

Supportive Others in the Lives of Four-year and Community College Students: Support and the Development of Hope

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About 33% of four-year and 46% of community college students fail to return for their second year of college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Studies of college student mentoring demonstrate that formal relationships (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003; Salinitri, 2005) and mentoring relationships with faculty (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2003) are useful in preventing student attrition, but less is known about the impact of informal mentoring from non-faculty members during these years. However, a number of studies highlight the impact of social support from family and peers on both community and four-year college student retention (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn & Pascarella, 1996; Skahill, 2002; Tinto, 1993).

Participants

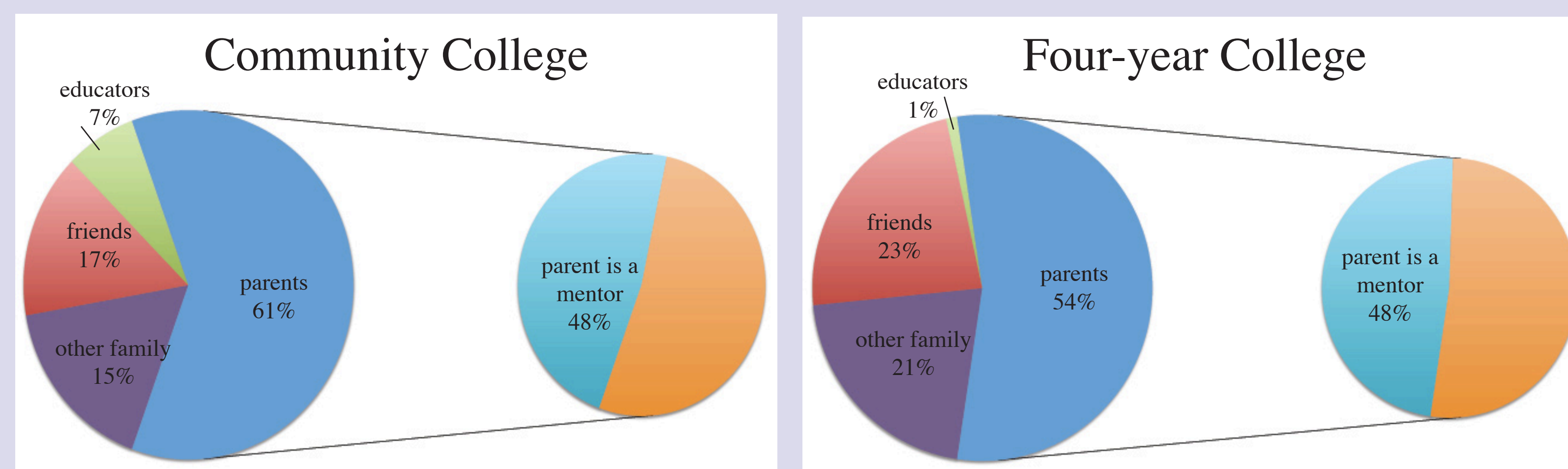
96 students at California State Universities (four-year)
85 students at California Community Colleges (two-year)
63 men and 117 women
Primarily Hispanic (46.4%) or Caucasian (27.1%)

Who Supports College Students?

Unlike the broad definition of mentoring used for studying adolescents, in studies of college students, non-academic supportive relationships are typically not categorized as mentoring relationships, but rather as social support (e.g., Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011). Similarly, parental support is not considered as a mentoring relationship in the literature (cf. Grossman & Bulle, 2006).

We asked:

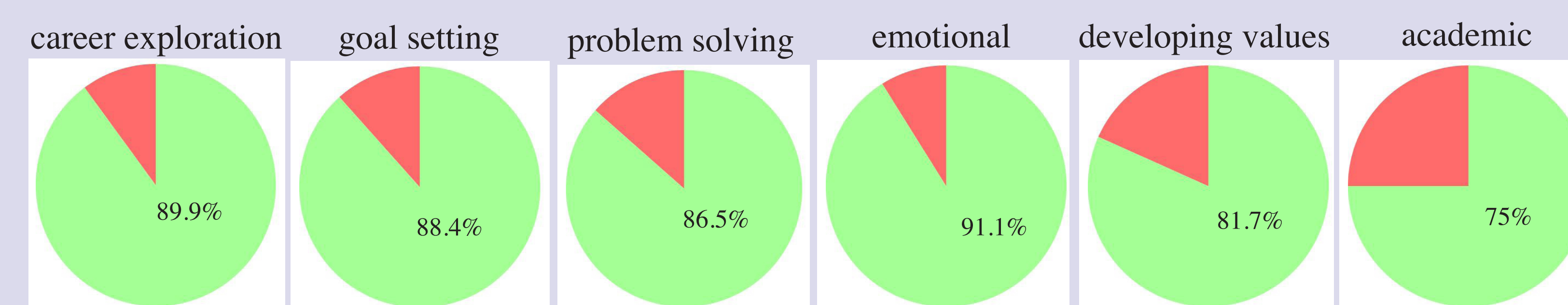
Is there an individual in your life who has more experience than you, and supports you and guides you as an adult and college student? This person is someone you look up to, you trust, and you feel like he/she cares about you.



What types of support do they provide?

According to Nora and Crisp's (2007) theoretical model of college student mentoring, mentors provide four essential functions (a) emotional support, (b) academic and goal setting support, (c) career and subject matter support, and (d) role modeling. This model was built from models of graduate student and professional mentoring, not adolescent mentoring. Given the overlap in developmental tasks between adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), we also considered more traditionally adolescent mentoring functions.

Charts show percent of students who reported their non-academic mentor providing each type of support "quite a bit" or "very much."



Conclusions

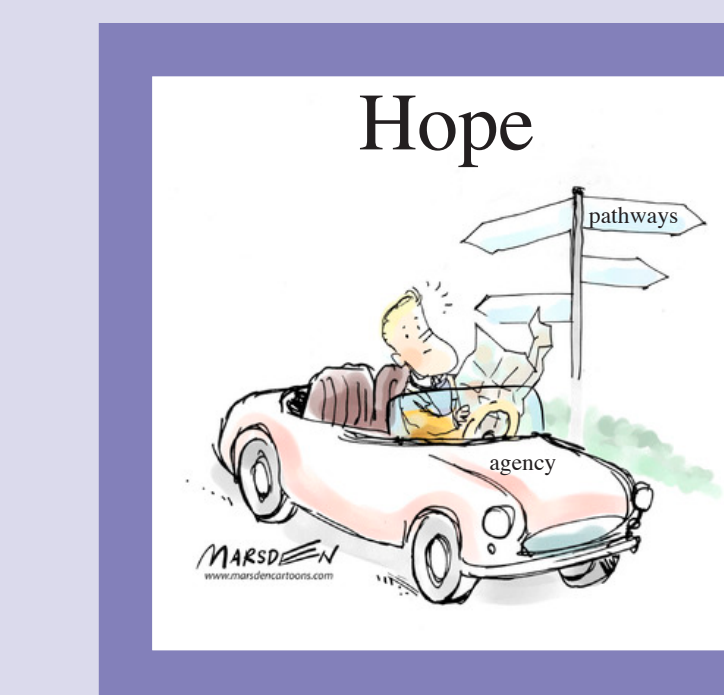
There are no differences between four-year and community-college students in their nominations of supportive adults, and the majority of students nominated a parent as this person. About half of students who nominated a parent as their primary supporter consider this person to be a mentor. Very few nominated a traditional academic mentor. The majority of students felt a good deal of support in a number of areas from these non-academic mentors. Types of support not commonly studied as mentoring functions for college students such as support for developing values, problems solving, and goal setting, were heavily endorsed in this sample.

Together, these findings suggest the importance of considering the role of non-academic, informal mentors of college students, in particular, the role of parents as mentors. Future research should also expand current conceptualizations of mentoring to include alternative mentoring functions not captured by existing modeling of college student mentoring.

College students who identified supporters were more hopeful than those who did not. In a regression model, the type of support received that significantly predicted both pathways and agency thinking was support for problem solving. Further research should consider the role of mentors and supportive adults in promoting hope among emerging adults.

Developing Hope

Hope is a trait made up of the two components of **agency**, or drive to achieve a goal, and **pathways**, or ability to come up with the ways to accomplish a goal (Snyder et al., 1991). College students with high levels of hope are more successful in their courses (Curry et al., 1997; Gilman, Dooley & Florell, 2006; Snyder et al., 2002) and more likely to persist in college (Snyder et al., 2002). Many hope interventions include working with a coach to build hope skills (Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007; Madden, Green & Grant, 2011).



Students who nominated a supporter reported marginally higher levels of agency thinking $t(170) = 2.184, p = .030$, but not significantly higher levels of pathways thinking than those without supporters $t(170) = 1.422, p = .157$.

Among students with supporters, perceived support received significantly predicted levels of both pathways and agency, $R = .500$, Adjusted $R^2 = .17$, $F(14, 144) = 3.101, p < .001$

Regression Model Predicting Pathways and Agency thinking from levels of support

Model		agency			pathways		
		Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)		16.931	.000		17.446	.000
	Ethnicity Asian	-.197*	-2.126	.035	-.068	-.733	.465
	Ethnicity African American	-.042	-.467	.641	-.006	-.065	.948
	Ethnicity Hispanic	-.050	-.501	.617	-.011	-.115	.909
	Ethnicity Other	.055	.624	.534	.100	1.137	.257
	Gender	-.172	-1.914	.058	-.232	-2.596	.010
	Age	-.053	-.601	.549	.095	1.096	.275
2	College Type	.094	1.058	.292	.124	1.404	.162
	(Constant)		5.386	.000		6.336	.000
	Ethnicity Asian	-.154	-1.789	.076	-.033	-.364	.717
	Ethnicity African American	-.005	-.063	.950	.014	.159	.874
	Ethnicity Hispanic	-.016	-.164	.870	-.002	-.019	.985
	Ethnicity Other	.161	1.882	.062	.180*	2.022	.045
	Gender	-.169*	-1.983	.049	-.219*	-2.463	.015
	Age	-.018	-.217	.828	.117	1.349	.180
	College Type	.043	.510	.611	.090	1.031	.305
	emotionally	.079	.796	.427	.021	.200	.842
	financially	.020	.239	.811	-.009	-.105	.916
academically	.158	1.561	.121	.100	.949	.344	
my goal setting	.015	.133	.894	.138	1.173	.243	
when I have problem	.345**	2.878	.005	.250*	2.001	.047	
in figuring out what I value	-.167	-1.479	.142	-.172	-1.464	.146	
career exploration	.111	1.229	.221	.046	.491	.624	

Note. N = 144. *p < .05. **p < .01.

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