

PARENTS IN TRANSITION



A Multiple Case Study of Parent & Family Orientation Programs

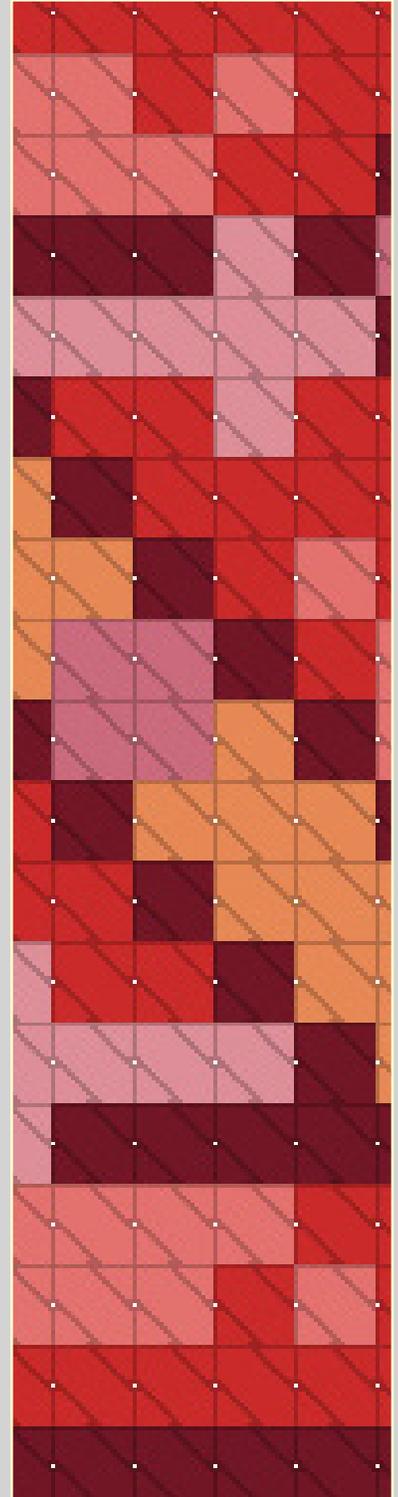
Research Team

Judy Marquez Kiyama, Associate Professor, University of Denver
Casandra E. Harper, Associate Professor, University of Missouri
Delma Ramos, PhD Student, University of Denver
David Aguayo, PhD Student, University of Missouri
Spring 2016

Overview & Purpose of the Study

This research explores college orientation programs that have a special emphasis on parents and families and investigates whether and how these programs address the transition needs of parents of first-generation, low-income, and/or students of color. Orientation programming has become increasingly attuned to the needs of students' families (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005), thus the focus of this project is programs with a range of established parent and family programming in order to understand the resources available to parents and families of first-year students. The purpose of this study was to better understand the foundation from which such parent/family orientations have been established and how institutions have conceptualized ways of engaging these parents. With this knowledge, further strategies can be developed to foster and support what parents are already doing well and address any gaps in resources, support, or information—whether on the parents' or the institution's side.

Research on the transition to college and adjustment within the first year (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005) has focused on exploring the student experience and less on the transition experience of parents and families. Moreover, work addressing the positive contributions diverse families offer, in the form of involvement and engagement for their college-aged children, is emerging (Kiyama, et al., 2015). Therefore, this research offers a unique approach to addressing the large disparities in persistence and degree attainment among low-income students, first-generation college students, and students of color. Important in our work is the intentional use of the term engagement, and its representation as a more culturally inclusive way of describing the contributions and roles that first-generation, low-income, and families of color offer, which differ based on cultural, historical, and social orientations (Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Kiyama & Harper, 2015). This broader terminology also encompasses the multiple ways in which families frame their engagement. Specifically, "involvement has been used to describe the specific things that parents do, while engagement also includes parents' orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do" (Carreón, Drake, & Calabrese Barton, 2005, p. 469).



Overview & Purpose of the Study

1 Research Questions

- a) What types of orientation-based programs are offered to parents and families of first-year college students during the transition to college?
- b) What processes inform the development and implementation of parent/family orientation-based programs?
- c) What, if any, orientation-based programming is offered to parents/families of low-income students, first-generation college students, and students of color?

2 Methodology

Study Design

Our project is guided by a multiple case study (Yin, 2003) research design. This multiple case study is part of a larger study in which we examine the experiences and roles of parents and families during the college transition process. The larger study consists of three phases: 1) a descriptive content analysis of orientation programs across the country, 2) a multiple case study of parent and family orientation programs including program observations and interviews with staff, and 3) a series of interviews with parents and families during students' first year of college.

Participants

Institutions: The **6** institutions included in this study were chosen through multiple approaches. First, after national conference presentations about the study, some staff members approached us with an interest in participating. Second, we intentionally sampled institutions that offered year-long parent and family programming and Spanish orientations, in addition to the parent and family sessions offered during orientation. And third, one institution was noted by other participant institutions as an exemplary parent/family orientation program, and we invited that institution to participate .

Personnel: Within each of the six institutions, we interviewed orientation staff who oversaw programs that engaged with parents and families. In total, we interviewed **7** orientation staff members (coordinator, assistant director, and director levels), **6** parent and family staff members (assistant director and director levels), and **3** staff members who oversaw academic year family engagement programs, for a total of 16 participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected from June 2014 – August 2015. Three points of data were collected for each institutional case. First, members of the research team attended a one to two-day parent/family orientation session at each institution, assuming the role of participant observers. Second, we conducted semi-structured interviews with one to two orientation or parent/family programming staff at each institution. Third, we collected documents related to communication with and for parent/family members from each institution. In total, we conducted over **65 hours** of observations, interviewed **16** parent / family staff members, and collected documents ranging from promotional orientation materials to orientation programs and booklets to post-orientation assessment reports .

Institutional Participants & Programs Offered

#1 Public, 4-year and above, more selective, high undergraduate enrollment, very high research activity university. Its first-year student enrollment totaled 6,221 in Fall 2015, the largest, most diverse, and most qualified freshman class in its history.

This university has an office of parent relations which works with parents and families to support the educational experience of its students. This institution also has a parent association, which is free for parents to join. The role of the parent association is to serve as ambassadors for the institution and reach out to current and prospective parents and families. Aside from services and organizations geared toward parents, this institution publishes an email update twice a month used to disseminate information to parents regarding news, programs, and policies. No programs specific to first-generation parents and families are offered at this institution.

#2 Public, 4-year and above, selective, high undergraduate enrollment, very high research activity university. This institution's total undergraduate enrollment exceeded 32,000 in 2014.

This institution has developed an app parents and students can use as a resource. Similar to other study participants, this university has a parent and family association, which is dedicated to promote parent and family engagement, facilitate communication among students, parents and the university, and support philanthropic engagement. They also publish a monthly newsletter for which parents and families can sign-up if they make a donation. In addition to on-campus orientation programs for parents and families, this institution offers orientation programs out-of-state. No programs specific to first-generation parents and families are offered at this institution.

#3 Public, 4-year and above, selective, high undergraduate enrollment, very high research activity, primarily residential university. Total first-year enrollment in 2014 exceeded 4,000.

This institution has a parent and family programs office dedicated to partnering with parents and families to support students' success by offering coaching and referral services. The parent and family programs office partners with other campus offices to address the various needs of parents and families. This office also houses their parent and family association, which is free for parents and families to join. In addition to offering services and programs to parents and families, this office publishes a monthly online newsletter August through May. No programs specific to first-generation parents and families are offered at this institution.

Institutional Participants & Programs Offered

4 Public, 4-year and above, selective, primarily nonresidential baccalaureate college. Total undergraduate population in Fall 2014 exceeded 20,000.

This institution offers orientation for parents and families in Spanish. No specific parent programs are offered through this office outside of orientation. No programs specific to first-generation parents and families are offered at this institution.

5 Private not for profit, 4-year or above, more selective, primarily residential, high research activity university. This university's total enrollment Fall 2014 exceeded 11,000.

This private not-for-profit institution has developed an app for students and their families to access information on events including homecoming and family weekend. There is also an office for parent and family relations at this institution. This office oversees the parent association for which parents must pay a fee to join. As part of their orientation programming, they offer a ceremony of passage where students and their parents are officially recognized as members of the campus family. No programs specific to first-generation parents and families are offered at this institution.

6 Private not for profit, 4-year or above, more selective, small four-year, highly residential, baccalaureate college (Arts & Sciences). There were a total of 2000 students enrolled at this institution in fall 2015.

This institution offers a session dedicated to first-generation families as part of their orientation programming. There is also an office for parent/family relations on this campus, this office is dedicated to help parents and families stay connected with students as they transition. The office also has a presence on social media and communicates with parents/families through electronic newsletters and bulletins. No programs specific to first-generation parents and families are offered at this institution.

Findings

I Strategies to Engage Families

Common modes of family engagement included summer orientations with select sessions for families and other support, summer send offs, parent and family weekends, and parent associations.

Orientation Programs

- Orientation programs were rarely named to indicate inclusion of parents, only a few programs used more inclusive terminology such as family, guests, and support.
- Most orientation programs took place on Friday or Saturday, while only a few were hosted during weekdays.
- The majority of orientation programs charged student and guest fees with only two programs offering a fee waiver for family members.
- Program length varied from a few hours to two days.
- Only two institutions developed a full orientation schedule for families while most only dedicated a few sessions to parents and families including: financial aid, campus resources, and safety.

Summer Send-Offs

- Summer send offs consisted of gatherings for families of incoming students hosted by families of current students. Typically, family hosts were responsible for all expenses associated with costs of these programs. The main goals of summer send offs were to offer an opportunity for families of new students to develop connections to the campus and also served as a recruitment tool for parent associations. At least two participant institutions held summer send offs both within the United States and abroad.

Parent and Family Weekends

- Weekend programming was held throughout the academic year in which at least one institution tailored to a single group of parents/family members including mothers, single mothers, fathers, single fathers, and grandparents. These programs represent an opportunity for parents and other family members to return to campus after orientation.

Parent Associations

- In most cases, parents had to pay dues to belong to these groups. Overrepresentation of parents and families who could afford such fees was evident, excluding those who could not. Membership in Parent Associations often led to participation in a Parent Council, a leadership body less reflective of the diversity existent within families of college students.

Findings

II Communicating with Parents & Families

Approaches to communicate with parents and families about programs and important dates ranged from blanket paper and electronic mailings about specific programs to packets that were inclusive of programs and dates and other information about the institution. Strategies to disseminate information also varied per the nature of programs and the imperative to reach as many families as possible.

Blanket mailings/emails

- This was a common way of reaching out to parents about orientation and other programs that aimed at introducing new families to the institution.

Welcome Packets

- At least one institution talked about reaching out to families with a packet of information with details about orientation and with a variety of pamphlets about other institutional programs and resources.

Translated Materials

- An approach to welcome and communicate with families who speak languages other than English was to translate handbooks and materials about programs including invitations to attend orientation. One institution indicated that they sent blanket mailings for orientation and the document had information in English on one side and Spanish on the other side.

Electronic Vs. Paper Communication

- Although there exists a push to move from paper to electronic communications in an effort to reduce expenses, institutions are being strategic about determining what needs to be sent on paper and what can be shared via email. For instance, an institution shared that they prefer to send orientation invitations and confirmations via paper mailings to ensure they reach out to as many people as possible and to prevent exclusion of families who might not have access to internet.

Newsletters

- Newsletters were another way to update families on programming and other institutional information. These were compiled and published monthly (or every six weeks at some institutions). One institution shared they highlight parents and families in their newsletter. Most institutions were adopting electronic modes of delivery for newsletters.

Applications & Websites

- Another way institutions disseminated information to families is via social media, websites, and apps. Websites (and links to websites via social media) house a comprehensive array of information ranging from program information to institutional policies and tips on student support. At least two institutions have developed apps that allow students and families to receive alerts about programs and events as well as important dates.

Findings

III Rationale for Orientation Program Design & Implementation

Inquiries on programming design and development for underrepresented families led most staff to reference best practices in peer institutions. Some of them, however, based programming changes on feedback received from families who participated in orientation programming. The only issue with the latter approach is that only the voices of those who actually attended orientation were being considered. Approaches on expanding engagement to include traditionally underserved families is key in this endeavor. Only three institutions indicated program design based on student development theories including self-authorship (Magolda, 2004), Bridges (2009) transition model and Torres (2004) work around Latino families and the concept of familism.

IV Staffing Structure

Parent and Family relations were often housed in its own office and sometimes in alumni relations while orientation programming was developed by the orientation programming office. This staffing structure was not as effective in allowing both offices to collaborate efficiently on the planning and delivery of orientation programming for families. Observations revealed a gap in communication and collaboration of the various offices involved in the planning of these programs.

In addition, only about a third of the staff overseeing orientation and family relations possessed a background working with parents and families. While this is a relatively new area in Student Affairs, many staff members noted they received no training or professional development to work with diverse families. Only a handful of professionals had chosen to work with parents and families as their career path; the remainder of staff were in their positions because of other reasons such as promotions or simply an interest in changing positions.

Another prominent theme also related to staffing revealed diverging perceptions on those working with low-income and first generation families. While only a few orientation and parent relation offices acknowledged their responsibility to outreach and support these groups, many participants suggested this was the responsibility of offices and departments already working with underrepresented students such as cultural centers, international student offices, and those coordinating programs for specific racial/ethnic groups.

Findings

V Perceptions on Family Engagement of Low-Income & First-Generation Families of Color

A common theme in our findings revealed that low-income, first-generation families are largely absent from college campuses and activities. The dominant perception of these groups is that they are disengaged and indifferent to the college experience of their children. While some study participants were heavily invested in researching strategies to support engagement of these groups, in most cases the burden of low-participation of these groups was placed on the families themselves. That is, families from underserved backgrounds were expected to reach out and navigate institutional systems on their own.

Additionally, some staff further supported deficit notions about these groups by claiming that students who came from these backgrounds had difficulty developing a sense of belonging on-campus because their families kept pulling them away from campus. Another way programming coordinators justified low-engagement of low-income, first generation families was that their institution did not collect the right information or that they had no way of identifying who came from a first-generation background, therefore they were unable to offer support. Thus, families were expected to self-identify and also to reach out to campus offices for support. On the extreme, some of the findings alluded to color-blind/class-blind ideologies where staff asserted they did not see color or that they were unaware families from disadvantaged backgrounds were present on their campuses. In the same vein, some staff argued that all families have the same concerns about their children in college, for example safety, thus, there are no issues pertaining specifically to low-income, first generation families.

VI Prescriptions on Family Engagement

Generally, most institutions wanted families to remain engaged and often used the metaphor of a “tandem bicycle” to describe the role of the parent/guardian. While parents take the front seat during their children’s first 18 years, once a child starts college the parent moves to the back seat to support the journey while also allowing the child to steer the way. However, institutions also established a set of parameters to that engagement:

- Families were asked to play a secondary role in their children’s college experience. Institutional ideologies were in alignment with current negative narratives in parental and family involvement. These narratives depict parents and families as overly involved and as a detriment to the development of students in college.
- Families were encouraged to ask their children to take charge, address matters on their own, and avail themselves to services and campus resources
- Institutions offered lists of DOs and DON’Ts for family engagement, most of the items on these lists alluded to student independence from family.
- Some institutions welcomed family engagement only during crisis, for instance, when students had mental issues or when the student had gone missing.

Findings

VII Redefining Families as Partners in the Success of College Students

Although conversations about family engagement are still dominated by negative perceptions, a shift is beginning to happen. Staff are beginning to recognize that families are key in the success of college students. They are also beginning to acknowledge that students do not come to campus alone and that current parenting models do not fit all.

Public and private institutions were equally, at least verbally, invested and interested in developing partnerships with parents and families. They began to expand their awareness of the complexity of support networks of college students, some personnel expressed their wishes to have families remain connected and engaged during the college experience. One orientation staff member expressed that families are critical to student success, while another staff argued that the current parenting model was exclusive of underrepresented families. At two of the participating institutions, staff stated they had moved away from negatively charged terminology to refer to parents. The difference between dominant discourse on parental and family engagement in contrast to the shift in both perceptions of parents and plans for the future was evident in the redefining of parents and families as valuable partners and key support for student success as opposed to threats to student success.

VIII Organizational Culture

There are three aspects of organizational culture we focused on: finances of parent/family programs, home of parent/family programs within organizational structure, and professional background of personnel working with parents and families.

- Finances

Most institutions expressed great concern about their ability to make family orientation and other programming financially accessible to families. Among the factors that fueled such concerns include: low state financial support for their institution, orientation program driven by student enrollment, and scholarships to cover program fees only available to parents and families who pay dues to parent association. Programs also expressed concerns about outreaching as many families as possible. With regard to this aspect, they spoke of budget cuts for paper communications, which then limited program information accessibility only to families with access to internet.

- Parent/family programs home within organizational structure

Only three institutions housed parent/family programs within administrative levels including the VP for Student Affairs office and the Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor. At other institutions parent/family offices and programming were situated at programmatic levels within student services, thereby making these programs more vulnerable to budget cuts.

- Professional background of personnel working with parents/families

In most cases, personnel working with parents/families during orientation or through parent/family programs did not possess a background/experience working with families. Academic and professional preparation ranged from degrees in biology & English to counseling and psychology, and military training.

Summary of Practices

Best Practices

Institutions are becoming more inclusive of underrepresented families in the design and delivery of orientation programming.

- Orientation programming for families made more affordable by offering waivers for attendance of families of pell-eligible students.
- Programming offered on weekends as opposed to the middle of the week.
- Language used for and during programs moving toward inclusive models, naming programs with terms such as family and support and moving away from the limiting term “parents.”
- Orientation programming for families offered in other languages such as Spanish.

Assumptions, Approaches, & Expectations to (Re)Consider

These are approaches to parent and family engagement and involvement that can be improved:

- Assuming that parents and families of color are absent from the college experience at their own will without questioning how institutional systems preclude their engagement.
- Having expectations of parents and families that can only be met by those from more privileged backgrounds.
- Laying the responsibility of parent and family engagement on the parents and not the institution.
- Delegating work and delivery of services for parents and families solely to one office. Excusing oneself from lack of knowledge and familiarity with underrepresented parents and families because one does not/ is not supposed to work with them.
- Not acknowledging that students receive support from others than the typical two-(opposite sex) parent household, developing messages and programs that only cater to the traditional notions of parents and family.

Resources

Publications from this project

- Kiyama, J.M. & Harper, C. with Ramos, D., Aguayo, D., Page, L., & Riestler, K. A. (2015). Parent and Family Engagement in Higher Education. ASHE Higher Education Report Series. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Harper, C., Kiyama, J.M., Aguayo, D., Ramos, D. Orienting parents and families: How is higher education serving families of students of color, first-generation, and low-income students? (under review).
- Kiyama, J.M. & Harper, C. Beyond hovering: A conceptual argument for an inclusive model of family engagement in higher education (under review).
- Ramos, D., Kiyama, J.M., & Harper, C. Limiting levels of engagement of low-income, first-generation, families of color through controlling Images (under review).
- Kiyama, J.M., Harper, C.E. & Ramos, D. (invited, under review). First-generation students and their families: An examination of institutional responsibility and familial assets during college access and transition. In A.C. Rondini, B.Richards-Dowden, & Nicolas Simon (Eds.) Clearing the Path: Qualitative Studies of the Experience of First-Generation College Students. Lexington Press.

*Please contact us to request copies of any of these publications.

Literature

Potential Obstacles Among First Generation Parents & Families	Benefits of First Generation Familial Support	Parent/Family Involvement in Higher Education
<p>*Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first generation students. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504448.pdf</p> <p>*Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Bell, A. D., & Perna, L. W. (2008). Contextual influences on parental involvement in college going: Variations by socioeconomic class. <i>The Journal of Higher Education</i> 79(5), 564–586.</p> <p>*Smith, W., & Zhang, P. (2010). The impact of key factors on the transition from high school to college among first- and second-generation students. <i>Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition</i>, 22(2), 49-70.</p> <p>*Wartman, K., & Savage, M. (2008). Parental involvement in higher education: Understanding the relationship among students, parents, and the institution (ASHE Higher Education Report, Vol. 33, No. 6). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.</p>	<p>*McCarron, G. P., & Inkelas, K. K. (2006). The gap between educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of parental involvement. <i>Journal of Higher Education</i>, 3(2), 125–145. <i>College Student Development</i>, 47(5), 534–549. doi:10.1353/csd.2006.0059</p> <p>*Saenz, V., Hurtado, S., Barrerra, D., Wolf, D., & Yeung, F. (2007). <i>First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971</i>. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.</p> <p>*Torres, V. (2004). Familial influences on the identity development of Latino first-year students. <i>Journal of College Student Development</i>, 45(4), 457-469. Chicago</p> <p>*Yazedjian, A., Purswell, K., Sevin, T., & Toews, M. (2007). Adjusting to the first year of college: Students' perceptions of the importance of parental, peer, and institutional support. <i>Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition</i>, 19(2), 29-46.</p>	<p>*Auerbach, S. (2004). Engaging Latino parents in supporting college pathways: Lessons from a college access program. <i>Journal of Hispanic Education</i>, 3(2), 125–145.</p> <p>*Carney-Hall, K. C. (Ed.). (2008). <i>New Directions for Student Services: No. 122. Managing parent and partnerships: Maximizing influence, minimizing interference, and focusing on student success</i>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.</p> <p>*Harper, C., Sax, L., & Wolf, D. (2012). Parents' influence on college students' personal, academic, and social development. <i>Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice</i>, 49(2), 137–156.</p> <p>*Kiyama, J. M. (2010). College aspirations and limitations: The role of educational ideologies and funds of knowledge in Mexican American families. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>, 47(2), 330–356.</p>

Resources

Literature Cont.

Orientation ,Transition, & Parent Programs

*Miller, T. K. (2001). *The book of professional standards for higher education*. Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Chicago

*Pascarella, E. T., Terenzini, P. T., & Wolfe, L. M. (1986). Orientation to college and freshman year persistence/withdrawal decisions. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 155-175.

*Savage, M., & Petree, C. (2013). National survey of college and university parent programs. University of Minnesota. Retrieved from http://www1.umn.edu/prod/groups/ur/@pub/@ur/@parent/documents/content/ur_content_471671.pdf

* Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. G., & Destin, M. (2014). Closing the social-class achievement gap a difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological science*, 25(4), 943-953.

* Ward-Roof, J. A., Heaton, P. M., & Coburn, M.B. (2008). Capitalizing on parent and family partnerships through programming. *New directions for student services*, 2008(122), 43-55.

Orientation Programs with Parent/Family programming

* Boise State University "BroncoVenture Orientation"
<http://goo.gl/YoCi9K>

*California State University-Fullerton "Parent Orientation"
<http://goo.gl/ltlCwD>

*Central Michigan University "Parent and Family Orientation"
<https://goo.gl/8X3sZA>

*Miami University (Ohio) "Family Orientation"
<http://goo.gl/l6UZnX>

*University of Colorado at Colorado Springs "Family and Friends Orientation"
<http://goo.gl/Fr7dtS>

Our Contact Information

Please feel free to contact us for institution specific information and/or if you would like to meet with us.

•Judy Marquez Kiyama, Associate Professor, Higher Education Department, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Judy.Kiyama@du.edu , @JudyMKiyama

•Casandra E. Harper, Associate Proessor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis, University of Missouri, Harpercas@missouri.edu, @casassafrass

References

- Bridges, W. (2009). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change* (3rd edition, ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press.
- Calabrese Barton, A., Drake, C., Perez, J. G., St. Louis, K., & George, M. (2004). Ecologies of parental engagement in urban education. *Educational Researcher*, 33(4), 3-12.
- Carreon, G. P., Drake, C., & Calabrese Barton, A. (2005). The importance of presence: Immigrant parents' school engagement experiences. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(3), 465-498.
- Kiyama, J.M. & Harper, C. with Ramos, D., Aguayo, D., Page, L., & Riester, K. A. (2015). *Parent and Family Engagement in Higher Education*. ASHE Higher Education Report Series. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kiyama, J. M., & Harper, C. (2015). Behind the hovering: How "helicopter parenting" has stalled developing inclusive models of higher education family engagement. Unpublished manuscript.
- Magolda, B. (2004). Self-authorship as the common goal. *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship*, 1-35.
- Mullendore, R. H., & Banahan, L. (2005). Designing orientation programs. *Upcraft, L., Gardner, J., Barefoot, B. & associates, Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student*, 391-409.
- Upcraft, M. L., Gardner, J. N., & Barefoot, B. O. (2005). Introduction: The first year of college revisited. *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*, 1-12.
- Torres, V. (2004). Familial influences on the identity development of Latino first-year students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(4), 457-469.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.