

Parents, Family, and the New College Student Experience, Book Two of the New College Student Experience Series

By Dr. Kent D. Beeler

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Reviewed by

Cindy Payne

While orientation and transition programs for new students entering the college or university setting have occurred on campuses for more than 100 years, intentional transition programming for parents and families is a much more recent addition. The inclusion of parents and families in orientation programs has generated a wide variety of publications written to educate the family on changes they will experience as their college student moves into a new community. To this end, Kent D. Beeler has authored *Parents, Family, & the New College Student Experience* as book 2 in the New College Student Experience Series.

Parents, Family, & the New College Student Experience is a “pocket advice” paperback and a quick read at only 66 pages. It is presented in three parts, or topical areas. Part 1 addresses what Dr. Beeler calls “the biggest transition of all, letting go”. In this chapter the changing demographics of today’s undergraduate students are outlined. The college experience is not the same one that parents may have experienced as undergraduate students twenty or thirty years ago. Campus climate, student expectations, and student preparedness have all changed. Additionally, as the demographics of college-bound students expand, so does the number of students attending whose parents never experienced higher education.

The author explores separation anxiety and typical transition issues in Part 1. Parents are encouraged to consider paradoxical messages including:

- make your own decisions *and* do what I taught you;
- be independent *and* let me help you; and
- learn, grow, *and* change and always stay as you are.

Issues surrounding changes in family dynamics and interpersonal relationships are introduced and the dilemma of when (or if) parents should intervene on behalf of their students is briefly addressed.

The central focus of Part 2 (Slices of College Life Transitions) is developed from the results of a survey of students at a large midwestern state university which identified the top twenty transitional issues that are common among first-year undergraduate students.

Cindy Payne is the Director of Orientation, Transition, and Retention Services at Northern Arizona University.
cindy.payne@NAU.edu

Advice is dispensed on how to deal with transitions such as student homesickness, parent campus visits, students selecting their majors, time management, and new freedoms. Parents are encouraged to stay actively involved in their college students' experiences by providing support, open lines of communication, and helping them set realistic goals and expectations. While each family will enter the college years with differing expectations of upcoming relationship changes, every parent will find something in this chapter with which they identify and from which they will receive "tip-niques" or suggestions for a smooth transition.

The third part of this book is entitled "Special Notes for Special Parents" and directly addresses specific parent populations. Addressing the growing diversity of student demographics represented in higher education today, this chapter introduces themes not commonly found in other "parent guide" books. Included are specialized messages for parents of first-generation college students, parents of commuting students, parents of physically and mentally impaired students, and parents who may be recently separated, divorced, or remarried. For first-generation college parents, Dr. Beeler provides a detailed description of important differences between academics in high school and higher education. Also outlined are typical reasons that students experience academic adjustment difficulties and suggested ways that parents can support their students through difficult times.

For parents of "road scholars," or those students commuting to school, the concerns of time management, setting priorities, personal freedom, and open communication are discussed. Parents are reminded of the new priorities necessary in their students' lives if the students are to become connected in a valuable way to their educational endeavors. Commuting students can face difficult challenges in finding the balance between family, academic, job, and social responsibilities.

Parents of students with a learning or physical disability are reminded of the challenges facing their students. One of the largest hurdles for this population is the general lack of knowledge or hands-on experience exhibited across campus by staff and faculty as they work with students with disabilities. While disability support programs are being established and providing leadership on today's campuses, learning and physically disabled students may still be the best educators for their needs on many college campuses.

Overall, this contribution to parent and family orientation and transition literature reminds parents about relationship skills. The author encourages parents to remain active participants in their sons' and daughters' lives and advocates open communication, support, and understanding. The book provides the basic messages found in most parent or family orientation programs and provides a surface view of family transition issues. This book is recommended as a supplemental resource for first-time college or university parents who do not participate in an on-campus orientation or transition program. For this group of parents, the book provides encouragement, useful suggestions, and a pathway for families to develop strong partnerships with their college-bound students.