human voice. They found that blogs with a "conversational human voice" were more effective than traditional corporate communications on a company's website (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 395). Traditional corporate communications, which can "sound more like

profit-driven machinery than real people," were shown to be less effective in engaging audiences (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 398). Furthermore, organizational communications that displayed "communicated relational commitment" correlated "significantly with desirable relational outcomes" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 395). In this context, conversational voice "indicates an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's publics," and communicated commitment is the public's perception of "communication in which members of an organization work to express their commitment to building and maintaining a relationship" (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 226).

Trust is a key component of how researchers study blog effectiveness. Chua, Robertson, Parackal, and Deans (2012) found that "using blogs as a tool to create transparency and credibility online contribute to the overall development of trust for a company" (p. 2). The use of the first-person voice (e.g., "I," "me," "my") enhances the influence of the blog and "presumably improves transparency" (Chua et al., 2012, p. 3). Use of the first person could be especially salient for college families, as they may feel more trust if a school projects the sense of a "real person" in its communications (Chua et al., 2016). At the researcher's institution, the researcher regularly receives calls and emails from parents who say they feel they know the researcher through the blog and trusted that she would help them if they needed assistance. One must note that having a blog with a first-person, conversational voice does not automatically create trust, it merely "functions as a mechanism to build trust among its online audience" (Chua et al.,

2016, p. 13). In this sense, a blog can be a part of an organization's overall relationship management strategy, but it is not a panacea.

Another component of building trust in blogs is acknowledging faults and issues when they arise (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). It is important to note that "in cyberspace, the requirement to be candid and forthright is doubly important" if one wants to connect meaningfully with one's key publics (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 398). Blogs can be an important communications strategy for an organization because blogs convey "some sense of human attributes existing behind an organizational façade" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 409). One way that bloggers can create that sense of human connection is through the disclosure of "feelings, uncertainties, opinions and self-reflections" (Chua et al., 2012, p. 2). These humanizing strategies can help convey the "realness" of a blogger (Chua et al., 2016).

When looking at blogs from a crisis communications perspective, Park and Cameron (2014) looked at social presence theory, or the sense that an organization "is perceived as being real in a mediated communication environment" such as a blog or a website (p. 489). In other words, blogs that are conversational and friendly in tone are more likely to make readers feel like they are "interacting with actual human beings" (Park & Cameron, 2014, p. 490). Having a sense of real human interactivity in a crisis produced some valuable public relations outcomes in this study, including the intent to purchase products from the company, and engaging in positive word of mouth communications (Park & Cameron, 2014). It also revealed the importance of having a blogger with a credible voice to help in "reducing negative crisis perceptions and

presenting its commitment to correct problems" (Park & Cameron, 2014, p. 501). Given the Millennial parents' sense of anxieties about their children and the range of potential college student issues with health and safety impacts (drinking, mental health, illness), a school blog with a human voice may be one way to help mitigate parents' and families' concerns, making a blog a useful OPR tool (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Wandel, 2008).

Kelleher and Miller (2006) concluded that "organizational blogs may have value in efforts aimed at building and maintaining relationships" (p. 408). Conversational voice helped a blog feel credible and trustworthy; conversational voice "correlated positively and significantly with all four of the key relational outcomes measured: trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 409). Additionally, "publics perceive advantages for blogs as social media" and blogging with a conversational voice "positively influences relational outcomes and correlates with more favorable perceptions" (Kelleher, 2008, p. 302). Having a blog with a candid conversational style could also provide a way to "invite people to a conversation," which could be perceived as the kind of invitation to familial involvement referenced in the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model of parent/family engagement (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 410).

Blogs, OPR, and Higher Education

There was scant literature on the use of blogs as relationship management tools in higher education. Wandel (2008) noted that "colleges and universities are expanding their online arsenals to include tools such as blogs, videos, podcasts, and online social networks" (p. 35). A 2006 study showed that 64% of prospective college students "have

read or would like to read a blog written by a faculty member" and 63% "have read or would like to read a blog written by a current student" (Wandel, 2008, p. 37). Online tools such as blogs "may become one of the most effective ways to engage today's college students and to strengthen their bonds to the university," helping them feel "socially accepted even before visiting campus" (Wandel, 2008, p. 45). These same principles of providing connection, engagement, and a sense of comfort are applicable to communication with college families; one implication for practice is "targeting special interest groups . . . such as parents" (Wandel, 2008, p. 46). It is interesting to note that while literature about the potential uses of blogs as an OPR tool has been around since the mid-2000s, higher education has not yet widely adopted blogs for parent/family relations. This study will hopefully begin to explore how blogs could influence how practitioners approach their work.

Another higher education blog study comes from Rudolf and Sweetser (2009). The researchers examined student bloggers who wrote admissions and recruitment blogs for their school. From a content analysis perspective, this study revealed the various frames that bloggers use when writing about their college—social life, academics, extracurricular activities, community, finance, physical wellness, athletics, residential life, professors, and religion (Rudolf & Sweetser, 2009). Two of the findings of this study are that "student blogs have the potential to showcase the college experience at an institution" and "student blogs offer prospective students a chance to 'test drive' an institution" (Rudolf & Sweetser, 2009, p. 29). These are some of the very same outcomes that a college parent blog can produce by providing families with information about

activities, resources, campus culture, and the many things students experience. Furthermore, bloggers "created opportunities to dispense the institution's message," which is what so many of the previously mentioned practitioner articles encouraged (Rudolf & Sweetser, 2009, p. 29). There appears to be "untapped potential" in using blogs for recruitment, and it stands to reason there could also be untapped potential in using blogs for family engagement (Rudolf & Sweetser, 2009, p. 33).

It is interesting to note that in the Rudolf and Sweetser (2009) study, 75% of the 92 schools that had student admissions blogs were private schools. While it is premature to infer from one study that blogs are more prominent in private colleges, the question of how often public vs. private schools communicate with families—or use blogs—is an area that needs further research. One final note on college-produced blogs: Rudolf and Sweetser (2009) suggested that "it seems likely these blogs lose their effectiveness when bloggers post more than once or twice a week. Bloggers simply ran out of insightful things to write" (p. 32). This is a direct contradiction with the researcher's subjective experience writing a college parent/family blog. Regular blog readers did not seem to care if it was a "light news cycle" with limited content; similarly, if the researcher announced that the blog would go dark for a time because of illness or vacation, some wrote to the researcher to say they missed their regular dose of campus life. Continuous connection to campus seemed to be what readers craved. Rudolf and Sweetser (2009) admitted their conclusion was "not justified quantitatively"—just as the researcher's perceptions of the utility of a daily blog are not yet justified quantitatively—but this exposes other potential items for future research: are there diminishing returns in family

engagement as blog posting frequency increases, and is the reason blogs are so infrequently used in higher education because there is a perception that blogs are too time-intensive to create relative to the perceived return on investment?

All of the aforementioned studies point to the notion that "practitioners can improve the impact of their public relations program through continued relationship maintenance" (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 228). Blogs, particularly those with a conversational human voice, have been shown to be an effective tool in developing relationships between organizations and their publics (Kelleher, 2008; Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Park & Cameron, 2014; Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016). This demonstrates the potential power of blogs in cultivating OPR.

Having explored colleges' desire for positive OPR and the role that blogs can play in enhancing OPR, the final section of this literature review investigates how colleges engage parents and families, and the evolution of parent and family relations offices in U.S. colleges.

The Rise of the Family Relations Function in Colleges

The University of Minnesota has been a leader in the field of researching parent and family relations offices. Since 2003, the University of Minnesota has conducted the National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, which is a biannual survey that benchmarks parent and family relations efforts in higher education (Savage & Petree, 2009). It is important to have this longitudinal study, as it enables researchers to see how colleges are adapting to parent/family needs and requests over time. The National Survey of College and University Parent Programs typically covers topics such as

"organizational structure, program demographics, staffing of parent/family program offices, services and programming, program budget, [and] advice" (Savage & Petree, 2015, p. 8). It will be helpful to provide context briefly on some of these areas to understand the trends in parent/family relations work, as described in the 2017 National Survey of College and University Parent Programs.

The majority of parent/family relations offices are housed within student affairs (62%) or advancement/development (16%) (Savage & Petree, 2017). The location of the parent/family relations office appears to have a strong correlation to the type of institution, with 74% of public schools housing the office within student affairs as compared to 47% at private schools; private schools housed the office in the "foundation, advancement, or development" office 35% of the time (Savage & Petree, 2017, p. 2). In terms of staff members, 34% of respondents reported working in parent/family relations full-time, and 49% work in parent/family relations "half time or less" (Savage & Petree, 2017, p. 3).

Staff members' educational attainment is on the rise, with increasing numbers of staff having a master's degree or higher, typically from a higher education or student affairs graduate program (Savage & Petree, 2017). Of the respondents, 49% had been engaged in parent/family relations work for 1-5 years and only 17% had worked for 11 years or more (Savage & Petree, 2017). Program budgets vary widely, from less than $10,000 (16%) to over $250,000 (5%) (Savage & Petree, 2017). Some institutions' budgets come in part from a dues-paying membership in a parent association (16% of

respondents), but most came from university budget allocation (68%) (Savage & Petree, 2017).

The longitudinal data also showed that the professional field of parent and family relations has grown dramatically within the past 20 years. According to the 2015 National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, 53% of schools surveyed formed their parent/family relations offices between 2000 and 2015, and 12.5% formed them between 1990 and 1999; less than 10% of schools had a parent/family relations office before 1979 (Savage & Petree, 2015). A point to note: the dramatic rise in the creation of parent/family relations offices roughly corresponds to when the Millennial students (and their very involved families) were beginning to enter college, starting around 2000.

The proliferation of parent and family relations offices shows the growing role of parents and families in the college experience (Daniel et al., 2001). Colleges actively work to support and involve parents and families through programming because "there has been an intentional paradigm shift toward promoting collaborative relationships between parents and institutions" (Lowe & Dotterer, 2017, p. 34). Colleges are increasingly viewing parents/families as partners, having moved from the *in loco parentis* philosophy to more of an "*in consortio cum parentibus*" (in partnership with parents) model (Henning, 2007, p. 539).

Services Offered to Families

In response to—or perhaps to encourage—family engagement, colleges offer a broad array of parent and family services. In terms of most successful offerings for engagement, parent/family relations offices listed parent/family orientation (34%), an e-

newsletter (19%), and family weekend (10%) (Savage & Petree, 2015). These numbers were mostly consistent with the 2017 survey, with parent/family orientation (35%), an e-newsletter (24%), and family weekend (4%) being reported as the most successful offerings (Savage & Petree, 2017). These areas of most-reported success represent two types of same engagement methods that are captured in the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1—one-time interventions (Orientation and Family Weekend) and semi-regular interventions (e-newsletter).

The 2017 National Survey of College and University Parent Programs revealed the most commonly offered services for families:

> parent website (98%); parent/family orientation (98%); parent/family weekend (95%); email newsletter (93%); email address dedicated to parents (88%); parent/family handbook, guide, or calendar (83%); phone number dedicated to parents (70%); and Facebook pages (60%). (Savage & Petree, 2017, p. 5)

There was no category for blogs in the 2017 survey, though some respondents (when asked if they provided other services), said they offered a parent blog (Savage & Petree, 2017). The 2019 survey (in press), does offer blogs as a category of services offered, so future iterations of this survey will be able to benchmark the use of parent/family blogs. Currently "there are limited examples from the literature of institutional programs that actively engage parents and families consistently and throughout the span of college" (Kiyama et al., 2015, p. 43); this study added to the literature by illustrating the influence that continuous interventions for engagement had on parents and families, using the Family 411 blog as an example.

With the advent of open source and easy-to-use web authoring software, an increasing number of offerings for parents/families have become electronic (Savage & Petree, 2015). In 2015, 100% of respondent schools in the National Survey of College and University Parent Programs offered a parent or family website (Savage & Petree, 2015). It is noteworthy that 72% of those schools said there was a link from their college's home page to their parent/family page (Savage & Petree, 2015). This suggests that colleges believe it is important to communicate with the parent/family constituency, as front-page web real estate is typically at a premium.

This section of the literature review detailed the growth of the parent/family relations function at the college level. The next section explores the programmatic underpinnings of family engagement as seen through the lens of practitioners.

Programmatic Opportunities and Implications for Practice

Throughout the literature—both empirical and practitioner-generated—some best practices have emerged on how to engage college families. Several articles discussed how colleges can play an important role in educating parents/families about the resources, opportunities, and challenges of college (Coburn, 2006; Price, 2008, Ward-Roof et al., 2008). A good communications strategy is key to this effort. Ward-Roof et al. (2008) advised that "staff cannot overcommunicate with parents and family members" and advocated for the establishment of a pre-arranged set of messages and consistently stressed those themes in all family communications (pp. 52–53). The timing of when to begin engaging college families is also something practitioners must consider. Ward-Roof et al. (2008) reviewed programmatic opportunities that colleges can use to engage

parents/ families and advocated that colleges should reach out to parents/families early in the students' time at college and do so through a variety of methods. The authors acknowledge the wide variety of existing programmatic options to engage parents/ families, including orientation, family weekend, parent associations, and more (Ward-Roof et al., 2008).

Price (2008) argues that colleges should help explain key experiences to parents/ families in order for them to understand their students' academic and extracurricular lives as well as challenges they may face. Having a solid base of knowledge about the college experience, as well as student development, will arm families with information they need to help their students persist through difficulties (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cullaty, 2011, Ward-Roof et al., 2008). Electronic newsletters can be used to educate parents/families, and with the ubiquitousness of email and the Internet, college parents have a baseline expectation for this kind of outreach (Kiyama et al., 2015; Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Coburn (2006) approaches the need for family education on the college experience from a different lens: the reduction of parent anxiety. He argues that the more effectively practitioners can help families understand student development and the changes their students undergo, the less anxious parents will be (Coburn, 2006). Similarly, parents/families who are less anxious will be more likely to parent in appropriate ways and intervene for their students less frequently (Coburn, 2006). Ward-Roof et al. (2008) expanded this idea of the pragmatic reasons colleges ought to arm families with information about appropriate familial engagement: "we all can spend our

time together focusing on student success, instead of telling parents/families what they cannot do" (p. 48).

Colleges also must acknowledge that the complexity of family structures is greater now than in years past (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008). The profile of college students' families has changed, with new constructs and experiences to consider: there is greater college attainment for parents, a higher divorce rate, fewer siblings per family, and a more diverse society (Daniel et al., 2001). Within the literature, many practitioners advocate for sensitivity to the distinct information needs of specific subsets of parents/ families, including first-generation families, international families, families of color, etc. (Daniel et al., 2001; Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Price, 2008). Practitioners are challenged to serve parents and families equitably, respecting their life contexts, cultures, and identities (Carney-Hall, 2008; Daniel et al., 2001; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Kiyama & Harper, 2018). Special care and attention should be paid to engaging underrepresented groups: "past K-12 research suggests parents of students of color, first generation students, and low income students are at particular risk of feeling less engaged" (Kiyama & Harper, 2018, p. 376). Schools have the ability to "create bridges between students' multiple worlds: school, home, and community" and should think about how best to engage all families (Kiyama & Harper, 2018, p. 376). It is important not to program just to White, middle- and upper-class families, lest schools "miss a significant population of students and their families" (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008, p. 390).

The rise in families' college attainment has been particularly challenging for practitioners. On the one hand, increases in college attainment means that a larger

number of college parents and families have their own higher educational experiences from which to draw (Cutright, 2008; Daniel et al., 2001). The paradox is that families can also be ill-informed because of their memory of their own college experiences and how a college functions might not match up with the reality of their students' college: "the collegiate environment they attended no longer exists" (Daniel et al., 2001, p. 8). Just as schools have to re-educate families with college attainment, they also have to find ways to assist families who have little to no experience with college or who experienced a different type of college environment (e.g., 2-year versus 4-year, public versus private, small versus large, PWI [primarily White institution] versus HBCU [historically Black college or university]). Many colleges seek to diversify their student bodies by enrolling more first-generation students and international students, so schools have to take into account the increased information needs of those families and communicate appropriately (Kiyama et al., 2015).

Multiple articles (Coburn, 2006; Cullaty, 2011; Daniel et al., 2001; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Kennedy, 2009) stressed the importance of having a systematic approach to how schools work with parents and families. Cullaty (2011), Daniel et al. (2001), and Kennedy (2009) all recommended that schools set a policy for parent involvement, because if the schools do not do so, families will define their own spaces and determine their roles based on their K-12 role construction. It is also recommended that colleges dedicate a specific person or office to serve as a liaison for parents and families (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cutright, 2008; Henning, 2007; Kennedy, 2009; Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Daniel et al. (2001) stressed that schools should "proactively and intentionally" connect with families to educate them on the college experience (p. 9). Coburn (2006) connected the idea of educating parents/families with the important outcome of student autonomy: when schools communicate their family engagement philosophy, families "have an easier time appreciating our reluctance to notify them or to intervene in situations that we think students should handle themselves" (p. 12). Cullaty (2011) also stressed that families need to understand their role in students' autonomy development, saying that parents and schools "must work together to ensure that students develop autonomy" (p. 436). Lowe and Dotterer (2017) summed it up nicely, recommending that schools need to determine "how to leverage the positive aspects of parental involvement" (p. 39) with the developmental needs of students.

Having looked at various programmatic and communication channels colleges use to engage parents and families, the next section of the literature review focuses on one particularly desirable type of family engagement, at least from the institution's perspective—parent/family fundraising.

Fundraising

Parents and families are increasingly seen as a source of revenue for schools: "since 2003, the number of colleges and universities soliciting funds from parent and family members has nearly doubled from 43.9% to 82%" (Kiyama et al., 2015, p. 57). Colleges, "recognizing that involved parents are a new reality (and a potential fundraising source)," have responded by establishing offices and liaisons to facilitate parental communication with both students and the institution (Sax & Weintraub, 2016, p. 74).

Administrators are also including parent prospects more in events on campus and with top administrators as a cultivation tool (Quizon, 2011; Savage, 2008). The researcher's professional experience reflects those trends; the researcher's institution decided in 2007 to decouple the alumni and parent relations offices (which had previously been under one office), creating a stand-alone office for each constituency. The parent/family relations office also began engaging high net-worth families with the president, provost, and deans. These decisions came as a result of assessing families' desire for connection to the university and their capacity for philanthropy.

McInnis (2001) looked at how colleges engage parents/families through institutional advancement, which is a combination of "friendraising" and fundraising. Knowing families want to be engaged and involved and knowing that colleges are looking for new revenue streams, McInnis (2001) argues that colleges should engage parent/family fundraising prospects to build a positive relationship, and do so in ways that are personal, inviting, and informative. Parents and families want to receive college communications and attend events that are warm and personal in tone and that give insights into campus life; these can influence fundraising outcomes later (McInnis, 2001). While some practitioners advocate for family fundraising, it is important to note the ethical considerations involved. Wartman and Savage (2008) and Kiyama et al. (2015) caution that the college's fundraising mission should not interfere with the school's goal to serve all parents/families equitably; furthermore, colleges should not privilege those families who can make gifts over those who cannot.

There is one example in the literature of a linkage between family communications and fundraising outcomes. Chapman (2017) investigated the connection between blog readership and giving at their university. The university had seen an 83% increase in dollars raised and a 53% increase in the number of parent/family donors between 2009 and 2015; this corresponded to the creation of their parent/family blog, which was started in 2009 (Chapman, 2017). Analysis of specific, gift-level segments showed marked increases in family charitable giving overall, with a few specific segment decreases (Table 1) (Chapman, 2017). A chi-square analysis confirmed that blog subscribers were donating at higher levels than non-subscribers (Chapman, 2017). This is the only known example of a college parent/family blog showing a significant relationship with parent/family giving. However, caution must be used in the interpretation of these findings, as correlation does not equate to causation.

Table 1

Increase in Gift-Level Segments from Parent and Family Donors FY09-15

Gift Level	% Change
$1-24	105%
$25-49	1%
$50-99	-10%
$100-149	-5%
$150-249	13%
$250-499	11%
$500-749	20%

Table 1

Cont.

Gift Level	% Change
$750-999	-24%
$1,000-2,499	5%
$2,500-4,999	41%

Conclusion

In their 2015 monograph "The Relationship Between College Students and Their Families," Kiyama et al. (2015) acknowledged that we must better understand "what messages, communication strategies, and/or invitations do parents and families receive from institutions" (p. 70). This literature review has shown that there is a gap in the literature related to the behaviors of parents/families and colleges in how they hope to engage with each other, particularly in terms of parent intervention, sense of trust and satisfaction, and charitable giving. This study was a starting point in investigating these themes at Wilson University, and the results suggest a continued research agenda for the future.

There are also implications for higher education graduate programs; if these programs do not currently include coursework on the role of parents and families in higher education—and how to train pre-professionals on how best to engage families—they could be missing an important opportunity to inform practice. Parents and families are a constituency that does not appear to be going away anytime soon, so we have an obligation to help graduate students understand the value families can bring in students'

development and experience of college, as well as some of the pitfalls of that engagement. Being well-grounded in understanding the distinct needs of families—and how to encourage the ideal forms of interaction—will better prepare graduate students to enter higher education administration.

The next chapter explores the research methodology of the study, including information about the research design, sample population and sampling procedures, the instrument to be used, data collection procedures, data analysis, and potential limitations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous two chapters outlined the context for this study, including the conceptual framework, what the literature shows about family engagement with their college students, uses and gratifications theory, Organization-Public Relations (OPR), and the role blogs can play in communications. Again, the purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which parents/families interact with their students' college following university-sponsored engagement opportunities, and the resulting behavioral outcomes or attitudes that follow, specifically parent/family intervention with the college on the students' behalf, sense of satisfaction with the institution, and charitable giving.

Because the use of family-oriented blogs as a continuous engagement tool is a relatively new phenomenon, a necessary preliminary step in this study was to survey the higher education landscape to see which colleges are using blogs. The results of this preliminary work then informed this study's research design. The next section details the researcher's preliminary findings.

Pilot Study on College Parent and Family Blogs

As part of an independent study course that preceded this study, the researcher attempted to identify current colleges in the United States that offer parent/family blogs. The Association for Higher Education Parent Program Professionals (AHEPPP), the

professional organization to which parent/family relations practitioners can belong, has over 180 member schools, primarily located in North America (AHEPPP, n.d.). The AHEPPP listserv connects practitioners to each other for information sharing and benchmarking.

In September 2018, the researcher worked with AHEPPP to send a survey about blog use to its member schools, requesting a follow-up interview with schools that blog. Of the 180+ member schools, 57 schools responded to the survey. Of the 57 respondent schools, only seven reported writing a parent/family blog; these schools are early adopters of parent and family blogs. Table 2 shows the types of schools that author parent/family blogs, and the general characteristics of each.

Table 2

Colleges Currently Using Blogs for Parents/Families (*N*=8)

School	Frequency of blogging	Primary author(s)	Delivery method	Written in first person?
1. Southern, public, land-grant university	1x/month	Rotates: parent association board of directors member	Social media, Campus ESP e-newsletter	Yes
2. Northwestern, private, religiously-affiliated university	1x/month	Rotates: administrators, parents, students	Emailed to parents	Varies
3. Northeastern, private university*	1x/month (2018); 2x/month (2016-17)	Rotates: administrators, graduate assistant, parents	Unknown	No
4. Southern, public, land-grant university	1x/week	Rotates: parent volunteers, hired students, administrators	Social media, e-newsletter	Varies

Table 2

Cont.

School	Frequency of blogging	Primary author(s)	Delivery method	Written in first person?
5. Northeastern, public, land-grant university	2x/month	Rotates: parent board members, student ambassadors or administrators	Social media, Campus ESP parent portal e-newsletter	Yes
6. Northeastern, private, religiously-affiliated university*	1x/month	Single author (Exec. Dir. of Parent Programs)	Unknown	Yes
7. Southern, public university	1x/month	Rotates: administrators	Emailed to family listserv; included in e-newsletter	No
8. Wilson University*	Daily (weekdays)	Single author (Exec. Dir. of Family Communications)	Emailed to parents	Yes

Note. * did not respond to request for an interview; data are based on analysis of schools' websites

Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with five of the schools that write parent/family blogs (see Appendix A); two schools did not respond to the request for an interview. As the interviews were conducted, some schools expressed reluctance to have their comments attributed to their school by name; therefore, Table 2 only shows generic school data, and this research study only focused on the Wilson University parent and family population.

Discussion of Existing Parent and Family Blogs

Most schools published blogs about once a month; Campus 5 from Table 2 publishes twice a month, and Campus 4 publishes once a week. Wilson University is the only known college to have a daily parent/family blog. Two schools expressed that their

readership wanted them to blog more frequently, such as twice a month instead of once a month. Those schools reported that they would like to be able to provide more frequent blog posts but did not feel adequately staffed to do so.

Authorship of the blog varied by school. Many of the schools had a rotating pool of authors: parent/family volunteers (often parent board members), students (paid and unpaid), graduate assistants, campus partners from other offices, and parent/family relations staff. For schools that had parent or student volunteers as bloggers, the parent/family relations practitioner always edited the blog for suitability and content before publishing the blog on the website. Only two schools—Wilson University and Campus 6—had a primarily single-author blog, which allowed parents and families to hear consistently from one person.

The voice of the blogs varied by school; some schools used the first-person voice (the use of "I" statements), while others adopted the more formal third-person voice. The schools that employed the first-person voice made a deliberate choice to do so; they meant to invoke a conversational tone and imply a personal connection to the institution. One school was considering moving from a third-person voice to first-person because they believed it would be more consistent with the image their parent/family office was trying to project: a personal, relations-based team.

Several schools gave positive responses when asked about the effectiveness of using parent/family volunteers as bloggers. One school reported that their parent/family volunteers independently come up with a communications calendar for blog topics, which had proved successful. Campus 2 shared a story about the effectiveness of a blog post

from a parent who did not share the school's religious affiliation; that parent could speak authentically about the inclusiveness of a major campus tradition (that has an overtly religious purpose) so that families *not* of that faith would feel welcome to attend. The parent/family relations practitioner felt that the parent's words were more authentic and impactful than the practitioner's would have been.

However, schools also reported challenges with volunteer bloggers. One school expressed frustration because they wanted bloggers to talk about the experience of being a parent/family member at that school, but said their volunteers frequently provided blog content with strictly factual information (hours of operation for offices, etc.). Student blog volunteers could also be difficult in that their availability to blog was impacted by upcoming exams or major projects. Paid student bloggers appeared to produce more regular blog postings than purely volunteer student bloggers.

When asked about the content their blogs covered, most schools said they try to cover everything. Schools created content that included advice for students and parents/families, descriptions of major campus events or traditions, major university news, descriptions of processes (e.g., how students select housing for the next year, how to get on-campus jobs), and services available to students (e.g., flu shots, career services). Many schools' blogs attempted to give a sense of 'What is it like for your student to be here?' and included anecdotal information (often provided by student bloggers) on the importance of finding a good study space, why it could be helpful to go to the counseling center, etc.

Delivery mechanisms for the blogs varied. All of the blogs were posted on the schools' websites, so they were available for families who bookmarked the site and checked periodically for new entries. However, all of the schools had mechanisms to push blog content out to families. Several schools shared blog content with families via social media: they would create a post on the parent/family relations Facebook page, Twitter, or Instagram and link to the blog. For the schools that directly emailed the blog to parents and families, most used a mass email service, sending to all families and providing an 'opt out' feature (for families to unsubscribe if they wished). Wilson University's blog was emailed out via a mass email service and was an 'opt in' system (parents/families had to submit their email address to subscribe to the blog; they were not automatically subscribed).

Two schools partnered with a vendor called Campus ESP (https://www.campusesp.com/) for their delivery mechanism. Campus ESP is a communications platform that creates a parent portal; parents/families can then elect to receive information from the school about specific topics (athletics, fraternity/sorority life, news, etc.), and can specify how often they want to receive information from the school (once a month, twice a month, or weekly). As new content is created, the author tags it with a topic or category (e.g., fraternity/sorority life); Campus ESP then collects any new blog content within a family's indicated interests and emails it to them at the frequency the family requested. The Campus ESP schools indicated they automatically subscribed parents and families to the parent/family blog, so all families in the Campus ESP system received blog content.

When asked how families liked the blog, the schools had varied responses. Many of the schools said their parents and families reported being very satisfied with their parent/family communications programs, but were not sure if families would attribute that to a blog proper. Schools that delivered blog content via Campus ESP, an e-newsletter, or social media stated that they were not sure if parents and families would realize that there *was* a blog. One school conducted a communications survey and asked about the parent/family blog; they discovered that most respondents were not familiar with the blog (even though they had been receiving blog content via Campus ESP). It seemed that what practitioners considered "blog" content looked like just another item in an e-newsletter or a regular Facebook post to parents and families. In other words, there was not a specific connection to an individual *blogger*, and no perceived identification with a blog versus a regular news story.

There was one school that produced a "conversation calendar," which suggested monthly topics for parents/families to discuss with their students. The conversation calendar was pushed out via email monthly to families and has been very well received. While the school did not identify this publication as a blog proper, it did share some of the same type of content that is included in Wilson University's Family 411 blog.

None of the schools reported planning to stop writing their blog in the next 6 months, suggesting that they find the blog to be helpful for outreach and information sharing with families. Two additional AHEPPP schools reported on the survey that they were planning to begin blogging within the next 6 months. Future iterations of the

National Survey of College and University Parent Programs will show whether there is growing momentum in the use of blogs for family engagement.

Through this preliminary survey, the researcher concluded that there is only one known school—Wilson University—that produces a daily parent/family blog that could create continuous engagement (as shown in Table 2). Because there were no other daily blogs with which to compare, this study was designed to examine one school's parent and family population and served as a starting point in understanding the use of daily parent/family blogs as a continuous engagement tool. This research begins to fill the existing knowledge gap and adds to the literature on college family engagement. The next sections outline the research questions and research design for the study.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What clusters (i.e., groups) of Wilson University parents and families emerge based on their level of engagement with the school, as measured by event attendance, e-newsletter reading, and blog reading?
    1a. What are the main differentiators of each cluster (e.g., demographic categories)?
2. Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters contact college officials to help solve problems their student is having?
3. Are there statistical differences in the various clusters' reported satisfaction with the school?

4. Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters make gifts to the school?

Research Design

This was an exploratory study, as it investigated an area of higher education practice that did not have an extensive base of existing research (de Vaus, 2001). From a practitioner's standpoint, the researcher could affirm that there appeared to be differential parent/family behaviors based on their levels of family engagement. However, before "asking 'why?' [that is] we must be sure about the fact and dimensions of the phenomenon" (de Vaus, 2001, p. 2). In other words, research must first confirm if a basic premise is correct before attempting to explain a phenomenon (de Vaus, 2001). In this case, one had to determine if there were in fact differential behaviors at Wilson University based on level of engagement before one could propose a hypothesis to explain the differences. Therefore, an exploratory research approach was appropriate for this study.

Exploratory research "refers to the very domain of what can be detected, described, and explained" (Reiter, 2013, p. 11). An exploratory research design "emphasizes discovery over confirmation" and "is consistent with Wells (1993) who emphasized the need to start with real-world behavior and the need for ground-level generalizations" (Jones, 1999, p. 131). Exploratory research attempts "to establish plausibility among different variables, previously defined by the researcher . . . The outcome of a successful exploratory research project is to propose a new, insightful, fruitful, and plausible way to think about and explain reality" (Reiter, 2013, p. 15).

Therefore, this exploratory study attempted to situate the phenomenon of parent and family engagement at the college level as it related to intervention with administrators on behalf of their student, satisfaction with the school, and charitable giving.

This study utilized a survey as the data collection instrument and focused on "a single, bounded unit" of Wilson University parents/families (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 232–233). A quantitative research design (i.e., cluster analysis) was chosen for two reasons: first, because there was no extant research on college parent behavior following exposure to a continuous engagement tool (such as a daily blog), initial baseline data were needed; second, from the researcher's professional experience, decision-makers at institutions tended to base decisions on quantitative data. Therefore, in order to provide research that might help inform other schools' parent/family relations practices, the researcher believed that quantitative research would initially be the most persuasive.

To answer the first research question, a cluster analysis was performed on the Wilson University parent and family population. Cluster analysis is "the task of assigning a set of objects into groups called clusters so that the objects in the same cluster are more similar (in some sense or another) to each other than to those in other clusters" (Goyal & Vohra, 2012, p. 115). Facca and Allen (2011) contend that cluster analysis "allows the researcher to take a different perspective on the data, with no preconceived notions regarding profiles, similarities, or performance measures" (p. 75).

Clusters are created "based on the principle of maximizing the intra class similarity and minimizing the inter class similarity. Each cluster that is formed can be viewed as a class of objects, from which rules can be derived" (Goyal & Vohra, 2012, p.

115). The study population was segmented into “meaningful clusters. Then these clusters were reviewed, evaluated and discussed to better understand the behaviors that linked those within a cluster, and differentiated them from those in other clusters” (Facca & Allen, 2011, p. 75). Clusters were named based on the characteristics that were most prominent within a cluster; for example, the “All Ins” cluster consisted of families who reported attending events and had the highest reading levels of both the e-newsletter and the Family 411 blog. Describing the emergent clusters of Wilson University parents and families helped the researcher identify which homogenous groups existed and the main demographic or behavioral characteristics the clusters demonstrated.

This study employed a survey methodology. The survey was created from questions about parent/family intervention adapted from the 2007 experimental NSSE Family and Friends Support Scale, as well as a scale developed by Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) that measures communicated commitment and conversational voice, which contribute to OPR (National Survey of Student Engagement, n.d.c). The survey also collected demographic information and behavioral information. Demographic information for each participant included gender identity, age, race/ethnicity, college attainment, alumni status, household income, whether this was their first child in college, distance from campus, and employment status. Behavioral information included attendance at Wilson University events, readership of various Wilson University communications, charitable giving, and satisfaction with the school.

In order to create cluster memberships that find the most similar groupings of parents and families, the cluster analysis process used the variables of event attendance,

e-newsletter reading, and blog reading; these represent the differential levels of college engagement available to families. The clustering process showed the variables that were the most important contributors to each cluster; these variables could be either behavioral or demographic and were examined post hoc. By segmenting the Wilson University parent and family population into clusters, the researcher was able to see if the clusters behaved differently based on their level of engagement with the school, and how cluster membership related to behaviors of interest to the school—higher satisfaction, lower intervention, and higher charitable giving.

Study Population

As Wilson University was the only known school that produces a daily blog for parents/families that would provide continuous engagement, this study was limited to the parent/family population at Wilson University. In this study, "parents/families" referred to families of undergraduate students at Wilson University (the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022) and were defined as a student's primary familial support person(s) while in college. "Parents/families" is inclusive of all family constructs.

This study surveyed a bounded system of parents and families. A bounded system is "a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. You can 'fence in' what you are going to study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38). The bounded system was Wilson University undergraduate families from the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, which represented a finite population within a single organization. Because this study used a bounded system of parent and family participants from only one school, it was important to understand the demographics of the Wilson University student population.

Wilson University is a private, coeducational, 4-year liberal arts institution that is located in the South. Wilson University primarily serves traditional-age undergraduate students (ages 18-22). There are approximately 5,100 undergraduate students at Wilson University (Wilson University Office of Institutional Research, 2018). The undergraduate population is 70.6% White, 11.9% Asian, 7.4% Hispanic or Latino, and 6.9% Black or African American (Wilson University Office of Institutional Research, 2018). Just under 10% of Wilson University undergraduates are international students, and the vast majority of those international students are from China (Wilson University Office of Institutional Research, 2018). While the overall Asian population at Wilson University is 11.9%, 62% of those students come from China. Wilson University considers itself a residential campus community, and there is a 3-year residency requirement for undergraduate students to live on campus.

Wilson University, as a private school, is expensive to attend. Comprehensive fees for tuition, room, and board in 2017-2018 were $66,754 (Wilson University Office of Institutional Research, 2018). Approximately 59% of undergraduate families pay full tuition (W. Wells, personal communication, March 21, 2019). A 2017 article in *The New York Times* found that Wilson University was one of 38 schools where “more students came from the top 1 percent of the income scale than from the entire bottom 60 percent” (Aisch, Buchanan, Cox, & Quealy, 2017). In considering the parent and family population at Wilson University, one must acknowledge that this is a predominantly White affluent group.

Because this was an exploratory study, this study did not sample from within a population, but examined the entire Wilson University parent/family population. Upon matriculation, Wilson University asks incoming students' families to fill out a Family Record Form, which provides the information needed to populate its alumni and parent records system. Having accurate family contact information allows Wilson University to communicate with families (via paper mail, email, and/or phone) during their students' time on campus.

For the 2018-2019 academic year, there were 9,927 undergraduate parents and families in Wilson University's records system representing the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Of those, there were email addresses for 7,803 of them (78.6%). However, when broken down at the individual family unit level (which accounts for divorces, remarriages, etc.), Wilson University had 5,529 undergraduate families in the aforementioned classes. Wilson University had an email address for at least one parent/guardian for 4,646 of those families, for an overall reach of 84%. With the exception of the families who specifically instructed that Wilson University not send them any emails, recruitment messages for this study were sent to all undergraduate families in the Wilson University records system for the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 (N=7,803).

Data Collection and Procedures

This study used a quantitative research design using a survey methodology that was limited to a single institution (Wilson University). Parent/family participants were recruited via email. The survey for this study was emailed to all Wilson University

undergraduate parents/families in the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 for whom the Wilson University records system had a valid email address, excluding the families who specifically asked Wilson University not to send them any emails (*N*=7,803) (see Appendices B and C). The researcher sought and received permission from the Wilson University Advancement Services office to send an email to these families, excluding families who had explicitly requested not to receive emails from the university (see Appendix D).

Data collection began in the summer of 2019, and the survey was available to parents and families for 4 weeks. On the survey launch date, the researcher worked with Wilson University's records and broadcast email teams to send the survey via email to undergraduate parents and families from the 2018-2019 academic year (see Appendix C). The email described the purpose of the study, informed prospective participants of any risks and benefits, and included a link to the web survey, noting the closing date of the survey. On the launch date, the researcher also included a message about the survey in the Family 411 blog (Appendix E) and on the Wilson University Families Facebook page (Appendix F) to encourage participation. One and two weeks after the launch date, the researcher asked the Wilson University records and broadcast email teams to send a reminder email to parents and families who had not already clicked on the survey link, encouraging completion of the survey (Appendix G); this message was duplicated in the Family 411 blog one week after the survey launch.

The survey was administered via Qualtrics, an online survey platform used by UNC Greensboro and Wilson University. Parents and families were not individually

identifiable by this survey; no names or IP addresses were collected. The beginning of the survey (Appendix B) included the standard, required language regarding informed consent (Appendix H) and stated that the study had been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (see Appendix I). Following completion of the survey, respondents saw a final page that thanked them for their participation and provided contact information for the researcher should they have questions.

Instrumentation

Key study variables were measured via a survey instrument comprised of 21 questions, many of which were derived from existing surveys. This section outlines the creation of the survey instrument.

NSSE Family and Friends Support Scale (Adapted)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) "documents dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and provides information and assistance to colleges, universities, and other organizations to improve student learning" (NSSE, n.d.b, para. 9). There are more than 1,600 4-year colleges in the United States and Canada that participate in the NSSE annual survey, so it is a widely used tool for colleges (NSSE, n.d.b). The NSSE survey occasionally includes some experimental items; in 2007, there was an experimental section called "Family and Friends Support" that was "completed by 4,518 first-year and 4,644 senior students at 24 institutions" (NSSE, n.d.a, p. 24). In the 2007 "Family and Friends Support" section, students were asked, "How often do your parents/guardians contact college officials to help solve problems you may be having at

this college?"; replies were on a Likert scale (1=*Never*, 2=*Sometimes*, 3=*Often*, 4=*Very often*, 9=*Not applicable* (I have not had problems at this college) (NSSE, n.d.c). As this was an experimental set of questions, NSSE reports that they do not have validity and reliability analyses (R. Gonyea, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

The NSSE survey is geared towards student respondents, so the item was altered for this study to solicit the parent/family response. Additionally, this survey asked them the areas in which parents/families report intervening. The new item for this study's survey read: "How often do you contact college officials to help solve problems your student may be having in the following areas at Wilson University?: Personal issues (e.g., mental health, physical health, eating habits), Academics (e.g., grades, faculty, class registration, academic advising), Facilities issues (e.g., residence hall/room, parking, food service), Social issues (e.g., friends, roommate, fraternity/sorority life), Career plans (e.g., finding jobs or internships), Finance (e.g., financial aid, fees, etc.)." Responses were on a Likert scale of 4=*Very often*, 3=*Often*, 2=*Sometimes*, 1=*Never* (my student has had a problem in this area, but I have not contacted college officials, and 9=*Not applicable* (my student has not had a problem in this area). For each participant, their intervention scores for each section of the question were computed as an average; any values of 9 were treated as missing data and were not computed in the average. The participants' average scores were used to measure the variable of parent and family intervention in Research Question 2.

The researcher sought and received permission from the NSSE administrators to adapt the question and use it for this study (see Appendix J).

Sweetser and Kelleher 11-Item Scale (Adapted)

Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) identified that communicated commitment and conversational voice were key contributors to positive OPR. They condensed an OPR scale measuring these two concepts into a parsimonious 11-item scale that could be used to help measure "relational maintenance strategies that positively correlated with relational outcomes" such as trust and satisfaction in an institution (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 218). This study took the original 11-item scale and adapted it to 10 questions that are specific to the Wilson University audience, as shown in Appendix B.

The Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) scale has items about two main categories of OPR relational maintenance strategies that have been shown to correlate with trust and satisfaction: communicated commitment and conversational voice. The communicated commitment (CC) questions shed light on how parents and families perceive institutional "communication in which members of an organization work to express their commitment to building and maintaining a relationship" (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 226). The conversational voice (CV) questions represent "an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's publics based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in publics" (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 226).

The researcher sought and received permission from Drs. Sweetser and Kelleher to use this scale and adapt the questions for this study (see Appendix K). One question within the conversational voice subscale was eliminated. The original question read "provides connections to competitors" (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016, p. 226). This

question was eliminated because typical college communications to parents and families do not provide connections to other schools (who could be considered competitors); there would not be a reason for Wilson University to provide links or connections to other schools since Wilson University families are presumably most interested in information specific to Wilson University. Questions 9 and 10 in Appendix B show the adapted scale used in this study.

The abbreviated scale created by Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) represents the "final items for the measures of communicative strategies for maintaining OPR" (p. 226). As with the previous (longer) scales, the abbreviated set of questions on communicated commitment and conversational voice are meant to be summed into a single index (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016). In the original 2016 study, the theme of communicated commitment had a Cronbach's α coefficient of .88 and the theme of conversational voice had a Cronbach's α coefficient of .82 (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016). In this study, the category, Cronbach's α coefficient from this study, and an example from each theme were:

1. ***Communicated Commitment (CC)***, 5 items, α = .88 (e.g., "Communicates a desire to build a relationship with parents and families");
2. ***Conversational Voice (CV)***, 5 items, α = .87 (e.g., "Uses a sense of humor in communication")

Two Kruskal-Wallis H tests were run to measure the concept of families' satisfaction with Wilson University in Research Question 3: one on the 10-item scale, and one on the stand-alone question about parent and family satisfaction. The researcher had

planned to use ANOVAs (one-way analysis of variance), as ANOVAs are omnibus tests that measure whether or not the means of all clusters are equal, or at least "one of the [cluster] means is different from at least one other mean" (Howell, 2013, p. 337). However, due to the data violating the ANOVA assumption of normality, a Kruskal-Wallis H test was used instead. The Kruskal-Wallis H test functions similarly to an ANOVA and is the recommended test when data are not normally distributed (Laerd Statistics Premium, n.d.a).

Demographics and Additional Items

The researcher added demographic questions to the survey that were used post hoc in understanding the results of the cluster analysis. Demographic information for each participant included gender identity, age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, alumni status, household income, whether this was their first child in college, year and gender of their student(s), distance from campus, and employment status. Behavioral information included attendance at Wilson University events, readership of various Wilson University communications, charitable giving, and satisfaction with the school. By examining the variables that contribute most significantly to each cluster, the various clusters were described and differentiated from each other to answer Research Question 1a. The survey question about charitable giving was used to measure the variable of parent and family giving in Research Question 4.

Field testing of the survey instrument. Because this was a newly created survey, there were no existing validity measures, so the survey had to be field tested to ensure that participants understood the questions and answered them in the way the researcher

intended (Roberts, 2010). The American Educational Research Association (AERA) (2014) stressed the importance of testing validity measurement in instruments: "questioning test takers from various groups making up the intended test-taking population 'about their performance strategies or responses to particular items can yield evidence that enriches the definition of a construct'" (p. 15). In order to ensure that the survey wording is "clear, unambiguous and permits respondents successfully to answer the question that is asked," the researcher used cognitive interviews "to identify problematic questions that may elicit response error" (Drennan, 2003, p. 57).

The researcher solicited a sample of five participants of parents and families who graduated in 2018 and asked them to take the survey using a cognitive interview format, where participants talked through their thinking process as they answered the questions (Fonteyn, Kuipers, & Grobe, 1993). During survey completion, participants were instructed to describe what they are thinking as they answered each question; this "allows the researcher to gain insight into problems that may not have been anticipated prior to general distribution of the questionnaire. It also ensures data compatibility in that the majority of respondents will interpret questions in the same way" (Drennan, 2003, p. 62). Following the five cognitive interviews, no significant deficiencies in the wording of the survey were observed. The interview subjects said that each question was clearly stated and did not cause any confusion. As they answered, their articulated understanding of each question was consistent with the meaning the researcher had intended. The researcher did add the words "at Move-In" to the question on the survey asking about

attendance at Orientation, because “Move-In” was how some of the interview subjects referred to Orientation or the start of school.

Data Analysis Plan

This study examined the entire parent/family population at Wilson University in an attempt to understand the ways in which they interact with Wilson University following university-sponsored engagement opportunities. The survey data were analyzed using SPSS software. The *p*-value for each analysis in this study was set at .05, and descriptive characteristics of the participants were summarized.

To answer Research Question 1, the researcher conducted a cluster analysis of the participants using two-step cluster analysis. This study had 1,001 respondents, so two-step clustering was used. Two-step clustering is the appropriate method for large data files; “even 1,000 cases is large for clustering” (Norusis, 2008, p. 363). Two-step clustering begins with “the formation of preclusters,” or “clusters of the original cases that are used in place of the raw data in the hierarchical clustering” (Norusis, 2008, p. 381). In the second step of the process, “SPSS uses the standard hierarchical clustering algorithm on the preclusters” to determine the final clusters (Norusis, 2008, p. 381).

Unlike hierarchical cluster analysis (where the researcher makes a determination about the correct number of clusters by interpreting SPSS output), or a k-means cluster analysis (where the researcher specifies in SPSS the number of clusters to be created), two-step cluster analysis in SPSS automatically generates the appropriate number of clusters based on algorithms (IBM Knowledge Center, n.d.; Norusis, 2008). Therefore, two-step clustering is the only SPSS clustering method that does not require researcher

interpretation as to the number of clusters that emerge from the analysis. In this research project, a two-step cluster analysis in SPSS resulted in a six-cluster solution.

Cluster analysis reveals the relative contribution of each variable to the clusters. The variables could be either demographic or behavioral; "the importance measure is chi-square distributed" (Facca & Allen, 2011, p. 79). The variables included in the cluster analysis were the engagement activities of Orientation attendance, e-newsletter reading, and blog reading; these represented the differential levels of college engagement available to families. Each cluster was then described to show the main characteristics of that cluster in terms of demographics and engagement activities.

The cluster analysis process creates a new variable in SPSS for cluster membership. In order to answer Research Questions 2 and 3, the data analysis plan called for a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to be run on cluster memberships for the frequency with which families contact college officials to help solve problems their student is having, and parents'/families' reported satisfaction with the school. An ANOVA shows if there are "statistically significant differences between the means of two or more independent groups" (Laerd Statistics Premium, n.d.b). For any of the one-way ANOVAs that showed there were statistically significant differences between the groups, the data analysis plan called for Tukey's post hoc test to be run to identify those differences. As previously stated, due to the violation of the assumption of normality, Kruskal-Wallis H tests and post hoc tests were used instead of ANOVAs to answer Research Question 3.

To answer Research Question 4 on parents'/families' charitable giving, a chi-square was conducted between cluster membership and giving behavior. A chi-square test is appropriate because it shows whether "the deviations from what would be expected by chance are large enough for us to conclude that responses weren't random" (Howell, 2013, p. 140). One might hypothesize that each cluster has an equal chance of making a charitable gift; a chi-square test shows whether any clusters make gifts at a rate that is significantly higher than expected.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology of this study and the data analysis process. A quantitative approach was used to answer the research questions; the population to be studied was Wilson University undergraduate parents and families in the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 with a survey as the data collection tool. To answer Research Question 1, a cluster analysis was performed to group parents and families into clusters that share similarities. A combination of one-way ANOVAs, post hoc tests, and chi-square analyses were run to answer the other research questions. The next chapter reports the results of the data analyses.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the ways in which parents/families interact with their student's college following university-sponsored engagement opportunities, and the resulting behavioral outcomes or attitudes that follow, specifically parent/family intervention with the college on the student's behalf, sense of trust in/satisfaction with the institution, and charitable giving. The previous chapter outlined the data collection and analysis process. This chapter provides descriptive statistics of the survey respondents and the main findings of the study.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What clusters (i.e., groups) of Wilson University parents and families emerge based on their level of engagement with the school, as measured by event attendance, e-newsletter reading, and blog reading?
    1a. What are the main differentiators of each cluster (e.g., demographic categories)?
2. Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters contact college officials to help solve problems their student is having?

3. Are there statistical differences in the various clusters' reported satisfaction with the school?
4. Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters make gifts to the school?

In this chapter, research findings are presented. The analysis begins with an examination of the survey respondents, followed by the results of the cluster analysis and inference testing on the aforementioned research questions.

Participants

There were 1,001 valid responses, which represents 12.8% of the individuals who received the survey. The demographics of the respondents reflected a largely homogenous population, which was consistent with the overall demographics of Wilson University families: 67.8% were female; 71.5% were 50-59 years old; 88.5% were White; 95.8% had a BA or higher in terms of educational attainment; 63.6% had a household income of $250,000 or above; and 66.6% lived within 100-999 miles of Wilson University. The complete demographics of the respondents are shown in Appendix M. The only question with a sizeable percentage of the respondents choosing not to respond was the question on household income (10% did not answer). However, this did not limit the analysis, as income was not a variable that was used in the cluster analysis.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Preliminary data analysis began with the researcher computing the frequencies, means, and standard deviations of the variables used for the cluster analysis. Responses

to questions on one-time engagement (Orientation, Family Weekend, and other event attendance) were measured as binary, as seen in Tables 3, 4, and 5. Semi-regular engagement was captured using monthly e-newsletter reading, which was measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale (see Table 6). Continuous engagement was measured by the frequency of readership of the daily Family 411 blog, which was measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale (see Table 7).

All variables were assessed for outliers via a visual inspection of boxplots. Eight of the 1,001 respondents represented outliers in four or more variables. These outliers were included in the final analysis because the researcher ran the cluster analysis with and without the outliers and found that removing the outlier cases did not significantly change cluster membership. For the two Likert-style variables used in clustering (e-newsletter reading and Family 411 blog reading), visual inspection of the scatterplots suggested that there was not a normal distribution of the data. Further analysis revealed that both e-newsletter reading and blog reading were not normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p < .05$). Similarly, for the variables used to measure satisfaction and intervention, visual inspection of scatterplots suggested the data did not have a normal distribution; Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p < .05$) confirmed that those variables were not normally distributed. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk's test helped determine whether to use an ANOVA or the Kruskal-Wallis H test to answer Research Questions 2 and 3. However, the researcher conducted the cluster analysis due to the robustness of the two-step clustering algorithm:

> the clustering algorithm is based on a distance measure that gives the best results if all variables are independent, continuous variables have a normal distribution, and categorical variables have a multinomial distribution. This is seldom the case in practice, but the algorithm is thought to behave reasonably well when the assumptions are not met. Because cluster analysis does not involve hypothesis testing and calculation of observed significance levels, other than for descriptive follow-up, it's perfectly acceptable to cluster data that may not meet the assumptions for best performance. (Norusis, 2008, p. 380)

Examination of Clustering Variables

The data analysis plan called for a cluster analysis to be run on the various methods that Wilson University uses to engage parents and families: stand-alone events (one-time engagement), a monthly e-newsletter (semi-regular engagement), and the Family 411 blog (continuous engagement). Tables 3 through 7 show the frequency of parent/family engagement with these activities and media. There was considerable overlap in the percentage of families that engaged in the one-time events of Orientation, Family Weekend, and other events (e.g., summer send-off parties, regional donor receptions, or club events, etc.), as seen in Tables 3, 4, and 5, respectively. The majority of families (87%) attended the two signature on-campus events: Orientation and Family Weekend.

Table 3

Orientation Attendance by Frequency and Percentage (*N*=1,001)

Attended Orientation	*n*	%
Yes (2)	902	90.1
No (1)	99	9.9
Total	1,001	100.0

Note. $M = 1.9$, $SD = .299$.

Table 4

Family Weekend Attendance by Frequency and Percentage (*N*=1,001)

Attended Family Weekend	*n*	%
Yes (2)	872	87.1
No (1)	129	12.9
Total	1,001	100.0

Note. $M = 1.87$, $SD = .335$.

Table 5

Other Event Attendance by Frequency and Percentage (*N*=1,001)

Attended Other Events	*n*	%
Yes (2)	757	75.6
No (1)	244	24.4
Total	1,001	100.0

Note. $M = 1.76$, $SD = .430$.

Due to the overlap in the three event attendance variables, the researcher explored the possibility of reducing the number of one-time engagement variables. Two-step cluster analysis, as an exploratory type of analysis, allows the researcher to try various combinations of clustering variables to determine the best cluster quality and cohesion. The researcher tested every possible combination of event variables and found that the only combination of variables that led to a cluster quality of "Good" was when only Orientation attendance was used as the clustering variable. From a practitioner standpoint, this also makes sense: Orientation is the only Wilson University event where

administrators directly address how they hope parents and families will interact with their students, particularly in terms of family intervention when students encounter problems. By clustering on Orientation attendance only, the final cluster solution might better represent those intervention behaviors. Thus, Orientation was the only variable representing one-time engagement that was used in clustering.

Wilson University families reported a high degree of engagement with the monthly parent and family e-newsletter (see Table 6). The e-newsletter represents semi-regular engagement. Family 411 blog readership patterns are shown in Table 7. This is the one variable for which there was a greater range of family behavior: nearly an equal number of families read the Family 411 blog five times a week as those who did not read it at all.

Table 6

E-Newsletter Reading by Frequency and Percentage (*N*=1,001)

Frequency	*n*	%
Always (4)	561	56
Sometimes (3)	402	40.2
Never (2)	9	0.9
I Do Not Receive the E-Newsletter (1)	29	2.9
Total	1,001	100.0

Note. $M = 3.49$, $SD = .665$.

Table 7

Family 411 Blog Reading by Frequency and Percentage (*N*=1,001)

Frequency	*n*	%
Five Times a Week (6)	290	29
Four Times a Week (5)	160	16
Three Times a Week (4)	128	12.8
Two Times a Week (3)	75	7.5
One Times a Week (2)	108	10.7
Zero Times a Week (1)	240	24
Total	1,001	100.0

Note. M = 3.73, *SD* = 1.978.

Results by Research Questions

Research Question 1 and 1a

1. *What clusters (i.e., groups) of Wilson University parents and families emerge based on their level of engagement with the school, as measured by event attendance, e-newsletter reading, and blog reading?*
    1a. *What are the main differentiators of each cluster (e.g., demographic categories)?*

To answer Research Question 1, a cluster analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25 (IBM Knowledge Center, n.d.). Because there were more than 1,000 responses to the survey, a two-step cluster analysis was run (Norusis, 2008). No researcher interpretation is required to determine the final cluster solution; the two-step cluster analysis in SPSS automatically generates the appropriate number of clusters based on

algorithms (IBM Knowledge Center, n.d.; Norusis, 2008). However, the researcher can test multiple cluster solutions before settling on a final solution by manipulating the variables used in clustering.

Due to the high concentration of respondents who attended Orientation, Family Weekend, and other events, the researcher tested the possibility of reducing the one-time engagement variables by running the two-step cluster analysis with all possible combinations of event attendance. It was only when the researcher clustered only on Orientation that a cluster rating of Good (in the measure of cluster cohesion and separation) was achieved; when two or three event variables were used in clustering, the best rating that was achieved was only Fair. Thus, a six-cluster solution emerged, as shown in Figure 2. Figure 3 outlines the importance of each variable in the clustering process, with e-newsletter reading having the most influence and Orientation attendance the least.

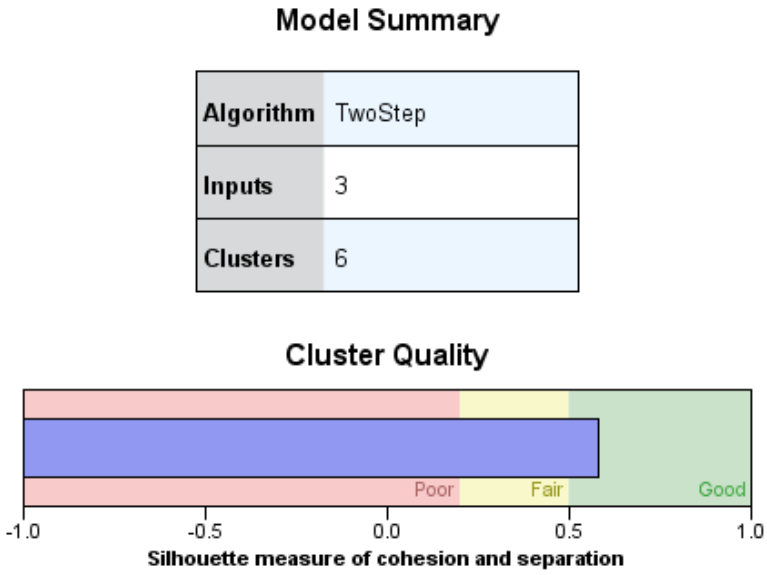
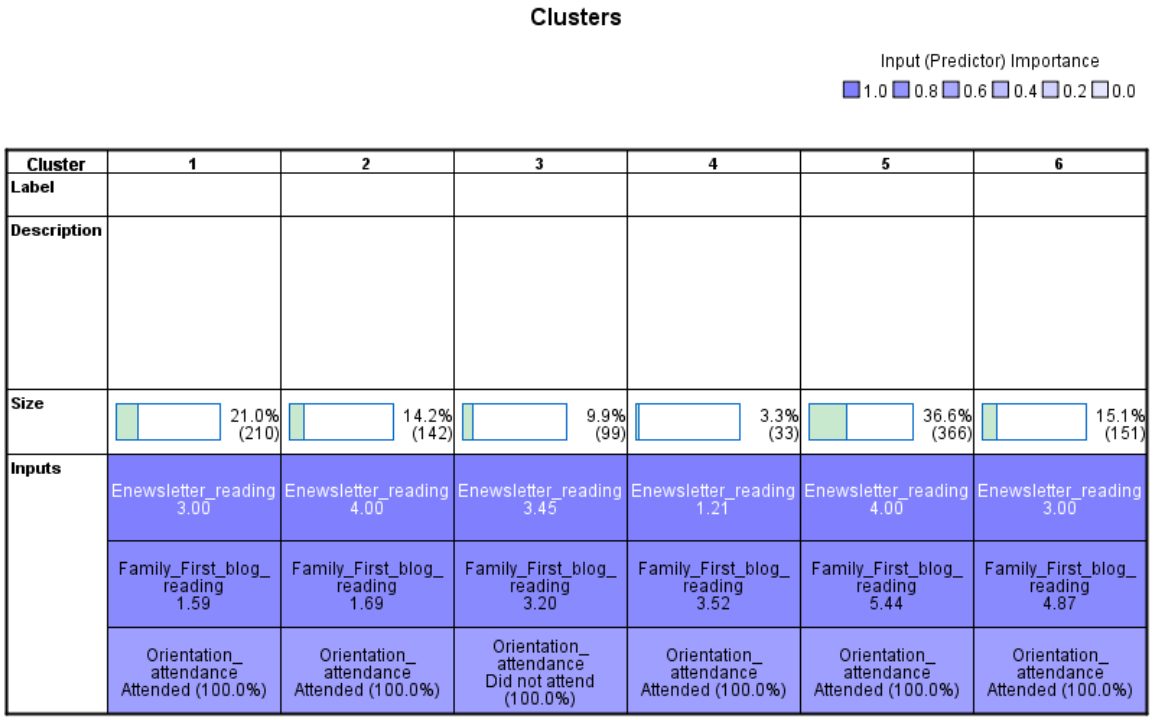


Figure 2. Six-Cluster Solution.



Cluster	1	2	3	4	5	6
Label						
Description						
Size	21.0% (210)	14.2% (142)	9.9% (99)	3.3% (33)	36.6% (366)	15.1% (151)
Inputs	Enewsletter_reading 3.00	Enewsletter_reading 4.00	Enewsletter_reading 3.45	Enewsletter_reading 1.21	Enewsletter_reading 4.00	Enewsletter_reading 3.00
	Family_First_blog_reading 1.59	Family_First_blog_reading 1.69	Family_First_blog_reading 3.20	Family_First_blog_reading 3.52	Family_First_blog_reading 5.44	Family_First_blog_reading 4.87
	Orientation_attendance Attended (100.0%)	Orientation_attendance Attended (100.0%)	Orientation_attendance Did not attend (100.0%)	Orientation_attendance Attended (100.0%)	Orientation_attendance Attended (100.0%)	Orientation_attendance Attended (100.0%)

Figure 3. Cluster Variable Importance.

Clusters were assigned nicknames based on their level of engagement with Wilson University (a fuller description of each cluster follows): Cluster 1 “Low Blog” (21%), Cluster 2 “The Es (Events and E-News)” (14.2%); Cluster 3 “No Ori” (9.9%), Cluster 4 “No E-News” (3.3%), Cluster 5 “All Ins” (36.6%), and Cluster 6, “Medium Digitals” (15.1%). Demographics are reported by cluster in Table 8. Although the data reveal that the Wilson University parent and family population is largely a homogenous body, an examination of the membership of each cluster can help paint a picture of the unique characteristics of each group. The six clusters are profiled below.

Table 8

Demographic Comparison by Cluster

Demographic	Low Blog (1) *n*=210 %	The Es (2) *n*=142 %	No Ori (3) *n*=99 %	No E-News (4) *n*=33 %	All Ins (5) *n*=36 %	Medium Digitals (6) *n=151* %
Student Year						
First-year male	18.1	26.1	23.2	33.3	20.2	24.5
First-year female	20	21.1	23.2	6.1	21.6	15.2
First-year prefer not to answer		0.7				
Sophomore male	12.9	14.1	12.1	18.2	12.8	10.6
Sophomore female	18.1	13.4	13.1	15.2	17.5	13.9
Junior male	12.9	8.5	8.1	15.2	13.1	18.5
Junior female	11.4	12	16.2	12.1	12.3	13.2
Senior male	9.5	8.5	5.1	9.1	8.7	6.0
Senior female	10	7.0	10.1		7.4	5.3
Senior prefer not to answer	18.1		1.0			
Gender						
Female	56.7	62	71.7	69.7	72.1	74.2
Male	41	36.6	27.3	27.3	27	24.5
Prefer not to respond	1.9	1.4	1.0	3.0	0.5	1.3
Age						
39 and under	0.5		1.0	3.0		
40-49	15.2	16.2	26.3	12.1	15.6	15.9
50-59	77.1	68.3	62.6	66.7	71.3	72.2
60-69	7.1	14.1	10.1	18.2	12.3	10.6
70+		0.7			0.5	
Race						
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5				0.3	
Asian	1.4	5.6	2.0		0.8	2.0
Black or African American	2.9	5.6	3.0	3.0	1.4	3.3
Hispanic/Latino	2.9	2.1	2.0		1.4	2.0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		0.7				
White	85.2	78.9	86.9	87.9	93.7	90.1
Two or more races	0.5	2.1	1.0		0.3	
Prefer not to respond	6.2	4.9	5.1	9.1	2.2	2.6

Table 8

Cont.

Demographic	Low Blog (1) *n*=210 %	The Es (2) *n*=142 %	No Ori (3) *n*=99 %	No E-News (4) *n*=33 %	All Ins (5) *n*=36 %	Medium Digitals (6) *n=151* %
Education						
High school degree or equivalent	1.0	1.4	2.0		0.5	
Some college, no degree	1.4	0.7	2.0		3.0	0.7
Associate degree	1.9	1.4	2.0	3.0	1.9	
Bachelor's degree	36.7	34.5	39.4	36.4	47.3	37.1
Master's degree	33.8	32.4	33.3	39.4	30.9	32.5
Professional degree	16.7	21.8	16.2	21.2	13.7	21.2
Doctorate	8.1	7.7	5.1		2.7	8.6
Alumnus/a						
Yes	8.6	7.7	12.1	9.1	6.3	11.3
No	91.4	91.5	86.9	90.9	93.7	88.7
Income						
$0-49.9K	0.5	1.4	4.0		1.4	0.7
$50-99K	7.6	8.5	6.1	3.0	4.9	6.0
$100-249K	25.7	32.4	31.3	18.2	24	18.5
$250-500K	28.8	23.9	17.2	27.3	27.9	27.8
$500K+	28.6	23.2	30.3	27.3	33.3	36.4
First child in college?						
Yes	54.3	52.1	53.5	39.4	62.6	53.6
No	45.2	47.9	45.5	60.6	36.9	46.4
Distance from campus						
<50 miles	7.1	9.2	6.1	3.0	3.3	7.9
51-99 mi.	5.2	4.2	4.0		6.6	3.3
100-499 mi.	31.4	39.4	34.3	27.3	32.2	33.1
500-999 mi.	36.7	20.4	26.3	42.4	35.5	37.1
1,000-1,999 mi.	10	8.5	10.1	21.2	11.5	7.3
2,000-2,999 mi.	6.2	9.9	8.1	6.1	6.0	4.6
3,000+ mi.	2.9	8.5	10.1		4.9	6.0

Table 8

Cont.

Demographic	Low Blog (1) *n*=210 %	The Es (2) *n*=142 %	No Ori (3) *n*=99 %	No E-News (4) *n*=33 %	All Ins (5) *n*=36 %	Medium Digitals (6) *n=151* %
Employment						
Full-time	67.6	67.6	53.5	63.6	50.3	53.6
Part-time	14.8	10.6	15.2	12.1	13.7	14.6
Unemployed/looking	1.4	1.4	2		1.6	1.3
Unemployed/not looking	1.9	0.7	6.1	3.0	2.5	1.3
Retired	4.3	7.7	6.1	6.1	6.8	8.6
Homemaker	9.5	8.5	17.2	15.2	24.3	20.5
Unable to work		1.4			0.8	

Cluster 1 – Low Blog. The Low Blog families represent 21% of the survey respondents. They had the lowest average reading level of the Family 411 blog (*M* = 1.59) of any cluster, and had the highest proportion of respondents who never read the blog. They were, however, moderate readers of the e-newsletter. All Low Blog families attended Orientation. In terms of demographics, the Low Blog families had the highest percentage of male respondents (41%) and had the highest percentage of respondents age 59 or younger (92.3%). Low Blog families represent the second highest percentage of families earning $50,000 – $99,000, and the highest percentage of families earning $250,000 – $500,000. Low Blog families have the highest percentage of people who work either full- or part-time (82.4% combined) and are the least likely to live 3,000 miles away or more.

Cluster 2 – The Es: Events and E-Newsletter. The Es cluster represents 14.2% of survey respondents. They all attended Orientation and reported they always read the e-

newsletter. The Es have generally low engagement with the Family 411 blog, reading only once or twice a week (if at all). The demographics of The Es cluster indicates the second highest percentage of male respondents (36.6%), as well as considerable racial diversity. It is the cluster with the largest percentage of Black or African American families (5.6%, as opposed to 2.8% of all survey respondents) and Asian families (5.6%, as opposed to 1.9% of all survey respondents). The Es also possess the second highest amount of post-graduate education; 61.9% have a master's degree or above, as compared to 55.2% overall. The Es most frequently earn between $100,000 and $249,000. In terms of employment, 67.6% of The Es work full time, yet they also have the second highest percentage of retirees (7.7%) and the largest percentage who reports being unable to work (1.4%, as compared to the overall 0.5%).

Cluster 3 – No Ori. As the name suggests, the No Ori cluster did not attend Orientation; they were the only cluster that did not attend. This is a small cluster, with only 9.9% of the overall respondents. The No Ori cluster shows moderate to high readership of the e-newsletter, but has a loosely bimodal distribution of reading the Family 411 blog, with slight peaks in both the 'never read' and 'five times a week' categories, and similar proportions in the two, three, and four times a week categories.

The No Ori cluster is notable because it is heavily female (71.7%) and the cluster with the highest percentage of alumni (12.1%, as opposed to 8.4% overall). From a socioeconomic perspective, the No Ori cluster appears to have a higher proportion of members who are less advantaged educationally and economically. No Ori has the largest percentage of families who have a high school diploma or equivalent (2.0%, as compared

to 0.8% overall). This group has the largest percentage of families earning $99,000 or below (10.1%, as opposed to 8.3% overall) and the highest percentage of families who live 3,000 miles or more away from Wilson University (10.1%, as compared to 5.5% overall).

Cluster 4 – No E-News. The No E-News cluster is the smallest of all, with only 3.3% of the respondents. It is the only cluster where respondents reported they either do not receive the e-newsletter or never read it, so this cluster contains members with no semi-regular engagement. As with cluster 3 (No Ori), the No E-News cluster has a loosely bimodal distribution of reading the Family 411 blog, with slight peaks in both the 'never read' and 'five times a week' categories, and similar proportions in the two and three times a week categories.

The No E-News families are the youngest of all the clusters, with 3% aged 39 and under (compared to 0.3% overall). This is the least racially diverse cluster, with only two races represented (Black/African American and White), but it should be noted that this cluster had the highest percentage that preferred not to disclose their race (9.1%, as compared to 4% overall). In terms of education, No E-News families had the highest percentage of Associate degrees (3.0%, as opposed to 1.6% overall) and no doctorates. This cluster also had the smallest percentage earning $100,000 – $249,000 and had the largest percentage living between 500 and 999 miles of Wilson University. Perhaps most notably, only 39.4% of the No E-News cluster said this was their first child in college; at least 52% of all other clusters were first-time college parents. Finally, this was the only cluster that seemed to be imbalanced in terms of students' gender: there was a vastly

greater proportion of first-year males (33.3%) and senior males (9.1) compared to first-year females (6.1%) and senior females (0.0%).

Cluster 5 – All Ins. The All Ins families represent 36% of the survey respondents. They represent high engagement across all categories: they all attended Orientation, are high consumers of the monthly e-newsletter, and are the most loyal readers of the Family 411 blog. In terms of demographics, the All Ins families are notably the Whitest group of families (93.7%, as opposed to the overall average of 88.5%). All Ins families have the highest percentage of bachelor's degrees (47.3%, as opposed to 40.6% overall), and comprise the second highest group earning $500,000 and above (33.3%, as opposed to 30.9% overall). They also have the lowest percentage of full-time workers (50.3%, as opposed to 57.9% overall) and the highest percentage of homemakers (24.3%, as opposed to 17.5% overall). This cluster has the largest percentage of first-time college parents: 62.6% (56.3% overall).

Cluster 6 – Medium Digitals. The sixth and final cluster is the Medium Digitals, which represents 15.1% of the respondents. This cluster reads the Family 411 blog three to five times a week and sometimes reads the e-newsletter. They all attended Orientation. Medium Digitals had the highest percentage of females (74.2%, as opposed to 67.8% overall). This was the second largest cluster of alumni (11.3%, compared to 8.4% overall) and had the highest percentage of doctorates (8.6%, as compared to 5.6% overall). Medium Digitals were the wealthiest of all clusters, with 64% earning $250,000 or above. This cluster had the second highest rate of homemakers (20.5%, as compared to 17.5% overall) and the highest rate of retirees (8.6%, as compared to 6.6% overall). As with the

All Ins, the socioeconomic advantages of the Medium Digitals may suggest a life context where they have more time and resources to be engaged with their student's college experience.

Research Question 2

Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters contact college officials to help solve problems their student is having?

Although the original data analysis plan called for an ANOVA to be run, because the data did not meet the assumption of normality (which is a requirement for an ANOVA), the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used instead. The Kruskal-Wallis H test is "generally considered the nonparametric alternative to the one-way ANOVA" (Laerd Statistics Premium, n.d.a). A Kruskal-Wallis H test was run to determine if there were differences in average intervention scores between the six clusters: Low Blog (n = 162), The Es (n = 117), No Ori (n = 75), No E-News (n = 28), All Ins (n = 308), Medium Digitals (n = 129). Values are mean ranks unless otherwise stated. Distributions of average intervention scores were not similar for all clusters, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. The distributions of average intervention scores were statistically significantly different between groups, $\chi^2(5) = 14.042$, $p = .015$. The statistically significant result indicated that the six clusters of Wilson University families differed in their level of intervention with administrators on their students' behalf when the students encountered problems, and that those differences were not simply due to chance (Howell, 2013). Average levels of intervention by each cluster are shown in Table 9.

The Kruskal-Wallis H test indicates whether there are differences in cluster behaviors, but it does not specify which of the groups differ from each other (Laerd Statistics Premium, n.d.a). In order to determine which clusters were causing the statistically significant result in the Kruskal-Wallis H test, pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted *p*-values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in average intervention scores between the Medium Digitals (mean rank = 374.31) and The Es (mean rank = 459.74) ($p = .015$), but not between any other group combination. There was only one other pairwise combination that approached (but did not reach) a statistically significant result: The Es and the All Ins ($p = .074$).

That statistical significance was only found in two of the six clusters may indicate that there was a somewhat weak relationship between cluster membership and intervention, or that may indicate there was a compelling difference between the Medium Digitals and The Es to cause that result. Looking at the behaviors of those clusters as shown in Figure 4, Orientation attendance and e-newsletter reading were similar for both the Medium Digitals and The Es, but there was a marked difference in blog readership that might account for the statistically significant result. Similarly, in the other pairwise comparison that approached (but did not reach) significance (The Es and All Ins), their Orientation attendance and e-newsletter reading were identical, but their blog readership was markedly different.

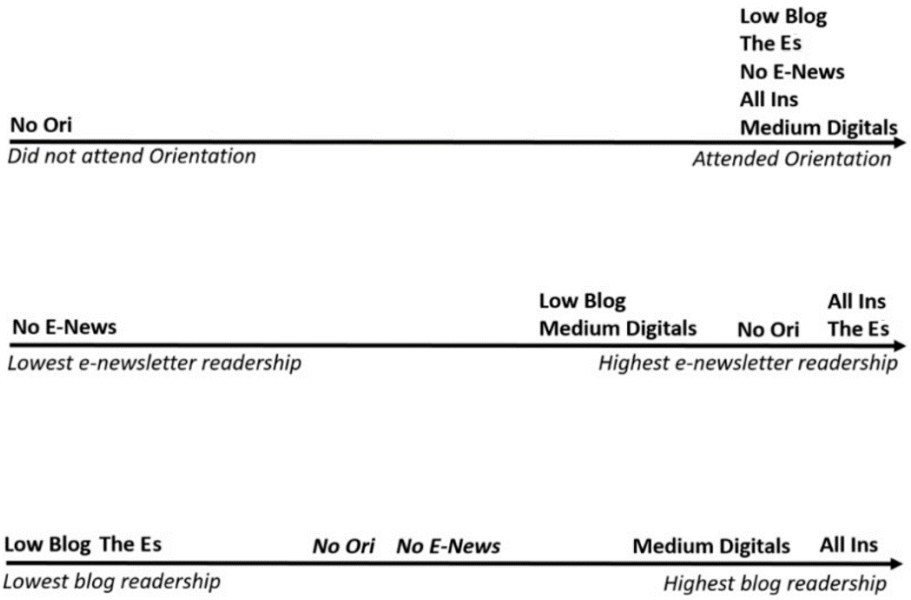


Figure 4. Cluster Behaviors.

While the average intervention scores were used for the above tests, the researcher acknowledges that some forms of familial intervention may be more appropriate than others. As such, the researcher explored which categories of familial intervention had greater means. The six areas were personal, academics, facilities, social, career, and finances. The two highest areas of where families contacted administrators when their students had problems, as measured by mean, were finances and personal, as seen in Table 9. The All Ins cluster and the Medium Digitals cluster, both of which are high consumers of the Family 411 blog (as seen in Figure 4), are the only two clusters whose mean scores per cluster were lower than the overall average for intervention type. By contrast, the Low Blog and The Es clusters, which had the lowest blog readership, show higher than average intervention across most categories. This suggests a potential connection between consumption of the blog and reduced familial intervention.

Table 9

Intervention Means by Cluster and Category

Cluster	Personal	Academics	Facilities	Social	Career	Finances	Cluster Average
Low Blog (1)	1.435	1.279	1.377	1.162	1.305	1.766	1.493
The Es (2)	1.666	1.451	1.46	1.237	1.352	1.945	1.598
No Ori (3)	1.4	1.142	1.375	1.23	1.171	1.692	1.4
No E-News (4)	1.214	1.176	1.307	1.17	1.000	1.812	1.428
All Ins (5)	1.418	1.215	1.365	1.169	1.222	1.645	1.396
Medium Digitals (6)	1.296	1.142	1.323	1.113	1.158	1.15	1.341
Overall Average of Dataset	1.425	1.238	1.373	1.174	1.23	1.73	1.437

Research Question 3

Are there statistical differences in the various clusters' reported satisfaction with the school?

Satisfaction was measured in two ways: one was a self-reported Likert-style question on satisfaction, and the other was by taking a sum of the ten questions that related to OPR. Both results are shown below.

For the self-reported Likert-style satisfaction, a Kruskal-Wallis H test was run to determine if there were differences in satisfaction scores between the six clusters: Low Blog (n = 209), The Es (n = 142), No Ori (n = 99), No E-News (n = 33), All Ins (n = 366), Medium Digitals (n = 151). Values are mean ranks unless otherwise stated. Distributions of satisfaction scores were not similar for all clusters, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. The mean ranks of satisfaction scores were statistically

significantly different between groups, $\chi^2(5) = 47.720$, $p = .000$. The statistically significant result indicated that the six clusters of Wilson University families differed in their reported level of satisfaction and that those differences were not simply due to chance (Howell, 2013).

To determine which clusters were causing the statistically significant result in the Kruskal-Wallis H test, pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted *p*-values are presented. Post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in satisfaction scores between the No E-News (mean rank = 406.33) and All Ins (mean rank = 550.69) ($p = .005$), between the Low Blog (mean rank = 439.33) and Medium Digitals (mean rank = 515.19) ($p = .002$), between the Low Blog (mean rank = 439.33) and All Ins (mean rank = 550.69) ($p = .000$), and between the No Ori (mean rank = 445.06) and All Ins (550.69) ($p = .000$), but not between any other group combination. The fact that statistical significance was found in five of the six clusters may suggest that there was a strong relationship between cluster membership and self-reported satisfaction, or that there was a compelling difference between specific pairwise combinations to cause these results.

Table 10 shows the average levels of e-newsletter reading and Family 411 reading for each cluster. For each of the pairwise combinations listed above, one can see potential reasons why those pairs could have had a statistically significant result:

- the No E-News cluster's e-newsletter reading average was 1.21, as compared to 4 for the All Ins

- the Low Blog cluster's Family 411 reading average was 1.59, as compared to 4.87 for the Medium Digitals
- the Low Blog cluster's Family 411 reading average was 1.59, as compared to 5.44 for the All Ins
- the No Ori cluster's Family 411 reading average was 3.2, as compared to 5.44 for the All Ins; another potential explanation for this pairwise significant result could be because the No Ori cluster did not attend Orientation, but the All Ins did

This suggests a potential connection between consumption of the school-generated media and increased satisfaction.

Table 10

Cluster Averages for E-Newsletter and Blog Consumption

Cluster	E-Newsletter Reading (4-point Likert scale)	Family 411 Reading (6-point Likert scale)
Low Blog	3	1.59
The Es	4	1.69
No Ori	3.45	3.2
No E-News	1.21	3.52
All Ins	4	5.44
Medium Digitals	3	4.87

For the sum OPR measure of satisfaction, distributions of the sum OPR scores were similar for all clusters, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. A Kruskal-

Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the sum OPR score between the six clusters: Low Blog (n = 210), The Es (n = 142), No Ori (n = 99), No E-News (n = 33), All Ins (n = 36), Medium Digitals (n = 151). Because the distributions were similar, median scores could be assessed (instead of mean ranks) (Laerd Statistics Premium, n.d.a.). Median sum OPR scores were statistically significantly different between groups, $\chi^2(5) = 92.369$, $p = .000$. Again, the statistically significant result indicated that the six clusters differed in their sum OPR satisfaction and those differences were not simply due to chance (Howell, 2013).

In order to determine which clusters were causing the statistically significant result in the Kruskal-Wallis H test, pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. Post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in sum OPR scores between the Low Blog (Mdn = 41) and The Es (Mdn = 43.5) (p = .003), between the Low Blog (Mdn = 41) and Medium Digitals (Mdn = 44) (p = .002), between the Low Blog (Mdn = 41) and All Ins (Mdn = 46) (p = .000), between the No E-News (Mdn = 42) and All Ins (Mdn = 46) (p = .001), between the No Ori (Mdn = 43) and All Ins (Mdn = 46) (p = .000), between The Es (Mdn = 43.5) and All Ins (Mdn = 46) (p = .001), and between the Medium Digitals (Mdn = 44) and All Ins (Mdn = 46) (p = .001), but not between any other group combination. The fact that statistical significance was found in five of the six clusters may suggest that there was a strong relationship between cluster membership and sum OPR satisfaction, or that there was a compelling difference between specific pairwise combinations to cause these results.

Table 10 shows the average levels of e-newsletter reading and Family 411 reading for each cluster. For each of the pairwise combinations listed above, one can see potential reasons why those pairs could have caused the statistically significant result:

- the Low Blog cluster's e-newsletter reading average was 3, as compared to 4 for The Es
- the Low Blog cluster's Family 411 reading average was 1.59, as compared to 4.87 for the Medium Digitals
- the Low Blog cluster's Family 411 reading average was 1.59, as compared to 5.44 for the All Ins
- the No E-News cluster's e-newsletter reading average was 1.21, as compared to 4 for the All Ins
- the No Ori cluster's Family 411 reading average was 3.2, as compared to 5.44 for the All Ins; another potential explanation for this pairwise significant result could be because the No Ori cluster did not attend Orientation, but the All Ins did
- The Es cluster's Family 411 reading average was 1.69, as compared to 5.44 for the All Ins
- The Medium Digitals cluster's e-newsletter reading average was 3, as compared to 4 for the All Ins

This suggests a potential connection between consumption of the school-generated media and increased sum OPR satisfaction.

The researcher used the self-reported satisfaction and sum OPR scores as a form of validity check between the two measures. There was, in fact, overlap in the findings between these two measures. All four statistically significant pairwise combinations of self-reported satisfaction were also statistically significant in the sum OPR pairwise combinations. This showed consistency between the self-reported satisfaction measure and the OPR satisfaction measure.

Research Question 4

Are there statistical differences in how frequently the various clusters make gifts to the school?

A chi-square test of homogeneity was conducted between clusters and giving behavior. All expected cell counts were greater than five, meeting the size assumptions for the chi-square test. As seen in Figure 5, the chi-square test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the proportion of giving between the six clusters ($\chi^2 = 23.75$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .154$, $V = .154$) and that the differences in giving were not simply due to chance (Howell, 2013).

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.751[a]	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	23.859	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.416	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1001		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.10.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.154	.000
	Cramer's V	.154	.000
N of Valid Cases		1001	

Figure 5. Chi-Square Test – Giving.

The chi-square test indicates whether there are differences in cluster behaviors, but it does not specify which of the clusters differ from each other (Laerd Statistics Premium, n.d.c). To determine which clusters caused the statistically significant result, post hoc analysis involved pairwise comparisons using the z-test of two proportions with a Bonferroni correction. The proportion of families who made gifts was statistically significantly different ($p < .05$) between the Low Blog cluster and the All Ins cluster (see Figure 6). No other statistically significant pairwise comparisons were found. That statistical significance was only found in two of the six clusters may indicate that there was a somewhat weak relationship between cluster membership and giving, or that may indicate there was a compelling difference between the Low Blog and All Ins clusters to cause that result. One potential explanation is that the Low Blog cluster only read the Family 411 blog an average of 1.59, whereas the All Ins' average was 5.44 (see Table 10), suggesting a relationship between media consumption and propensity to give.

giving behavior * cluster number Crosstabulation

			cluster number						
			Low Blog (1)	The E's (2)	No Ori (3)	No E-News (4)	All Ins (5)	Medium Digitals (6)	Total
giving behavior	No gift	Count	99a	55a, b	41a, b	15a, b	103b	54a, b	367
		% within cluster number	47.1%	38.7%	41.4%	45.5%	28.1%	35.8%	36.7%
	Made gift	Count	111a	87a, b	58a, b	18a, b	263b	97a, b	634
		% within cluster number	52.9%	61.3%	58.6%	54.5%	71.9%	64.2%	63.3%
Total		Count	210	142	99	33	366	151	1001
		% within cluster number	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of cluster number categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Figure 6. Percentage of Each Cluster That Made Gifts.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the cluster analysis performed on the survey completed by Wilson University parents and families. A two-step cluster analysis was performed, which grouped respondents into clusters that shared the most intra-group similarity; six clusters emerged as the appropriate solution. A series of descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis H tests, and a chi-square test were run to answer the study's research questions. Analysis shows that there were significant differences in intervention, satisfaction, and giving behavior among some of the six clusters. The last chapter discusses the findings, limitations of the study, implications for practice, and suggests an agenda for future research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

As seen in Chapter I, the role of parents and families in their students' college experience has changed over time. No longer do college parents and families take a hands-off approach in the spirit of *in loco parentis*; instead, families expect to have a relationship with their children's school (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Seeing the influx of families who want to be engaged, colleges have responded by creating family relations offices and a suite of engagement opportunities in the form of family-oriented events (e.g., Orientation, Family Weekend, summer send-off parties, etc.), digital media (e.g., websites, e-newsletters, social media, blogs, etc.), and direct relationships with staff members (Coburn, 2006; Cutright, 2008; Kennedy, 2009; Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017; Ward-Roof et al., 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which parents/families interact with their students' college following institutionally sponsored engagement opportunities and the resulting behavioral outcomes or attitudes that follow. Specific outcomes to be measured were parent/family intervention with the college on the student's behalf, sense of satisfaction with the institution, and charitable giving. The current study sought to determine whether there were statistical differences between the types of interactions families have (no engagement, one-time, semiregular, or continuous)

and the ways in which those families engage with the college. The researcher was particularly interested in understanding the utility of a daily blog as a form of continuous engagement with families. Undergraduate parents and families of Wilson University were surveyed about the ways in which they engaged with the school and various demographic characteristics (N = 1,001). A two-step cluster analysis was conducted using the variables of attendance at Orientation, readership of a monthly e-newsletter, and readership of the Family 411 daily blog; results revealed six distinct clusters of Wilson University families. The final chapter of this study summarizes the findings and discusses key results, limitations, implications for practice, and suggests an agenda for future research.

Discussion

As an exploratory quantitative research project, this study emphasized the role of "discovery over confirmation . . . [starting] with real-world behavior and the need for ground-level generalizations" (Jones, 1999, p. 131). Cluster analysis was a useful analytical tool because it allowed for a "new, insightful, fruitful, and plausible way" to think about the ways in which families can be categorized based on their behavior and demographics (Reiter, 2013, p. 15). Cluster analysis enabled the creation of plausible groupings of Wilson University families who shared common attributes. Through the use of descriptive and inferential statistics, this research showed that there were statistically significant differences in how some of the clusters of Wilson University parents and families interacted with the university relative to intervention on their students' behalf, sense of satisfaction with the institution, and charitable giving. As will be shown, this type of clustering could be useful for family relations practitioners: having a better

understanding of the distinct needs of undergraduates' families and life contexts may allow practitioners to serve a wider variety of parent and family needs.

Cluster Descriptions

The first research question explored how Wilson University families could be clustered based on their level of engagement with the school (via Orientation attendance, e-newsletter reading, and Family 411 blog reading). While the Wilson University population was largely homogenous, cluster analysis was still able to create six clusters of families with distinct characteristics. Those clusters are listed in Table 8.

An examination of cluster attributes was particularly helpful in teasing out the ways in which family life context may influence the behavior of a given cluster relative to Research Questions 2, 3, and 4, which investigated family intervention when students experienced problems, families' satisfaction with the institution, and family charitable giving, respectively (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Several examples of how cluster descriptions can help provide context on cluster behavior follow. The All Ins families' life context (a lower percentage of full-time workers, higher rate of homemakers, and higher incomes) may afford those families more time to engage with Wilson University, but also may indicate the All Ins have more resources (higher incomes could allow for the technology tools needed to maintain close digital connection). Because the All Ins have a greater proportion of first-time college parents/families than other clusters, they may also be more motivated to be engaged, as they presumably miss the child who left for college and are eager to connect with their college experience.

Medium Digitals have a life context similar to the All Ins. They were the wealthiest of all clusters, and had the second highest rate of homemakers and the highest rate of retirees. The socioeconomic advantages, access to technical tools for connection, and level of free time enjoyed by the Medium Digitals may suggest a life context where they have greater ability to be engaged with their students' college experience.

Conversely, the demographics of the No Ori cluster revealed a relatively lower socioeconomic status than other clusters and the highest proportion of families living 3,000 or more miles away. The intersection of lower income and greater distance from campus suggests a family life context that might require families to make a choice of which events to attend (Orientation, Family Weekend, or other events), if they can attend at all. For No Ori families, attending a campus event may not have been feasible.

In looking at the life context of the Low Blog cluster relative to their behavior, the Low Blog families had the highest percentage of people who said they never read the blog and had the highest percent reporting they work full- or part-time. This may point to a life context that shows they do not have the same amount of free time to indulge in reading a daily blog. The Low Blog cluster also had the highest percentage of men (41%). This raises the question of whether gender has an impact on media consumption; perhaps male parents/family members find their gratification and sense of connection to their student in other ways, such as phone calls (Chen & Katz, 2009).

In terms of giving, there was a significant pairwise combination with Low Blogs and All Ins. The Low Blog families had 57.4% earning above $250,000, compared to 61.2% of All Ins earning that amount. However, only 52.9% of the Low Blog families

made a gift, whereas 71.9% of the All Ins did. Since both clusters had a similar number of families with high incomes (but they did not make gifts at similar levels), one could infer that socioeconomic status might not have been a factor in giving. Rather, the difference in giving could be related to the fact that the All Ins actively consumed more media (and thus felt more connected to Wilson University), and as a result were more willing to give.

One of the notable characteristics of The Es cluster is that it has the highest percentage of families living within 99 miles of Wilson University. The proximity to campus would presumably allow those families to attend Orientation and may suggest less of a need to read Family 411 or the e-newsletter, since they could theoretically see their children in person more often than some of the other clusters. The Es cluster is also the most racially diverse and has the second highest percentage of families aged 60-69, while also having a relatively low blog readership (zero to two times a week). There could be a relationship between race and blog readership, higher age and blog readership, or the intersection of the two. The Es also has the second highest percentage of families who earn $99,000 or less, which may mean that some of the technical tools needed to access the blog might be more out of reach compared to clusters with higher incomes. Looking back at the CIRP survey, Sax and Wartman (2010) found differences in student-family involvement based on both racial and socioeconomic lines, so there could be some relationship between the life contexts of those families, their preferred ways of engaging with the school, and whether they feel welcomed and invited to be engaged.

The No E-News cluster has an interesting span of ages. It is the cluster with the highest percentage of families 39 and younger, and the highest percentage of families aged 60-69. While most of that cluster reports not reading the e-newsletter at all, there is a more bimodal distribution of blog reading (with slight peaks for never reading and reading five times a week). It is possible that there is something in this cluster that suggests that certain ages might receive particular media better than others; future research could investigate whether younger families prefer blogs over older families. However, there is another potential reason for relatively low media consumption: this cluster is the only one where the majority are not first-time college parents (only 39.4% were first-timers). The life context of these more experienced college families may be such that they do not crave the kind of connection that first-time parents do.

By understanding the demographics of a particular cluster of families, one can envision how family life context might influence behavior. Consideration of family life context may also counter any deficit thinking that may have been used to account for family behaviors (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Practitioners could be tempted to see the All Ins or Medium Digitals as ‘better’ college parents because they attended events or made more charitable gifts; conversely, one could be tempted to view the No Ori families as ‘disengaged’ because they did not come to campus or did not make a donation. In this case, No Ori families simply may not have had the resources to do so. Therefore, clustering families and understanding the life context of each cluster allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the population and offered a way to disrupt traditional narratives that favor the privileged (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

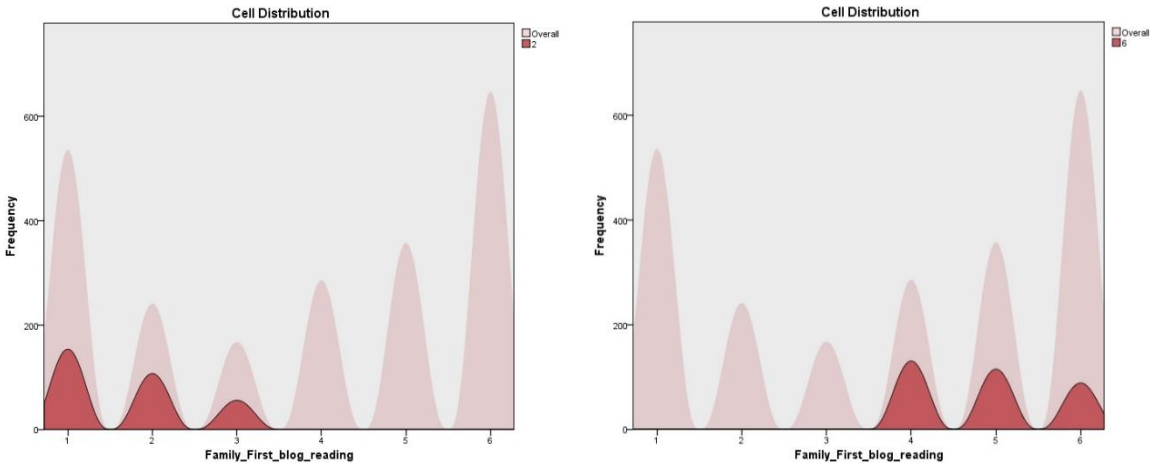
Intervention on Behalf of Their Student

The second research question explored whether there were statistical differences in the frequency with which the six clusters contacted college officials when their students had problems. The omnibus Kruskal-Wallis H test confirmed the distributions of average intervention scores were statistically significantly different between groups, χ^2 (5) = 14.042, p = .015. Post hoc pairwise comparisons revealed statistically significant differences in average intervention scores between the Medium Digitals (mean rank = 374.31) and The Es (mean rank = 459.74) (p = .015), but not between any other group combination.

In attempting to explain the significance of this pairwise comparison, one can begin by looking at the cluster descriptions. The biggest demographic differences between the clusters appear to be in gender (36.6% male in The Es, 24.5% male in Medium Digitals), race (5.6% Black/African American and 5.6% Asian in The Es; 2% and 3%, respectively, in Medium Digitals), income (42.3% of The Es earn $249,000 or below, compared to 25.2% of Medium Digitals), and work status vs. homemaker (78.2% of The Es work full or part time, compared to 68.2% of Medium Digitals; only 8.5% of The Es are homemakers, compared to 20.5% of Medium Digitals). While beyond the scope of this research project, a suggestion for future research would be to conduct additional analyses to see whether any of these demographic categories significantly predict familial intervention, as might be suggested by the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model for K-12 familial involvement, or in Alfaro's (2018) research on the ways

Mexican-origin students communicate with their families and the types of supportive messages they receive.

There is another way, potentially, to consider the intervention behavior of these two clusters. Both clusters attended Orientation, and their e-newsletter readership was similar (The Es reported always reading the e-newsletter and the Medium Digitals reported reading it sometimes), but their use of the Family 411 blog differs drastically (see Table 10). The Es read the blog zero to two times a week, whereas the Medium Digitals read it three to five times a week (see Figure 7). Wilson University's families' media consumption reflects uses and gratifications theory, which suggests that people have "different types and amounts of activity in different communications settings" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 8).



The Es cluster Medium Digitals cluster

Figure 7. Comparison of Blog Reading across Select Clusters.

The Family 411 blog frequently shares the advice for families not to intervene on their students' behalf. An examination of mean intervention scores across clusters (see Table 9, Chapter IV, page 116) shows that The Es intervene at an above average rate across all six categories, whereas the Medium Digitals show below average intervention. From a developmental standpoint, college students should begin to take ownership of their own decisions and actions without the direction of parents and families, as this helps them develop independence (Cullaty, 2011; Kennedy, 2009; Wartman & Savage, 2008). In this sense, lower levels of family intervention should be interpreted as a positive sign.

While there were not statistically significant pairwise comparisons between all six clusters, Table 9 (see Chapter IV, page 116) suggests that there could be some relationship between blog reading and intervention. The Low Blog and The Es clusters (who have the lowest proportion of reading the Family 411 blog) intervene above average in four of six categories, and the All Ins and Medium Digitals clusters (who have the highest proportion of frequently reading the Family 411 blog) show below average intervention in all six categories. In other words, it appears that those who read the Family 411 blog most also intervene the least, and vice versa. Caution must be used here, as correlation does not equal causation; however, this does suggest an area for additional research and inquiry. While Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) talked about perceived invitations to involvement, the messages in the Family 411 blog may represent to readers an invitation *not* to become involved; the high blog usage families appear to be heeding that message. Henning (2007) posits that college-level invitations to involvement are

more often about how to help students develop independence, so the messaging of the Family 411 blog may reinforce that finding.

Finally, while there was not a formal research question associated with which categories of the college experience had the most familial intervention, the researcher recognized that all types of intervention are not equal. A health and safety concern (e.g., fear that the student has developed an eating disorder) might be a reasonable cause for a family member to contact the administration, but not a social life issue (e.g., a rejection from a Greek life organization). Table 9 shows that the two highest average areas for intervention across the dataset were Personal (e.g., mental health, physical health, eating habits; $M = 1.425$) and Finances (e.g., financial aid, fees, etc.; $M = 1.73$). From the researcher's perspective, those feel like more reasonable areas in which to intervene.

Though beyond the scope of this study, additional research could be helpful in determining if there are significant differences in the areas in which families intervened, or if intervention declined over the course of a student's tenure at Wilson University. Future research with Wilson University families might show that intervention happens more in the first year, when students are new to the college environment and need more support, and when parents and families are trying to stop directing their student's behavior (as perhaps they did in the K-12 years) and moving to a more consultative role. That would reinforce the notion of interdependence, or that "transitions in one person's life often involve transitions for other people" (Lowe & Dotterer, 2017, p. 32). Families and students may be learning—together—how to shift the weight of problem-solving from parent to student (Lowe & Dotterer, 2017).

Across all categories and clusters, mean intervention scores were less than 2 on a 4-point scale (a value of 1 represented never intervening and a value of 2 represented sometimes intervening). While it is possible that families underreported their intervention, the fact that the survey did not ask for names or other identifying information may have been a protective factor against false self-reports. If so, then the dominant public narrative of the "helicopter parent" appears not to apply to this population, as the vast majority of Wilson University families appears to intervene infrequently (Coburn, 2006; Cutright, 2008; Lampert, 2009; Somers & Settle, 2010). A finding of lower intervention levels than is conventionally portrayed in the media could help reinforce the idea of an "*in consortio cum parentibus*" (in partnership with parents) model in higher education, where families are seen more as partners in their students' success, rather than thwarting students' autonomy development (Henning, 2007, p. 539). Having looked at intervention, the next section discusses the findings related to satisfaction with Wilson University.

Satisfaction with the College

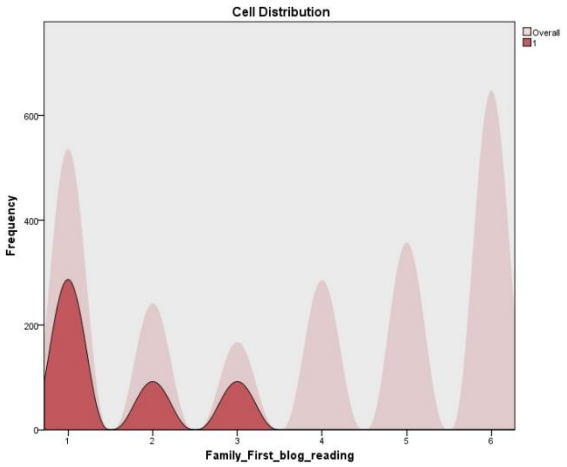
To answer the third research question, parent/family satisfaction with Wilson University was measured in two ways: a single self-reported satisfaction score and a sum of 10 questions designed to measure OPR, which has been shown to be related to satisfaction (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016). First to be considered is the self-reported satisfaction measure.

Self-reported satisfaction. For the self-reported satisfaction measure, the mean ranks of satisfaction scores were statistically significantly different between groups,

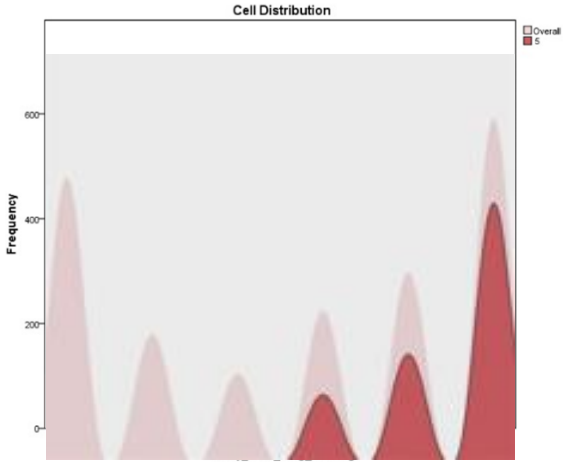
χ^2 (5) = 47.720, p = .000. Post hoc analysis found statistically significant differences in satisfaction scores between the following pairs: Low Blog (M = 4.46) and Medium Digitals (M = 4.73); Low Blog (M = 4.46) and All Ins (M = 4.8); No Ori (M = 4.54) and All Ins (M = 4.8); and No E-News (M = 4.42) and All Ins (M = 4.8). There are demographic differences between these clusters that could be the cause for these pairwise differences.

The Low Blog cluster was statistically significant with the Medium Digitals and All Ins, so analysis begins there. The Low Blog cluster tends to have more males (41%) than the Medium Digitals (24.5%) or All Ins (27%). Low Blog families also had a higher percentage of full- or part-time workers (82.4%) compared to Medium Digitals (68.2%) or All Ins (64%), and a larger proportion earning lower than $99,000 (8.1%) than the Medium Digitals (6.7%) or All Ins (6.3%). A far greater proportion of Low Blog families and All Ins had an associate's degree or lower (4.3% and 5.4%, respectively) than Medium Digitals (.7%). Families who did not attend a traditional 4-year residential college like Wilson University brought a different life context to their student's college, and thus may have had different expectations of what the schools should offer them and their students (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This could be one way of accounting for the discrepancy in the satisfaction level of the Low Blog families.

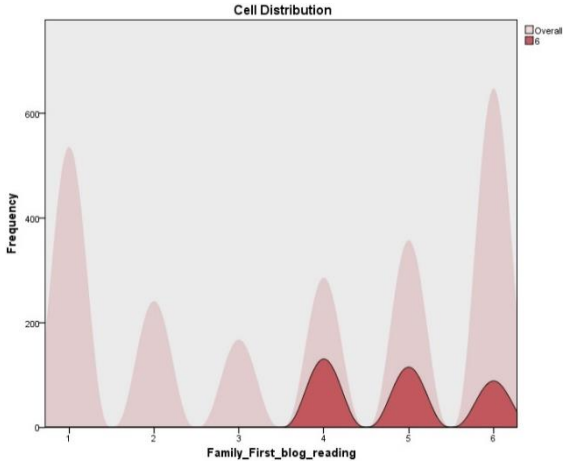
Those demographic variables could account for the significant differences between cluster pairs. However, an alternative theory about differences in satisfaction can be seen in Figure 8, which shows the clusters' blog reading rates.



Low Blog Cluster



All Ins Cluster



Medium Digitals Cluster

Figure 8. Blog Consumption Comparison across Select Clusters.

Uses and gratifications theory suggests that individuals select the media that meet their needs, and that choice is informed by "rational self-awareness" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 18). The Low Blog cluster has the least amount of interaction with the Family 411 blog, reading it zero to two times a week, whereas All Ins and Medium Digitals read the blog three to five times a week. One could infer that those who are consuming more school-

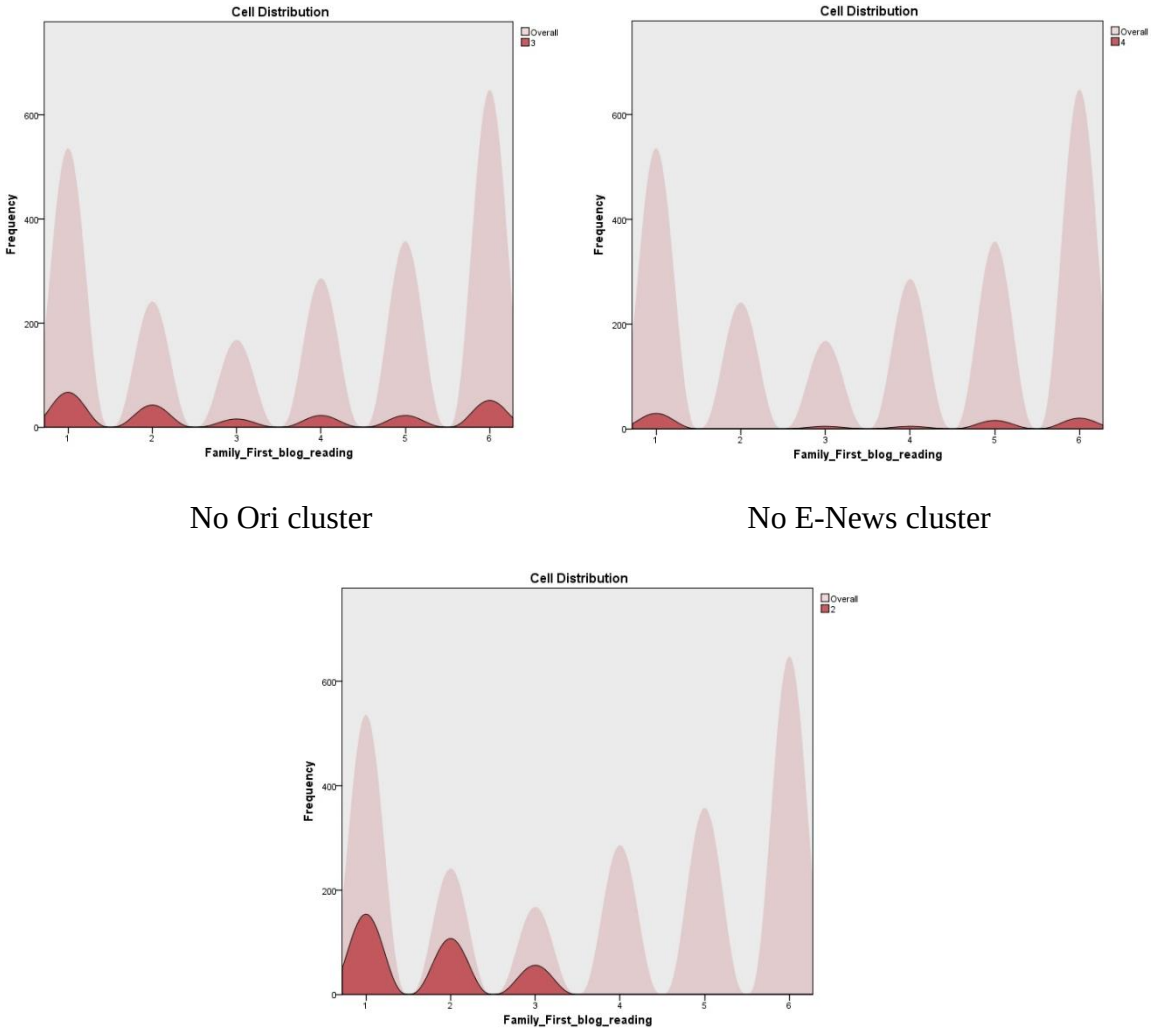
generated media are doing so because their desire for connection or information is fulfilled via the blog. By getting more of their needs filled, those families may experience greater interest in or affection with the school, which could lead to a higher sense of satisfaction (Kaye, 2010).

Kaye (2010) also found that some readers formed attachments to particular bloggers of interest. Readers may find particular gratification in a blogger who is like them and shares similar identities in age, race, or socioeconomic status. Moreover, a blog that provides a first-person, single-author perspective may tap into families' desire to have a local contact—in the true spirit of *in loco parentis*—who can be seen as a partner should they need it (Henning, 2007). It may not be that the blog reader expects the blogger to assist their child directly, but the mere presence of a parental-sounding voice in the blog may gratify families' needs to feel like someone cares for their child in their absence, which may lead to satisfaction (Henning, 2007; Kaye, 2010). This has been the researcher's experience with family blog readers; at a parent event, one family member talked about being comforted by having a staff member who understood and sympathized with family members' concerns, even dubbing the researcher the "mom *pro tem.*"

There were also statistically significant pairwise comparisons between the No Ori and No E-News clusters with the All Ins. From a demographic perspective, the No Ori cluster has more families aged 40-49 (26.3%) than the No E-News (12.1%) or All Ins (15.6%). No Ori families have a larger proportion of families earning $99,000 or less (10.1%) than the No E-News (3%) or All Ins (6%) clusters. At 39.4%, the No E-News cluster is the only cluster with less than 50% reporting they are first-time college parents,

compared to No Ori and the All Ins (53.5% and 62.6%, respectively). No Ori families are also more likely to live within 50 miles (6.1%) compared to No E-News (3%) or All Ins (3%) and are also move likely to live more than 3,000 miles away (10.1%) compared to No E-News (0%) or All Ins (4.9%). From a life context standpoint, the younger parents in the No Ori cluster may have more things on their plates (e.g., younger children, caring for aging parents, being mid-career and still trying to establish themselves, etc.) and therefore have less time and energy to consume Wilson University media (which could lead to lower satisfaction). Another possibility is that the larger proportion of No Ori families living more than 3,000 miles away may represent international families; if so, there could be language barriers or cross-cultural reasons for differences in media consumption and/or satisfaction.

Again, it is possible that some combination of these various demographics could be the reason for the pairwise differences in satisfaction. However, the clusters' blog reading rates also differ, as seen in Figure 9. While the All Ins cluster is skewed towards blog reading three to five times a week, there is a greater distribution of blog reading across all levels of the No Ori and No E-News clusters.



No Ori cluster

No E-News cluster

The Es Cluster

Figure 9. Additional Blog Consumption Comparisons.

From a practitioner's standpoint, the researcher surmises that those families who are most connected to the campus via a daily blog might reasonably report the highest levels of satisfaction. This makes sense on an intuitive level and seems consistent with the literature on uses and gratifications: if a family member reads the Family 411 blog to fulfill a need(s), and tends to consume that blog more frequently than other families, they

might reasonably feel more connected to and satisfied with their child's college (Kaye, 2005, 2010; Ruggiero, 2000). Families who read the blog may also feel like they are getting something of value for the high cost of tuition, which could engender some consumer satisfaction (Carney-Hall, 2008; Daniel et al., 2001; Kennedy, 2009). However, one cannot infer causation for these pairwise differences, so an agenda for future research would be to conduct a regression analysis to see which variables (demographic items vs. blog reading behavior) predict satisfaction.

Sum OPR satisfaction. The OPR scale developed by Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) measures communicated commitment and conversational voice; these are "relational maintenance strategies that positively correlated with relational outcomes" (p. 218) such as trust and satisfaction in an institution. Median sum OPR scores were statistically significantly different between groups, χ^2 (5) = 92.369, p = .000. Post hoc analysis found statistically significant differences in sum OPR scores between the All Ins and every other cluster. Additionally, the Low Blog cluster was statistically significant pairwise with The Es and Medium Digitals. Means of sum OPR for all clusters are seen in Table 11.

The two clusters that read the Family 411 blog the most, All Ins and Medium Digitals, have the highest mean sum OPR scores. This is not necessarily surprising, as those two clusters would be consuming the most media from Wilson University, and thus may have a higher sense of the institution's communicated commitment and conversational voice, which can positively impact OPR (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2016). The

Low Blog cluster, which has the lowest rate of Family 411 blog reading, has the lowest sum OPR mean.

Table 11

Comparison of Sum OPR Means (*N*=1,001)

Cluster	Sum OPR Mean
Low Blog	40.85
The Es	42.57
No Ori	42.02
No E-News	41.00
All Ins	43.26
Medium Digitals	45.01

As with the previous analyses, the differences in pairwise comparisons could be due to demographic differences. The Low Blog cluster is distinct in that it is the cluster with the highest proportion of male respondents, it has the highest rate of full- or part-time workers and is the second highest cluster to earn $50,000–$99,000 and the highest to earn $250,000–$499,000. On the other hand, the All Ins represent the lowest rate of full-time workers, the highest rate of first-time college parents, the highest rate of homemakers, and is the least racially diverse of all the clusters. While beyond the scope of this research project, a suggestion for future research would be to conduct additional analyses to determine whether any of these demographic variables significantly predict satisfaction.

Pairwise differences may also be a result of differential engagement behavior between clusters; the Low Blog combinations will be examined first. While the Low Blog and the Medium Digitals had identical e-newsletter reading, the Low Blog cluster read the Family 411 blog zero to two times a week, whereas the Medium Digitals read the blog three to five times a week. Similarly, the Low Blog and The Es cluster had nearly identical blog reading, but The Es reported always reading the e-newsletter and the Low Blog cluster only read it sometimes. Uses and gratifications theory posits that individuals "display different types and amounts of activity in different communication settings" and actively choose the media that best fulfills their needs (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 8). It is possible that as these clusters engage with their preferred medium at the highest level (whether that is the e-newsletter or the blog), their media engagement influences their overall satisfaction with Wilson University. This would be an important point to ponder for university Family Relations staff members, who may be using one strategy to communicate with all families as opposed to differentiating their approaches.

Turning to the All Ins cluster, it had statistically significant pairwise combinations with every other cluster, which makes it more difficult to discern exactly what is unique about the All Ins to cause that result. One way to consider this issue is by reviewing the means for e-newsletter reading and Family 411 blog reading across all clusters (see Table 12).

Table 12

Means of E-Newsletter and Family 411 Reading by Cluster

Cluster	E-Newsletter Reading (4-point Likert scale)	Family 411 Reading (number of times a week)
All Ins (5)	4	5.44
Low Blog (1)	3	1.59
The Es (2)	4	1.69
No Ori (3)	3.45	3.2
No E-News (4)	1.21	3.52
Medium Digitals (6)	3	4.87

The All Ins cluster has the highest mean for both blog reading and e-newsletter reading compared to all other clusters. In investigating any pairwise combination between the All Ins and any other cluster, the differences in means may have triggered the statistically significant result. For example, while the All Ins and The Es both had a mean of 4 for e-newsletter reading, their blog reading means were 5.44 and 1.69, respectively. Therefore, it is possible that mean differences played a role in determining statistical significance in the pairwise combinations. However, one must also note that the No Ori group was the only cluster not to attend Orientation, which could have been the basis of the significant pairwise combination with the All Ins.

There appears to be a relationship between the All Ins consumption of the Family 411 blog (higher than other clusters) and a correspondingly high sense of OPR satisfaction. Ledingham and Brunig (1998) stress the importance of communication in developing OPR. It is not enough to communicate with an organization's publics: the publics must know the organization is doing it to foster the relationship (Ledingham &

Brunig, 1998). The Family 411 blog, with its conversational, first-person voice, may play a strong role in building and maintaining the OPR relationship by inviting families to join in a virtual space on campus created just for them (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Again, caution must be used in inferring causal relationships between the engagement behaviors and sum OPR satisfaction scores. While beyond the scope of this research project, a suggestion for future research would be to conduct a regression analysis on these demographic and behavioral factors to see which variables (if any) predict OPR satisfaction.

The researcher chose to use two measures of satisfaction as a validity check. The Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) scale was selected because it had been successfully used in a university setting to measure OPR and could provide a contrast with the self-reported satisfaction score. Both satisfaction scores had similar averages: 4.65 for self-reported satisfaction, and 4.31 for the Sum OPR score; see Figure 9 (note: the sum OPR score must be divided by ten, as the original measure was a sum of ten questions).

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Satisfaction	1000	1	5	4.65	.667
Sum_OPR	1001	10	50	43.10	5.405
Valid N (listwise)	1000				

Figure 10. Average Satisfaction Scores across Methods.

Though there appears to be some similarity between the two measures of satisfaction as measured by the mean, the standard deviations are quite different. For self-

reported satisfaction, the low standard deviation suggests the data are closely clustered around the mean. The higher standard deviation for the sum OPR may reflect a much greater degree in the variability of the data, or it may be related to the scale going up to 50, as opposed to the self-reported scale going only to 5. Ultimately, the similarity in means suggests consistency between scales. While beyond the scope of this study, additional analyses could investigate whether the self-reported satisfaction and the sum OPR scores were statistically significantly correlated.

Charitable Giving

The final research question examined whether there were statistical differences in Wilson University families' giving behavior. A chi-square test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the proportion of giving between the six clusters ($\chi^2 = 23.75$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .154$, $V = .154$). As an omnibus test, the chi-square simply tells us there is a statistical difference between groups, but not where the difference is. Post hoc pairwise comparisons found that the proportion of families who made gifts was statistically significantly different ($p < .05$) between the Low Blog cluster (52.9% reported making gifts) and the All Ins cluster (71.9% reported making gifts; see Figure 5). No other statistically significant pairwise comparisons were found.

As with the research questions on intervention and satisfaction, one can begin the attempt to investigate pairwise differences by examining the cluster descriptions. The biggest demographic differences between the clusters appear to be in gender (41% male in Low Blog, 27% in All Ins), race (2.9% Black/African American, 2.9% Hispanic, and 1.4% Asian in Low Blog; 1.4%, 1.4% and .8%, respectively, in All Ins), distance from

campus (7.1% of Low Blog families live within 50 miles, compared to 3.3% of All Ins), and work status vs. homemaker (82.4% of Low Blog families work full- or part-time, compared to 64% of All Ins; only 9.5% of Low Blog families are homemakers, compared to 24.3% of All Ins). While beyond the scope of this research project, a suggestion for future research would be to conduct a regression analysis on these demographic factors to see which variables (if any) predict charitable giving.

It certainly seems plausible that family life context plays a role in charitable giving. If a greater proportion of All Ins families do not work or are homemakers (and are still paying significant tuition at Wilson University), their life context may be such that they have greater wealth and can afford to make gifts (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Given the fact that a larger proportion of families of color were in the Low Blog cluster, it is possible that their students' lived experiences on a predominantly White campus could factor in to their families' willingness to make a donation. If students of color at Wilson University experienced incidents of bias, whether at the macro- or micro-levels, that could negatively influence their families' opinions on whether to support the school. Students' socioeconomic status could add an additional consideration in families' willingness to donate, as the Wilson University population has a high proportion of affluent families making over $250,000 a year. Studying the experiences of students of color (and/or students of lower socioeconomic status) and their families' sense of satisfaction and charitable giving is another potential vein of inquiry that should be considered for future research.

As with the aforementioned analyses on intervention and satisfaction, one can potentially view differences in giving behavior relative to the Family 411 blog readership. Both the Low Blog and All Ins clusters attended Orientation, and they read the e-newsletter sometimes and always, respectively. However, their blog consumption is quite different: Low Blog families most frequently do not read the blog at all, or at best read it once or twice a week. The largest proportion of All Ins read the blog five times a week, but all cluster members read the blog at least three times a week.

Unlike the semi-regular Family 411 messaging encouraging families not to intervene when their students have problems, the blog typically only encourages families to make gifts twice in the calendar year: once at the end of December (so families can take advantage of giving for tax purposes), and once in June (as the Wilson University fiscal year ends June 30). Therefore, it seems unlikely that All Ins families make gifts at a greater rate than Low Blog families due to a direct ask seen in the blog. One interpretation of the greater giving rate could be that the All Ins consume the most media generated by the school, and if they like what they are reading and have formed a favorable impression of Wilson University because of the blog, they may be inspired to give more (Chapman, 2017; Kaye, 2010). Again, caution must be used in suggesting a causal factor for giving. The findings on charitable giving relative to blog consumption reinforces the importance of the two-way nature of OPR: by demonstrating openness and commitment to families (i.e., publics), desirable behavioral outcomes that assist the organization should follow (e.g., gifts).

In thinking about intervention, satisfaction, and giving, there are numerous plausible ways to consider parent and family behavior. Parental role construction, life context, and/or sense of efficacy may play a strong role in a parent's or family member's decision to intervene with an administrator when their child has problems. Family life context related to disposable income could be an important factor in a family's willingness to make a charitable gift. A parent's own college experience may influence their sense of satisfaction with their student's college, as they recall their own time on campus and compare it to their student's experience. Those are all plausible ways to consider family behavior. However, this study suggests that a family's media consumption can have an influence on their level of engagement with their student's college, as well as behaviors the college wants to encourage (lower intervention, higher satisfaction, and increased giving). The intersection of a family's role construction, life context, and sense of efficacy—combined with their media consumption, an invitation to involvement—may paint a richer picture of how families behave towards their student's college.

Limitations

There are several important limitations that should be noted with this study. The response rate to this study's survey was 12.8%. Van Mol (2017) notes that "response rates have been steadily decreasing over the last decade," and "today, even a response rate below 10% is not uncommon" (p. 318). Therefore, a potential limitation is that the response rate could impact the reliability of the study and its findings (Van Mol, 2017). Related to survey response rate, 10% of survey respondents declined to provide their

income level. This could have influenced the clustering process, and it is possible that different clusters could have been formed had that 10% provided their incomes.

Another limitation is that the study was centered on one institution. Only one example existed of a college that produced a daily parent and family blog, and the study might have been more robust if there had been more than one school to survey. Additionally, the Wilson University parent and family population was largely homogenous, so the findings of this study may not be applicable for schools whose families have a different demographic profile.

This study required knowledge of English and access to a computer or smartphone to complete the survey, which could have limited the respondent pool. Email was the delivery mechanism for the survey. Though the survey was emailed to the entire Wilson parent/family constituency, there is no way to control whether the email landed in the respondents' inboxes as intended or if the message was routed to spam or junk mail; this could also have limited the quality of the final dataset (Van Mol, 2017). The fact that the survey was administered during the summer months could have impacted the response rate; families may have been on vacation or were less responsive to Wilson University emails than they would have been during the fall or spring semesters. It is also possible that the rewording of the Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) scale could have produced different results than the original scale.

Another potential limitation is that the researcher's professional role includes blogging. While the researcher thoughtfully reflected on what might be reasonable conclusions to draw, unconscious bias from the researcher's own blogging experience

could have factored into the interpretation of the results. Finally, it is possible that there was a variable that was not measured on the survey but that might have contributed to the differences in families' behavior.

Contributions to the Literature

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. It is the first known empirical study investigating how a daily blog relates to the behavior of college parents and families, and therefore begins to fill a gap in the knowledge of how to use blogs as a family engagement tool. Up to this point, there had been "limited examples from the literature of institutional programs that actively engage parents and families consistently and throughout the span of college" (Kiyama et al., 2015, p. 43). This study showed that a family-focused blog is a tool that could "showcase the college experience at an institution" for all 4 years of a student's tenure (Rudolph & Sweetser, 2009, p. 29).

This study suggests that for at least two clusters—All Ins and Medium Digitals—families eagerly consumed the Family 411 blog, refuting the findings of Rudolph and Sweetser (2009), who suggested that admissions blogs "lose their effectiveness when bloggers post more than once or twice a week. Bloggers simply ran out of insightful things to write" (p. 32). This study supports the uses and gratifications research of Kaye (2005, 2010) and Ruggiero (2000), which suggest people choose to consume media of interest and will gravitate to those media channels that best fulfill their needs. Clearly, Wilson University families chose to consume the Family 411 blog and the e-newsletter in different ways that presumably satisfied particular needs or desires.

This study provided an important contribution to the literature by measuring college parent/family member intervention from the family member's perspective, rather than that intervention being reported from the students' or administrators' perspective, which has typically been the norm (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cullaty, 2011; Sax & Wartman, 2010). The findings on intervention in this study refute the perception of overinvolved "helicopter parents" by showing lower levels of intervention than may be portrayed in the media or among university faculty and staff (Carney-Hall, 2008; Coburn, 2006; Cullaty, 2011; Cutright, 2008; Garrett, 2016; Lantz, 2016; Somers & Settle, 2010). Additionally, this study showed that families' intervention seemed to be directed in appropriate areas, as opposed to all areas of college life.

Another contribution to the literature was analyzing parent and family satisfaction in multiple ways. This study built on the work of Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) by adapting their OPR scale for relational maintenance strategies for the Wilson University population. This dual approach provided a contrast between how satisfaction is measured via direct ask of respondents versus indirect measures of communicated commitment and conversational voice in family communications, which relates to OPR. It also tested an adapted version of the Sweetser and Kelleher (2016) scale in another college environment.

In terms of knowledge of family philanthropy, this study built on the work of Chapman (2017) by providing additional statistical analyses of parent and family giving behavior, suggesting a link between higher engagement and higher likelihood of donations. Finally, the study's methodology provides a framework through which other

family engagement practitioners could use cluster analysis as a tool to understand the distinct clusters of families at their institution, and thus be better able to serve their needs. As schools are increasingly challenged to ensure their programs equitably serve both majority and historically underrepresented populations, using cluster analysis may help amplify the circumstances of families whose voices might otherwise be lost, particularly in predominantly White institutions (Carney-Hall, 2008; Daniel et al., 2001; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Kiyama & Harper, 2018).

Implications for Practice

There are numerous implications for practice suggested from this study. From a global standpoint, this study's findings suggest that when a school offers parents and families the option to engage with the school via digital media, there are families who will respond with enthusiasm. This study affirms the suggestion of Wandel (2008) that higher education should "[target] special interest groups . . . such as parents" (p. 46). Family relations practitioners should consider using blogs as a way to engage families and strengthen their affiliation to the school (Wandel, 2008). Despite their seeming promise, family-oriented blogs appear to be an untapped resource for colleges, and a medium that should be added to the current range of family engagement opportunities (Chapman, 2017). Families' needs are not monolithic; therefore, the range of media to engage them should not be monolithic (Kiyama & Harper, 2018).

In the researcher's professional experience talking to colleagues at other institutions, a common misperception is that creating a family-oriented blog would require hiring a new full-time employee or would strain already limited budgets. This has

not been the case at Wilson University. Wilson University deployed an existing staff member to create the Family 411 blog. On a daily basis, it takes as little as 15 minutes and as much as an hour a day to create and publish the Family 411 blog. With free, open-source blogging software available, the only real technical cost in starting a blog is getting the assistance of technical staff to help place it on the school's website.

In addition to the recommendation for family relations offices to begin a blog, schools should take care in developing an appropriate voice and style for their blog. Blogs with a "conversational human voice" were more effective than traditional corporate communications in building OPR (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 395). Schools that adopt a blog model and use a conversational tone could have an advantage in expressing their "communicated relational commitment" to families; communicated relational commitment correlated "significantly with desirable relational outcomes" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 395). As the blogger creates a sense of trust with the readers of the blog, it may be easier to navigate difficult or controversial topics or crises through a trusted blogger's voice (Jo et al., 2005; Park & Cameron, 2014).

If they are not already doing so, family relations practitioners should also consider conducting an annual communications assessment with their parents and families. Such an assessment should focus on several key areas: which school-produced media do families use (and how do they rate their effectiveness), which additional social media platforms do families use (that perhaps the school does not utilize), and what types of information are most critical to families. While practitioners may feel like they already understand what families need to know, or there may be specific messages the school is

asking to push out to families, it is important to uncover any gaps in families' information needs. Special attention should be paid to the needs of first-generation families, international families, and families for whom English is a second language. Schools that can find ways to anticipate and prepare for a diverse set of family information needs might generate additional positive OPR. Schools that create a parent and family blog should set up metrics to track readership, both in terms of which blog posts generate the most page hits or comments, and how to track which families read the blog in their records system. Having these metrics would allow for the possibility of studying behavior among blog readers versus non-readers.

If a school perceives there is too much family intervention with administrators when students have problems, schools should consider creating a position statement on what is appropriate intervention (and what is not). Once created, schools should find multiple ways to communicate that philosophy to families. Kennedy (2009) suggests that if schools do not take the lead and communicate roles and expectations, families will define their roles based on their K-12 role construction, so schools should communicate guidelines on developmentally appropriate intervention.

Finally, graduate programs in higher education should consider adding coursework about parent and family relations to their curricula. Graduates of these programs will presumably go into jobs in higher education and will likely interact with parents and families. Without a well-grounded understanding of the college parent-student relationship, especially as it relates to communication and intervention behavior, young professionals could be frustrated with families they perceive to be overinvolved, or

acting in ways that seem to run counter to student-development goals. A combination of theoretical understanding of the current generation of college families, communication skills training, and conflict resolution could be highly valuable additions to current graduate coursework.

Agenda for Future Research

Having established that there is a gap in the literature on parent and family engagement with their students' college, particularly in terms of family intervention, sense of satisfaction, and charitable giving, this study was a first step in filling that gap. The current study also revealed several areas in which additional research is needed. First, while this study established that there were differences in cluster behaviors for intervention, satisfaction, and giving, it was beyond the scope of this study to find a causal explanation for those differences. A combination of regression analyses could be conducted to try and isolate which behavioral or demographic variables most contributed to intervention, satisfaction, and giving.

A second area for future research would be to approach the same research questions from a qualitative standpoint. While this study proved there was differential behavior among the various clusters, a quantitative approach cannot provide the thick, rich description of how and why parents and families behave as they do. Although this study's survey did not allow for respondent comments, one Wilson University parent reached out via email to share thoughts on the survey:

> The survey does not consider how family and parental engagement evolves for families over the 4 years their son or daughter is at Wilson University. I found the

> frequency of our desired nexus with campus and campus communications really changed as our son progressed and got older. We needed less from the school.

A qualitative study on family engagement, particularly as it relates to blog readership, could provide additional insights on the value that a blog adds across a family's tenure with the institution; that might help schools consider how to direct their efforts for maximum effectiveness.

Because this was just one study, and focused on a private PWI, it is unclear whether these findings would be able to be replicated at a different type of institution, such as a large public school or an HBCU. If other schools begin to adopt the blog model, it would be helpful to have research comparing the outcomes of varying engagement opportunities at schools with different profiles or different family demographics. Finally, future research could investigate whether parent/family blog readership has any relationship to desirable student outcomes, such as student retention, degree attainment, and students' rate of accessing help on campus (e.g., tutoring, counseling, etc.). If there are measurable differences in the ways that parents and families who read the blog are able to support their students and direct them to appropriate resources when needed, that could be a significant argument for the inclusion of family-oriented blogs as a means to foster student success.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the majority of colleges have a parent/family relations office and offer specific programming and communication for college families, there is a distinct lack of research on the ways that family engagement may affect behaviors of

interest to the college, such as intervention on their student's behalf, sense of satisfaction, or charitable giving. This study illustrated the ways that different types of family engagement could produce positive outcomes for both families and the institution.

Traditionally, family relations offices have focused on developing one-time engagement opportunities (such as Orientation, Family Weekend, summer send-off parties, etc.) or semi-regular engagements (such as a monthly e-newsletter) (Savage & Petree, 2017). At the time of this research, only seven family relations offices reported using blogs as a continuous engagement tool, and only Wilson University hosts a daily blog. The findings of this study offer a starting point in understanding how a daily blog can be used to deepen family engagement with the school.

This study found that the behavior of the six clusters of Wilson University parents and families differed based on their level of engagement. The clusters who were more engaged, as measured by readership of the Family 411 blog, and to a lesser extent the e-newsletter, tended to show a lower level of intervention with administrators than families who did not read the blog and were presumably less engaged, or less informed about what appropriate engagement looked like. Similarly, comparisons of clusters of parents who were more engaged with the Family 411 blog or the e-newsletter tended to have higher satisfaction and higher charitable giving than clusters with lower engagement. However, the findings from the current study also highlight that daily blog engagement is only one of a number of potential variables that influence intervention, satisfaction, and charitable giving. Future research is needed to understand the relationship between

demographic characteristics and consumption of a daily blog in predicting behavioral outcomes of interest to a college.

This study illustrates that colleges have an opportunity to broaden the services of their family engagement offices in ways that respond better to the emotional and informational needs of families. Harnessing the power of blogs or other continuous engagement tools, colleges could shape family involvement by allowing families to connect with their child's school and do so in ways that respect student development and autonomy. Colleges could invite families into the institution virtually, and in so doing help provide important means of gratification. One Wilson University family member emailed these thoughts upon completion of the survey:

> As I reflect back, I am interested in how our communication needs reflected our emotional needs relating to our first child heading off to college. In particular, I know I wanted to feel connected and clued into life on campus when our son first started Wilson University. I wanted to learn all I could and have as many points of contact to see into his new world, without being directly involved or in his way.

Those colleges that can successfully and productively engage parents and families might create greater goodwill with families, and may reap the benefits of lower intervention, greater satisfaction, and increased family philanthropy.

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APPENDIX A

PILOT STUDY PHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name of school:

Name/title of person being interviewed:

Size of your school's undergraduate population:

Blog URL: f

Do people access the blog online? RSS feed? Is it emailed to people?

How do you sign up for the blog (if subscription service)?

Any idea of how many blog readers you have?

Is there a primary blog author? Or a pool of people?

Who blogs? Name and/or title/function:

If student or parent volunteer blogs, do you check blog content before publishing?

Do you write the blog in the first person?

How often are blogs posted?

What kind of content do you cover in the blog?

How do you choose topics to blog about?

Do you allow reader comments on the blog? If so, do you respond? Or if people email you with comments, do you respond?

Do you do any kind of assessment of the blog—reader stats, comments, anecdotal?

What kind of feedback do you get about the blog?

What benefits have you seen from having a blog?

What drawbacks have you seen to having a blog?

Do you see your institution changing the blog in a significant way in the next 6-12 months?

How many hours a week do you spend on the blog?

How many people work in your office?

Does your office do fundraising?

Other info you would like to provide:

APPENDIX B

DISSERTATION SURVEY

Survey on the Engagement of Undergraduate Parents and Families at Wilson University

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT (THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO)

Project Title: A QUANTITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE WAYS PARENTS AND FAMILIES INTERACT WITH THEIR STUDENTS' COLLEGE FOLLOWING CAMPUS-SPONSORED ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES: EVENTS, E-NEWSLETTERS, AND A DAILY BLOG

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth A. (Betsy) Chapman

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Laura Gonzalez

Proceed to survey

- **I agree and consent to participate in this study. (1)**
- **I disagree and do not want to participate in this study. (2)**

[Skip Logic: If answer "I agree", skip to Q1. If answer "I disagree", skip to end of survey.]

In the 2018-2019 academic year, did you have a student at Wilson University?

- **Yes (1)**
- **No (2)**

[Skip Logic: If answer "Yes", skip to Q1. If answer "No", skip to end of survey.]

Q1 Please indicate the year and gender of your Wilson University student during the 2018-2019 academic year (if you only had one student, please check the button for 'I do not have a student in this year' for all years that do not apply)

Category	Male (1)	Female (2)	Other/prefer not to respond (3)	I do not have a student in this year (4)
First year student/Class of 2022	○	○	○	○

Category	Male (1)	Female (2)	Other/prefer not to respond (3)	I do not have a student in this year (4)
Sophomore/Class of 2021	○	○	○	○
Junior/Class of 2020	○	○	○	○
Senior/Class of 2019	○	○	○	○

Q2 Did you attend any of the parent/family Orientation sessions at Move-In/when your student first started at Wilson University?

- Yes (2)
- No (1)

Q3 Have you ever attended Family Weekend at Wilson University?

- Yes (2)
- No (1)

Q4 Have you attended any other Wilson University event, whether on campus or in your home area (e.g., New Student Reception, regional events, Jeffersonian Dinner, etc.)?

- Yes (2)
- No (1)

Q5 Do you read the monthly e-newsletter, Wilson Parents & Families, which is emailed to parents and families around the 15th of each month?

- Always (4)
- Sometimes (3)
- Never (2)
- I do not receive the e-newsletter (1)

Q6 In a typical week, how many days do you read the Family 411 blog?

- 5 times a week (6)
- 4 times a week (5)
- 3 times a week (4)
- 2 times a week (3)
- 1 time a week (2)
- 0 times a week (1)

Q7 Did your family make a charitable gift to any area of Wilson University in the 2018-2019 academic year (e.g., to the Parents' Campaign of the Wilson University Fund, an academic department, or other program)? ***Note: for the purposes of this study, paying tuition is <u>not</u> considered a charitable gift.***

- Yes (2)
- No (1)

Q8 How often do you contact college officials to help solve problems your student may be having in the following areas at Wilson University?

	Very Often (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Never (my student has had a problem, but I have not contacted college officials) (1)	Not applicable (my student has not had a problem in this area (9)
Personal issues (e.g., mental health, physical health, eating habits) (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Academics (e.g., grades, faculty, class registration, academic advising) (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Facilities issues (e.g., residence hall/room, parking, food service) (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Social issues (e.g., friends, roommate, Greek Life) (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Career plans (e.g., finding jobs or internships) (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Finance (e.g., financial aid, fees, etc.) (5)	○	○	○	○	○

Q9 The next set of questions asks about your impressions of Wilson University's electronic communications (Wilson Parents & Families e-newsletter, Family 411 blog, and other emails Wilson University sends you). Wilson University:

	Always (5)	Very Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
Uses a positive/optimistic tone (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Expresses cheer & optimism about the future (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Implies relationship with parents/families has a future/is a long-term commitment (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Communicates a desire to build a relationship with parents and families (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Demonstrates a commitment to maintaining a relationship with parents and families (5)	○	○	○	○	○

Q10 Wilson University:

	Always (5)	Very Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
Uses a sense of humor in communication (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Makes communication enjoyable (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Provides prompt/uncritical feedback when addressing criticism (3)	○	○	○	○	○

	Always (5)	Very Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
Would admit mistakes (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Positively addresses complaints or queries (5)	○	○	○	○	○

Q11 Overall, how satisfied are you with your experiences with Wilson University?

	Very satisfied (5)	Satisfied (4)	Neutral (3)	Dissatisfied (2)	Very dissatisfied (1)
Overall, how satisfied are you with your experiences with Wilson University? (1)	○	○	○	○	○

Q13. What is your gender identity?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other/prefer not to respond (3)

Q14 What is your current age?

- Under 40 (1)
- 41-19(2)
- 50-59 (3)
- 60-69 (4)
- 70 and older (5)

Q15 Which of the following best describes you?

- American Indian/Alaska Native (1)
- Asian (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- Hispanic/Latino (4)
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (5)
- White (6)
- Two or more races (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q16 Highest level of school you have completed?

- Less than a high school diploma (1)
- High school degree or equivalent (2)
- Some college, no degree (3)
- Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS) (4)
- Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS) (5)
- Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS) (6)
- Professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM) (7)
- Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD) (8)

Q17. Are you a graduate of Wilson University?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q18 What is your household's annual income?

- $0-49,999 (1)
- $50,000-99,999 (2)
- $100,000-249,999 (3)
- $250,000-499,999 (4)
- $500,000 and above (5)

Q19. Is your Wilson University student your first child to attend college?

- Yes, this is my first child in college (1)
- No, I have older children who have gone to college (2)

Q20 How far away do you live from Wilson University/[*city/state redacted*]?

- Under 50 miles (1)
- 51-99 miles (2)
- 100-499 miles (3)
- 500-999 miles (4)
- 1,000-1,999 miles (5)
- 2,000-2,999 miles (6)
- 3,000 or more miles (7)

Q21 What is your current employment status?

- Employed full-time (40 or more hours per week) (7)
- Employed part-time (up to 20 hours per week) (6)
- Unemployed and currently looking for work (5)
- Unemployed and not currently looking for work (4)
- Retired (3)
- Homemaker (2)
- Unable to work (1)

Thank you for completing the survey on engagement of Wilson University undergraduate parents and families following differential levels of college communications.

You are free to contact Elizabeth A. Chapman (Principal Investigator) at EACHAPM2@uncg.edu or by phone at (336) 758-4845 should you have any questions about this study.

APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO WILSON UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE PARENTS IN THE CLASSES OF 2019, 2020, 2021, AND 2022 WITH SURVEY LINK

Sender: Wilson University Office of Family Engagement
Reply to: parents@wilson.edu
Subject: Wilson University parent and family survey

Dear Wilson University parents and families:
As part of my graduate program in higher education, I am doing a research project on the engagement of college parents and families at Wilson University. I am writing to ask for your help with this project.
Please take this brief survey at: [LINK]
This survey is looking at how we engage undergraduate parents and families at Wilson University. The survey asks a series of questions about the types of communications you receive from Wilson University, the ways you engage with the school, and your impressions of Wilson.
Once you click on the survey link, you will see a consent form, which is standard for dissertation research. Please read and scroll through the consent form, then at the end you will choose whether you consent to participate.
Please complete the survey promptly, as it will only be available until 5 pm on July 25.
Your responses will help us better understand the engagement of undergraduate parents/families at Wilson University, and it may also suggest ways that other colleges and universities can engage parents and families in ways that are beneficial.
Thank you in advance for your participation in this survey and for helping me with my graduate studies.
With all best wishes,
Betsy Chapman (‘92, MA ‘94)

Executive Director of Family Communications and Volunteer Management
Office of Family Engagement

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO SURVEY WILSON UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE PARENTS FROM THE CLASSES OF 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: [redacted], **Tim** <tim@[redacted].edu>
Date: Mon, Mar 25, 2019 at 11:45 AM
Subject: Re: Email survey to [redacted] parents/families
To: Betsy Chapman <eachapm2@uncg.edu>

Dear Betsy,

My team and I will look forward to supporting your research.

Best,

Tim

Associate VP, Alumni & Donor Services

On Thu, Mar 21, 2019 at 10:28 AM Betsy Chapman <eachapm2@uncg.edu> wrote:
Tim, I hope this message finds you well. As you know, I am a doctoral student at UNC-G. [redacted] have been incredibly supportive of my studies and the value that informed research can bring [redacted]. I have also met with [redacted] to discuss the potential for this study, and he was supportive.
This semester I am moving toward the proposal phase of my dissertation, which means I have to propose a research project and describe the methods associated with it.
I am writing you to request permission to email Wilson University current undergraduate parents for my study. This would hopefully take place sometime this summer (or early fall).
My proposed research will examine the ways in which Wilson University parents/families interact with the university following university-sponsored engagement opportunities and communications. Specific engagement opportunities include one-off events (such as Orientation), semiregular interventions (such as our monthly e-newsletter), and a continuous intervention, via the Family 411 blog. I am hoping to see if there are differences in parent/family behaviors relative to their level of engagement with these communication channels. The behaviors I will measure are: 1) amount of intervention with the college on their student's behalf, 2) sense of trust/satisfaction with the institution, and 3) charitable giving.

The survey has not been finalized yet, but I am anticipating that it will be a relatively short series of questions (less than 20), plus some demographic questions. All responses will be anonymous. I will be happy to provide a copy once the survey is finalized.
To ensure that the research adheres to all ethical research principles, I will go through the UNC-Greensboro Institutional Review Board approval process and gain approval before the survey can be conducted.
This study has the potential to shed light on parent behaviors and inform our practices. It also has the potential to position Wilson University at the forefront of an important conversation on how family relations practitioners at other schools can measure parent and family engagement.
As you know, the survey's results will be much more meaningful if we send it to all parents and families (and not just advertise it via the Family 411 blog, which is a self-selected population with greater potential for skew).
Please let me know if you consent to my emailing of Wilson University undergraduate families as part of this study. I would then work with your reporting team at the appropriate time to gain access to the distro list and with [redacted] to physically send the email.
Thank you,
Betsy

Betsy Jensen Chapman '92, MA '94
Executive Director of Family Communications and Volunteer Management

APPENDIX E

MENTION OF SURVEY IN THE FAMILY 411 BLOG

[On the day the survey launches, the following blurb will be run in the Family 411 blog. This message will be repeated one week after survey launch].

Survey launch email:
As part of my graduate program in higher education, I am doing a research project on the engagement of college parents and families at Wilson University. Families in the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 were sent an email survey about how we engage undergraduate parents and families at Wilson University. The survey asks a series of questions about the types of communications you receive from Wilson University, the ways you engage with the school, and your impressions of Wilson University.
Your responses will help us better understand the engagement of undergraduate parents/families at Wilson University, and it may also suggest ways that other colleges and universities can engage parents and families in ways that are beneficial.
The survey was sent to the email address you have on file in our records system. If you did not receive it, you can check your spam folder/junk mail/quarantine. Unfortunately, I cannot resend the survey to you if you did not receive it, because ethical standards require that I not be able to identify any individual respondents.
Your participation is voluntary, and will in no way affect your relationship with Wilson University, or your student. Full information and the informed consent form is available at the survey link in your email.
Thank you in advance for your participation in this survey and for helping me with my graduate studies.

One week later email:
I want to remind any parents/families who wish to complete the survey about parent and family engagement at Wilson University, to please do so, as the survey closes on INSERT DATE. If you need a refresher on this survey, click here [WILL LINK TO THE ORIGINAL FAMILY 411 POST]

APPENDIX F

MENTION OF SURVEY ON THE WILSON UNIVERSITY PARENTS AND FAMILIES FACEBOOK PAGE

[On the day the survey launches, the following message will appear on the Wilson University Parents and Families Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/[redacted]].

Survey launch mention on Facebook:
As part of my graduate program in higher education, I am doing a research project on the engagement of college parents and families at Wilson University. Families in the Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 were sent an email survey about how we engage undergraduate parents and families at Wilson University. For more information, see today's Family 411 blog: [WILL LINK TO THE FAMILY 411 POST URL]

APPENDIX G

RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAILS

[to be sent at 1 and 2 weeks after survey launch, only to those families who did not click on the survey link already]

Sender: Wilson University Office of Family Engagement
Reply to: parents@wilson.edu
Subject: Reminder: Wilson University parent and family survey

This is just a reminder that you are invited to complete the parent and family survey if you wish to do so. Details and the survey link are below. The survey will close on July 25.

Dear Wilson University parents and families:

As part of my graduate program in higher education, I am doing a research project on the engagement of college parents and families at Wilson University. I am writing to ask for your help with this project.

Please take this brief survey at: LINK

This survey is looking at how we engage undergraduate parents and families at Wilson University. The survey asks a series of questions about the types of communications you receive from Wilson University the ways you engage with the school, and your impressions of Wilson University.

Once you click on the survey link, you will see a consent form, which is standard for dissertation research. Please read and scroll through the consent form, then at the end you will choose whether you consent to participate.

Please complete the survey promptly, as it will only be available until 5 pm on July 25.

Your responses will help us better understand the engagement of undergraduate parents/families at Wilson University, and it may also suggest ways that other colleges and universities can engage parents and families in ways that are beneficial.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this survey and for helping me with my graduate studies.

With all best wishes,
Betsy Chapman (‘92, MA ‘94)

Executive Director of Family Communications and Volunteer Management
Office of Family Engagement

APPENDIX H

STUDY INFORMED CONSENT

Study information:

Purpose of the study: This is a research project for a dissertation. This study will investigate the engagement of undergraduate parents and families at Wilson University following exposure to certain types of communications, including blogs. Participants are invited to answer a series of questions about the ways you interact with Wilson University, your student, and administrators by completing the dissertation survey.
Type of study: You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Study participants: This survey is being sent to all parents/guardians of undergraduate students at Wilson University in the 2018-19 academic year (Classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) for whom we have a valid email address, and who have not otherwise specified that they do not wish to receive emails from Wilson University. Participants must be at least 18 years of age to participate.
Summary of study procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, you will take a survey that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey asks you about the types of communications you receive from Wilson University, the ways you engage with the school, and your impressions of Wilson University. You will not be compensated for participating in the study. You are free to contact Elizabeth A. Chapman (Principal Investigator) at EACHAPM2@uncg.edu or by phone at (336) 758-4845 to discuss the study. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.

Note: Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

How data will be stored: The Principal Investigator will keep the data in Box at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, which requires a secure login. Data will be kept for 5 years following the closure of the study and then will be deleted.

Principal investigator of this study, which will be conducted at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro: Elizabeth (Betsy) Chapman. If you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, contact Elizabeth A. Chapman (Principal Investigator) at EACHAPM2@uncg.edu or by phone at (336) 758-4845 or Dr. Laura Gonzalez (Faculty Advisor) at lmgonza2@uncg.edu or by phone at (336) 405-8682.

If you have concerns about how you have been treated in this study, call the Office of Research Integrity Director at 1-855-251-2351.

APPENDIX I

UNCG INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD EXEMPTION

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **IRB** <ori@approved-senders.uncg.edu>
Date: Mon, Jun 10, 2019 at 8:41 AM
Subject: IRB Notice - 19-0573
To: <EACHAPM2@uncg.edu>, <LMGONZA2@uncg.edu>
Cc: <irbcorre@uncg.edu>

To: Elizabeth Chapman
Teacher Ed/Higher Ed
[redacted]

From: UNCG IRB

Date: 6/10/2019

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption
Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation
Study #: 19-0573
Study Title: A QUANTITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE WAYS PARENTS AND FAMILIES INTERACT WITH THEIR STUDENTS' COLLEGE FOLLOWING CAMPUS-SPONSORED ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES: EVENTS, E-NEWSLETTERS, AND A DAILY BLOG

This submission has been reviewed by the IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Study Description:

This study will examine the ways in which parents/families of Wilson University undergraduate students interact with Wilson University following university-sponsored engagement opportunities, and the resulting behavioral outcomes or attitudes that follow. Specific behaviors of interest are: parent/family intervention with college officials on the student's behalf, parent/family sense of satisfaction with Wilson University, and parent/family charitable giving. Parents and families will be surveyed via Qualtrics

Investigator's Responsibilities

Please be aware that any changes to your protocol must be reviewed by the IRB prior to being implemented. **Please utilize the consent form/information sheet with the most**

recent version date when enrolling participants. The IRB will maintain records for this study for three years from the date of the original determination of exempt status.

Please be aware that valid human subjects training and signed statements of confidentiality for all members of research team need to be kept on file with the lead investigator. Please note that you will also need to remain in compliance with the university “Access To and Retention of Research Data” Policy which can be found at http://policy.uncg.edu/university-policies/research_data/.

APPENDIX J

PERMISSION TO ADAPT THE 2007 NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT'S EXPERIMENTAL ITEM ON FAMILY & FRIENDS SUPPORT

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Gonyea, Robert Michael** <rgonyea@indiana.edu>
Date: Tue, Mar 19, 2019 at 1:18 PM
Subject: RE: Permission to adapt an item from 2007 NSSE Family and Friends Support
To: Betsy Chapman <eachapm2@uncg.edu>

Hi Betsy,
Given that's you are only interested in one item and you are substantially adapting it to a different population, I don't believe you need our formal permission, but I would only ask that you cite the source of the item in your reports as you have noted.
Because it was an experimental set of questions, we don't have validity and reliability analyses. Even so, because you are using the question on an entirely different population (parents instead of students) the validity of the item for students would not be relevant.
Thank you for asking.
Good luck with the study.
Bob Gonyea

Robert M. Gonyea, Ed.D. | *Associate Director*
Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research
T: 812-856-3014 | **E:** rgonyea@indiana.edu

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From: Betsy Chapman <eachapm2@uncg.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, March 19, 2019 8:17 AM
To: Gonyea, Robert Michael <rgonyea@indiana.edu>
Subject: Permission to adapt an item from 2007 NSSE Family and Friends Support

Dr. Gonyea,
I hope this message finds you well. I am writing because I am a doctoral student entering the proposal phase of my dissertation, and I would like permission to use one of the questions from the NSSE 2007 experimental Family and Friends Support section as part of my study.

My proposed research will examine the ways in which Wilson University parents/families interact with the university following university-sponsored engagement opportunities and communications. Specific engagement opportunities include one-off events (such as Orientation), semiregular interventions (such as our monthly e-newsletter), and a continuous intervention, which comes in the form of a college parent-oriented blog produced each weekday, Family 411 (411@wilson.edu).

I am hoping to see if there are differences in parent/family behaviors relative to their level of engagement with these communication channels. The behaviors I wish to measure are: 1) intervention with the college on their student's behalf, 2) sense of trust/satisfaction with the institution, and 3) charitable giving.

As part of my study, I was hoping to utilize a question from the NSSE 2007 Experimental Family and Friends Support section to measure intervention with the college, but would flip the question for parents/families (not students):

- Original NSSE 2007 extension question [asked of students]: How often do your parents/guardians contact college officials to help solve problems you may be having at this college? 1=Never 2=Sometimes 3=Often 4=Very often 9=Not applicable (I have not had problems at this college)
- PROPOSED REVISION [to be asked of parents/families]: How often do you contact college officials to help solve problems your student may be having at Wilson University? 1=Never 2=Sometimes 3=Often 4=Very often 9=Not applicable (my student has not had problems at Wilson University)

Please let me know at your earliest convenience if you will allow me to use this question as adapted above. If you grant me permission to use this flipped question, I will of course cite that this scale is based off the NSSE 2007 Experimental Family and Friends Support section (and is used with permission of NSSE).

In addition, if NSSE has any information on validity and reliability relative to the creation of the Family and Friends Support experimental questions, would you please send that to me? That would be very helpful information.

Many thanks for your consideration, and best wishes,

Betsy

APPENDIX K

PERMISSION TO ADAPT THE SWEETSER AND KELLEHER ABBREVIATED SCALE

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Dr. Kaye Sweetser** <ksweetser@sdsu.edu>
Date: Thu, Mar 21, 2019 at 10:02 PM
Subject: Re: Permission to use your abbreviated 11-item OPR measure
To: Kelleher, Tom <tkell@jou.ufl.edu>
Cc: Betsy Chapman <eachapm2@uncg.edu>

Aloha Becky!

Like Tom I have no issue with you using the scale. Scales are meant to be verified!

I know you think you should delete items, but I urge you to reconsider that. If the items (reworded to fit your context) don't factor or contribute reliability then delete it in analysis but not including items from the starts totally takes options away. Recall that our initial study was in a university setting - that is how we tested the scale (alumni of a university program). Since then, the scale has been reworded to look at relationship with political candidates, political parties and various other contexts.

Good luck on your study!

With aloha,
Kaye

Kaye D. Sweetser, PhD, APR+M, Fellow PRSA
Professor of Public Relations
School of Journalism & Media Studies
Coordinator, JMS Military Public Affairs Master's Program
cv **kayesweetser.com/cv**
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phone**619.594.6714**

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Kelleher, Tom** <tkell@jou.ufl.edu>
Date: Wed, Mar 20, 2019 at 7:41 AM
Subject: Re: Permission to use your abbreviated 11-item OPR measure

To: Betsy Chapman <eachapm2@uncg.edu>, ksweetser@sdsu.edu <ksweetser@sdsu.edu>

Fine by me, Betsy.

Glad to see you're able to use this!

--
Tom Kelleher, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Advertising
College of Journalism and Communications
University of Florida
PO Box 118400
Gainesville, FL 32611-8400
352-392-4046

From: Betsy Chapman <eachapm2@uncg.edu>
Date: Tuesday, March 19, 2019 at 8:03 AM
To: "ksweetser@sdsu.edu" <ksweetser@sdsu.edu>, "Kelleher, Tom" <tkell@jou.ufl.edu>
Subject: Permission to use your abbreviated 11-item OPR measure

Drs. Sweetser and Kelleher,
I hope this message finds you well. I am writing because I am a doctoral student entering the proposal phase of my dissertation, and I would like permission to use one of your scales as part of my study.
My proposed research will examine the ways in which Wilson University parents/families interact with the university following university-sponsored engagement opportunities and communications. Specific engagement opportunities include one-off events (such as Orientation), semiregular interventions (such as our monthly e-newsletter), and a continuous intervention, which comes in the form of a college parent-oriented blog produced each weekday, Family 411 (411@wilson.edu). A key feature of this blog is conversational voice.
The conceptual framework for my study includes OPR, and as part of my study, I was hoping to utilize your 11-item abbreviated scale of communicative strategies for maintaining OPR, with a couple of minor adaptations to fit my survey population.
My proposed 11-item abbreviated scale communicative strategies for maintaining OPR for my dissertation is below. Items in red indicate proposed changes.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience if you will allow me to use your scale as adapted below. If you grant me permission to use your scale in this adapted way, I will of course cite that this scale is based off your original 11-item abbreviated scale (and is used with your permission), so you receive full credit for your scholarly work.
As a side note, I have read a good deal of your individual and joint scholarship related to blogs and/or OPR and I admire your work very much. It has heavily influenced my approach to my professional work (in college parent/family communications) as well as my dissertation research.
With best wishes,
Betsy

PROPOSED ADAPTED SCALE
Instructions: On a 5-point Likert-type scale, please indicate your agreement with the following items.
Wilson University
Factor: Communicated commitment

CC1: Uses a positive/optimistic tone
CC2: Expresses cheer & optimism about the future
~~CC3: Implies relationship has future/long term commitment~~ NOTE: I would strike this question, given the fact that once a student graduates, the main relationship changes to the college-alumni relationship, and the college-parents/families relationship diminishes.
CC4: Communicates a desire to build a relationship with parents and families
CC5: Demonstrates a commitment to maintaining a relationship with parents and families

Factor: Conversational voice

CV1: Uses a sense of humor in communication
~~CV2: Provides connections to competitors~~ NOTE: I would strike this question, as this appears to apply more to consumer products than higher education
CV3: Makes communication enjoyable
CV4: Would admit mistakes
CV5: Provides prompt/uncritical feedback when addressing criticism
CV6: Positively address complaints or queries

FROM:
Sweetser, K. D., & Kelleher, T. (2016). Communicated commitment and conversational voice: Abbreviated measures of communicative strategies for maintaining organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *28*(5–6), 217–231. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2016.1237359

Betsy Jensen Chapman ‘92, MA ‘94
Executive Director of Family Communications and Volunteer Management
PhD student in Higher Education, UNC-Greensboro

APPENDIX L

APPROVAL FROM THE WILSON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD OFFICE

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: [redacted], **Pam** <[redacted]@[redacted].edu>
Date: Mon, Jun 10, 2019 at 10:00 AM
Subject: Re: question about IRB process
To: Betsy Chapman <[redacted].edu>

Hi, Betsy.

Melissa from the UNC-G IRB office sent me the determination letter for your dissertation research. It qualifies as exempt. Neither UNC-G nor [redacted] IRBs require an IAA for exempt human research. As far as the [redacted] IRB is concerned, you are good to go!

Best of luck,
Pam

APPENDIX M

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Participant Gender by Frequency and Percentage (N=999)

Gender	*N*	%
Female	677	67.8
Male	310	31.0
Other/prefer not to respond	12	1.2
Total	999	100.0

Participant Age by Frequency and Percentage (N=997)

Age Range	*n*	%
30-39	3	0.3
40-49	166	16.6
50-59	713	71.5
60-69	112	11.2
70 and older	3	0.3
Total	997	100.0

Race/Ethnicity of Respondents by Frequency and Percentage (N=1,000)

Race/Ethnicity	*N*	%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	0.2
Asian	19	1.9
Black or African American	28	2.8
Hispanic/Latino	19	1.9
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.1
White	885	88.5
Two or more races	6	0.6
Prefer not to answer	40	4.0
Total	1,000	100.0

College Attainment of Respondents by Frequency and Percentage (N=1,000)

College Attainment	*N*	%
Less than a high school diploma	0	0.0
High school degree or equivalent	8	0.8
Some college, no degree	18	1.8
Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS)	16	1.6
Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)	406	40.6
Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS)	325	32.5
Professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM)	171	17.1
Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD)	56	5.6
Total	1,000	100.0

Participants Who Are Wilson University Alumni/ae by Frequency and Percentage (N=998)

Alumni Status	*N*	%
Wilson University alumni/alumnae	84	8.4
Did not graduate from Wilson University	914	91.6
Totals	998	100.0

Participant Annual Income Level by Frequency and Percentage (N=901)

Annual Income Level	*N*	%
$0-49,999	13	1.4
$50,000-99,999	62	6.9
$100,000-249,999	253	28.1
$250,000-499,999	264	29.3
$500,000 and above	309	34.3
Total	901	100.0

Participant's First Child in College by Frequency and Percentage (N=997)

First Child in College?	*N*	%
Yes, first child in college	564	56.6
No, have older children who have gone to college	433	43.4
Total	997	100.0

Distance from the Participant's Home to Wilson University (N=999)

Distance in Miles	*N*	%
Under 50 miles	59	5.9
51-99 miles	50	5.0
100-499 miles	333	33.3
500-999 miles	333	33.3
1,000-1,999 miles	103	10.3
2,000-2,999 miles	66	6.6
3,000 or more miles	55	5.5
Total	999	100.0

Employment Status (N=997)

Employment Status	*N*	%
Unable to work	5	.5
Homemaker	174	17.4
Retired	66	6.6
Unemployed and not currently looking for work	23	2.3
Unemployed and currently looking for work	15	1.5
Employed part time (up to 20 hours/week)	137	13.7
Employed full time (40+ hours/week)	577	57.6
Total	997	100.0