



The College Transition: Managing Stress and Maintaining Health Focus Group Report

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Survey Research Center Report 2006/10
December, 2006

Students working for the Survey Research Center were instrumental in the completion of this study. The following SRC staff members contributed time and effort in moderating and assisting with the focus groups: Adrienne Adolphson, Corrie Ford, Danielle Rogers, and Bethany Barnett.

The SRC would like to give a special thank you to Samantha Heathman, Continuing Education Director; Dale Fenton, Assistant Campus Dean for Student Services; and Sonya Swearingen at UW-Barron County for their assistance.

Introduction

During the fall semester 2006, the Survey Research Center conducted a series of focus group sessions at the request of a team of University of Wisconsin-Extension faculty from the Western and Northern Districts. Team members included Lori Zierl, Pierce County Family Living Educator; Dianne Weber, Washburn County Family Living Educator; and Annette Bjorklund, Washburn County 4-H Youth Development Educator. The purpose of the focus groups is to be a source of input for a research project designed to develop a curriculum to help students and their families make the transition from high school to college.

Description of the Focus Groups

The research team identified four target audiences for the focus group research: college freshmen, college sophomores, college faculty/staff, and parents. Focus groups with each of the four target audiences were organized on both the UW-River Falls and UW-Barron County campuses. A total of eight focus groups were conducted between late September and early December.

Date	Location	Group	Participants
September 27	UW-River Falls	Faculty/Staff	9
October 4	UW-Barron County	Faculty/Staff	7
October 4	UW-Barron County	Sophomores	7
October 16	UW-River Falls	Sophomores	4
November 1	UW-Barron County	Freshmen	7
November 1	UW-Barron County	Parents	5
November 16	UW-River Falls	Freshmen	3
December 6	UW-River Falls	Parents	5

Study Findings: Key Themes

- Most participants placed the level of college student stress as “Moderate.” No group placed a high proportion of students in either the “Little or No” or “High” categories.
 - There were some notable differences about the proportion of students believed to be experiencing “Fairly High” stress levels. Faculty/staff and freshmen at UWBC perceived more students with “Fairly High” stress levels than other groups. UWRF freshmen placed a much smaller proportion in the “Fairly High” category. Overall, stress levels may be higher among UWBC students.
- Sources of stress include tests, assignments, conflicting demands on time, financial issues, the need to make new friends, separation from family, roommate conflicts, changing relationships with family, finding life direction, and questioning of value system.
- The major sources of stress varied between the two campuses.
 - A powerful common theme among the UWBC groups was the impact of conflicting time demands, particularly between school and work, and the need for time management skills. Although the time management issue was mentioned in

the UWRF groups, it stood out more prominently at UWBC. The commuters in the UWBC groups often found their family relationships changed even though they continued to live at home.

- There is a group of additional social issues for those who move away from home to attend college, including the formation of new friendships and social contacts, family separation concerns, and roommate issues. This theme was picked up in multiple groups, but more frequently among the UWRF groups because more of the UWRF students reside on campus rather than commute from home. Concerns about life direction were also mentioned as a stressor at UWRF.
- Most, but not all, students from both campuses were surprised by the increased expectations in college compared to high school, the need to be self-disciplined, and the easy accessibility of the professors.
- Common stress relievers include a wide variety of activities, including socializing in person and via Internet, exercising/sports, entertainment such as TV, and drinking/partying. UWBC freshmen cited the use of tutors and study groups to relieve academic stress.
- Many students wish they had known in high school how much more demanding college would be. Specific suggestions included:
 - Many said that their college stress would have been reduced if they had taken more courses to prepare them for college or if their high school classes had been more demanding. Further, efforts to improve the time management skills of students would likely be beneficial to students making the transition to college.
 - One common piece of advice was to be organized and to avoid procrastination.
 - Another common suggestion was to take Advanced Placement courses to gain experience with college expectations.
 - Some suggested inviting high school alumni who are in college to come back to share their experiences and advice, since they would have more credibility.
 - Restructure some of the senior-level high school courses to place more responsibility on the student as a way to emulate the expectations in college courses. For example, providing seniors with a syllabus for the quarter that identifies due dates for projects and expecting them to conform to the schedule without additional reminders.
- Opinions among the students, faculty/staff, and parents were highly varied about the value of high school guidance counselors in helping high school students prepare for college, but negative comments were more common, often citing the large counselor-to-student ratio as an impediment to accessibility and effectiveness.
- There is no single dominant source for information on the transition to college. Parents and students use a wide variety of sources, including Internet web sites of colleges under consideration, campus visits, and word-of-mouth advice from friends, family, and teachers.
- Parents had many concerns about how their children would make the transition, but most are pleased that the transition is mostly going well and with the growth that they have seen in their children.

Overview of Responses

Freshman Students

- All but one UWBC participant were commuters, while all the UWRF participants lived on campus.
- Both groups cited the high level of accessibility of professors as a pleasant surprise, and the UWBC group added that they liked the smaller-than-expected class sizes. Some members from both groups felt that college is easier than they had expected, while some in the UWBC commented on that the expectations were higher and that college takes more discipline than high school.
- Both groups felt that the largest proportion of their friends' and acquaintances' stress level falls into the "Moderate" category. In addition, both groups felt that there is only a very small percentage in the "High" category. There was a notable difference between the two campus groups when considering the proportions in the other two categories. UWBC students said that there are more of their counterparts in the "Fairly High" category than did the UWRF participants. Conversely, the UWRF students believed that more of their counterparts experience "Little or No" stress.
- The major sources of stress cited by UWBC and UWRF were somewhat different.
 - UWBC students all agreed that time management is the biggest source of stress for them. UWBC students also mentioned financial concerns as a major source of stress too. The time management and financial stress are interlinked – a substantial source of the time management stress is driven by the considerable number of hours worked by these students to pay for their education.
 - UWRF students' sources of stress focused on social and academic concerns. Specifically, they experienced stress associated with the need to make new friends and conflicts with roommates in their residence hall living arrangements. They also noted more stress associated with academic pressures.
- Participants from both campuses cited talking with family and friends and physical exercise as ways to relieve stress. The UWBC participants mentioned relieving stress about academics by utilizing the tutoring service and study groups. Partying was mentioned by the UWBC group but not by the UWRF group. Other focus group work done by the SRC on alcohol and drug use, however, indicates that UWRF students do engage in these sorts of stress releases also.
- UWBC freshmen suggested that the stress of transition could have been reduced by taking more college preparatory courses in high school and by having a major selected before starting college. They were critical of their guidance counselors. UWRF students thought their high schools did a good job in college preparation. Both groups suggested taking advanced placement courses.

Sophomore Students

- All but one of the UWBC participants were commuters; all from UWRF lived on campus.
- Both groups indicated that college courses were more demanding than high school. UWBC participants were surprised by the accessibility of the professors, and UWRF participants were pleased with the numerous activities on campus. Friendliness and ease of meeting people were cited as positives by both groups.

- Both groups felt that the largest proportion of their friends' and acquaintances' stress level falls into the "Moderate" category. The second highest category is "Fairly High" for both groups. Both groups felt that there are small proportions in the "High" and "Little or No" stress categories. Of note is that UWRF sophomores placed a higher proportion in the "Fairly High" category than did the UWRF freshmen, indicating that they perceived some additional stress among the sophomores. In contrast, the UWBC sophomores indicated that stress wasn't much of an issue for them.
- Time management was the primary stressor for the Barron County campus participants as they struggle with the difficulty in balancing the many things that need to be done. While the UWRF participants mentioned the need to be organized and to set priorities, they indicated that stress is somewhat cyclical and increases at certain times, particularly before tests or when a group project is due. Other sources of stress cited by the UWBC group include financial concerns, building new friendships, and relationship issues.
- The most commonly listed stress relief activities by both groups include socializing, exercise/sports, and entertainment such as TV. Alcohol consumption was mentioned by only one person in the Barron County campus group and not at all by any member of the River Falls campus participants.
- Sophomores in both campus groups suggested that the stress of transition could have been reduced if they were more aware of increased expectations in college. UWBC participants specifically mentioned better preparation through increased rigor in their high school classes, while the UWRF group mentioned learning the benefit of being organized and keeping up with class assignments. The UWRF group also stressed the value of being connected with others and participating in activities that are personally interesting.

Parents

- Parents in both groups rated their children's high school stress levels in the "Little or No" or "Moderate" categories.
- The most common forms of coping with high school stress among the UWBC group were extracurricular activities, exercise/sports, and socializing. Some parents mentioned that their children minimized stress by being well organized or were naturally low-key individuals who didn't experience much stress. Most of the UWRF parents had been concerned that their children's high school classes had been easy and that they had wished for a bit more academic stress to prepare their children for increased expectations in college.
- Both groups of parents were very involved with their children in preparing for college. They used a variety of sources for information, including Internet, books, campus tours, guidance counselors, books, other family members, and teachers. Opinions about the most useful source varied among the individuals. Some had negative opinions about the helpfulness of guidance counselors, while others found them helpful but difficult to access due to their small numbers relative to the student population.
- A common concern of some parents in both groups was how well their children would do academically. Parents of students who live on campus expressed concerns about separation issues and distance between them if there were to be a problem. Some UWRF parents expressed concern about how responsible their child would be as a college student and would they use their time unwisely.

- Both groups of parents were pleasantly surprised at how well the transition has gone thus far. Their children are rising to the challenge. UWBC parents thought the orientation program was helpful and that access to help on the campus was easy.
- Financial issues were indicated as a major stressor by both groups. UWRF parents expressed a great deal of frustration about financial aid in general and FAFSA paperwork in particular as a negative surprise and source of stress on both parent and student. Social adjustments and roommate problems were cited by the UWBC group. Daily living issues such as mail delivery and car maintenance were mentioned by the UWRF group. Neither parent group listed academics as a major stressor for their college student.
- Since their children made the transition relatively without major problems, the parent groups listed few items that they wish they had known before their child entered college. Some UWBC parents felt they had expected the relationship with their commuting child to remain the same as before and weren't prepared for their children's increased independence while still living in their homes. Some UWRF parents indicated concerns about daily living issues not related to academics, such as continued need to help with car repairs and maintenance.

Faculty and Staff

- The members of the UWRF group felt that the majority of students experience "Moderate" levels of stress. In comparison, the Barron County campus group felt that the students' stress levels are somewhat higher and placed about equal proportions in the "Moderate" and "Fairly High" categories. Neither group placed large proportions in the "High" or "Little-No" stress categories.
- The two groups identified somewhat differing causes of stress. The Barron County campus group focused on time-management and money issues as the major stressors of the students there. The UWRF group presented a larger list that included additional issues such as adjusting to a new social environment, having their values and beliefs challenged, finding one's self and life direction, and culture shock when going home again. Social adjustment and life direction issues don't seem to be as large an issue among the Barron County students because so many of the students live at home or are older and have a stronger sense of life direction. However, the UWBC commuter students experience new stresses with their family as their relationship changes from being a high school student to being in college. Academic stress is more cyclical, peaking at the time of mid-term examinations and again during finals.
- The actions to relieve stress range from innocuous diversions to those that are potentially problematic. Beneficial activities include socializing, exercise/sports, computer-based activities, recreation such as hunting/fishing, faith-based activities, and participation in organizations. The UWRF participants felt that students may not recognize the stress-relieving benefits of these activities and more frequently mention partying as a significant stress reliever. Both groups listed problematic responses to stress such as excessive alcohol use, drugs, overeating, and sex. The Barron County campus group felt that campus resources for stress relief are underutilized because so many students are commuters and have left campus by mid-afternoon. The physical distance to the medical and mental health clinics available for students at both UWBC and UWRF may inhibit students from using these services. (At UWBC, these services are located on the adjacent

campus of Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College. UWRF contracts for services through the local hospital and clinic.)

- The UWRF group emphasized the benefits of an increased self-awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses prior to entering college as a way to have a less stressful transition to college. The UWBC group mentioned that stress awareness training in high school would better prepare students for the new stresses of college. In addition, the Barron campus group felt that the stress caused by money concerns could be reduced by having increased knowledge about financial issues such as student loans. The financial issue was echoed particularly strongly in the UWRF parent group and is discussed in an upcoming section of this report.
- Both groups expressed additional thoughts about the stress of the transition from high school to college. The UWRF group suggested two specific improvements. First, they suggested the implementation of comprehensive guidance models and increased opportunity to meet with guidance counselors in high school. Secondly, they think that the various offices on campus that are involved with aspects of the student experience are too compartmentalized and that improved information sharing could help address issues related to student stress. The UWBC group also suggested requiring courses on study skills and time management. Because of the high proportion of commuters on the Barron County campus, that group mentioned concerns related to family issues at home.

Recommendations based on focus group comments

In reviewing the comments from the participants, the following potential actions stand out.

- Promote the development of a system for high school alumni to share their experiences and advice with college-bound students as way to increase their knowledge about academic, social, and financial issues related to the transition to college.
- Promote the creation of workshops for parents and students about financial aid, particularly how to successfully navigate the FAFSA paperwork process.
- Consider developing workshops for parents and their college-bound students to discuss the social transformations that are coming. For students that are going away to college this includes the need to form new friendships, take on additional responsibilities, clarify their interests and expectations. For students who commute to campus while continuing to live at home, this includes altered relationships between parent and child.

Focus Group Notes

Freshmen Focus Group – UW Barron Campus

Q1. Where are you from? What is your major? Did your parents go to college? Do you have brothers/sisters who go to college? Are you living at home or do you have your own home/apartment?

Overview of responses. Some students lived in Rice Lake while others commute, a variety of majors were represented, but two students were undecided, only one student's parents went to college, and three students had siblings who go/went to college. All but one student live at home.

Comments:

- Cameron, undecided, no, no, home
- Chetek, undecided, no, no, home
- Rice Lake, Elementary Education, yes, no, home
- Rice Lake, Physical Education, no, on sister started but didn't finish, home
- Cadott, Speech Therapy, no, brother in college now in Madison, home
- Cameron, Sociology, no, no, own place
- Rice Lake, Business, no, sister in college at Southern Adventist University, home

Q2. What has been your biggest surprise (positive and negative) about college so far?

Overview of responses. Students seemed to be positive about the size of the campus, accessibility of the instructors, and the fact that they were treated like adults as far as responsibility given. On the other hand, they were negative about the high expectations and sometimes lack of understanding about the expectations of some of their professors, as well as the high level of time commitment required for their coursework in comparison to other activities/responsibilities.

Comments:

Positive

- Seems a lot like high school because it is so small.
- Surprised at the small class sizes (most are about 26 students) because it allows for more interaction with professors.
- Surprised at the accessibility of professors.
- Surprised that it is relatively easy to do well if you do what is asked.
- Surprised at the discipline it requires.
- Treated more like an adult. Questions in class tend to be more challenging and based on critical thinking.
- Responsibility is placed more on the individual student – there is less group work.
- Felt that as a non-traditional student, the “passport program” is very easy grade.
- Had an overall good experience (avoided Freshman Seminar).

Negative

- Professors expect you to know more than you do. They expect you to have all of the answers already.
- Professor in one class (taken by many of the participants) expects them to think on their own a lot, has higher expectations than other professors, and the technology components of the class, half of which is online, were not explained very well and weren't set up well initially.
- One student wanted to know her grade in a class and didn't find out until the midterm. By then she didn't feel she had a lot of time to get her grade up.
- There weren't enough sports for girls.
- Participation is part of the grade, but it's hard to gauge how they are doing on that. They have a lack of instant feedback.
- They felt that the college was trying to make it harder because of the learning community in order to prepare students for their next few years of college.
- The passport that accompanied freshman seminar became a time challenge for some students to balance it along with work, sports, other classes, etc.
- A Chemistry class is time intensive with both lab and lecture as well as the time it takes to prepare for unannounced quizzes because of the density of the material.

Q3. What percentage of your friends and acquaintances experience little or no stress, moderate levels of stress, fairly high levels of stress, and high levels of stress?

Overview of responses. Participants placed the highest percentages of their friends in levels of moderate and fairly high stress most of the time. They also placed fairly consistent numbers with little or no stress, as well as high stress. They cited time management and the fact that this is their first semester as reasons for their responses.

Percentages and Comments:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High stress
10%	35%	60%	3%
10%	45%	65%	3-5%
10%	38%	50%	2%
15%	30%	50%	5%
10%	60%	25%	5%
10%	80%	5%	5%
10%	80%	8%	2%

- Sports were time consuming and caused late night homework – made early classes stressful. Reduced stress by making more time for school.
- After sports wrapped up and long-distance travel didn't take up so much time, high level of stress was reduced to moderate level.
- Stress has increased since the beginning of the year.

- Seems like all of my friends are smarter, less stressed, and have more time. I have a job, try to hang out with friends, I have a boyfriend. I need to manage time better. (experiencing a high level of stress).
- Moderate to fairly high stress – around test time I get extremely overwhelmed. Mostly at moderate level of stress – I don't worry about those things.
- First week was major stress, been falling since then. Spent a lot of time talking with professors in first weeks. Time is the biggest.
- Usually little or no stress, sometimes moderate when I have a lot due.
- Not too many friends/acquaintances freaking out, but there hasn't been too many really stressful things happening. Moderate levels of stress come mostly from a major test. We may not see the stresses of others as clearly as our own. Can't think of people who drop out because of stress, because they just stop coming to class.

Q4. What are the major causes of stress for you at college (Living situation? Relationships? Drugs/alcohol? Finances? Grades?)?

Overview of responses. Focus group participants cited many different sources of stress, among them finances, time management, work conflicts, and academics.

Comments:

- Hopes stress is related to first year transition and it will fall when she becomes more used to things and knows her professors better.
- Sometimes hard to understand what professors are going to ask on tests, and there is so much to learn it is hard to keep it all straight. Online quizzes are timed, and there are ten of them – causes stress. Tests are increasing in level of detail and difficulty has become greater.
- Has two jobs, volunteering in classrooms, and is trying to pay for school. Feels that there is a lot of pressure to get things done, and this causes him to not do as well. Has kids, and is trying to manage school and outside life.
- Making friends as contacts for when help is needed can sometimes disrupt classroom concentration. Only knows two people from high school here, and didn't have anyone to help find where to go. Has to drive an hour to get here.
- Grew up here, knew the campus and people. Learning community (3-class link with same students in all classes) helped to get to know people – this relieved stress.
- Stressful to come here – live in a house where everyone else goes to WITC and feels left out. She didn't know how to negotiate the town.
- A friend lived in Chippewa Falls and had to come to volleyball practice at 7am – this yielded stress.
- The longer the commute, the more stress to manage time.
- Work time brought on stress – seemed like work and due dates for class work coincided.
- Financial stress – paying for school on own, lost financial aid and may not get it back, struggle with whether to take out loans to pay for it.
- Was given seven classes during orientation and that was too many – learned what is manageable and will apply it to next schedule.
- Worked full time prior to college and is now having to adjust to having less money.
- Another student's parents pay for school.

- Drugs and alcohol seem to interfere with class when students don't come when they are hung over – just causes them more stress.

Q5. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for you?

Summary of responses. Participants cited time management as their biggest source of stress.

Q6. What do you do to relieve stress? (Effective?)

Summary of responses. Students cited communication with friends and family and using study aids like tutors and study groups, among other things, as some of the ways that they relieve stress.

Comments:

- Talk to my mom – she calms me down.
- I talk to my brother in Madison – he tells me about his workload.
- Talk to my mom/friends.
- I work out.
- Many students go out and party.
- At times it's under control. Depends on the day. How a class goes.
- Now I've figured out my teachers a bit and hope it stays that way.
- Stress related to finals or tests was relieved by talking to other students, starting study groups, or just making personal time.
- Another participant only asked other students – not study groups.
- Study in the tutor room where help is accessible.
- Uses some online resources – stated what was wanted in the essay. Writing tutor was forced – good criticism, but didn't really help specifically, because didn't help fix what was needed for next essay. Tutors are not much older, and it's not intimidating – so you don't feel stupid.
- Wondered if people were advised to take fewer credits (12). Most said yes. 14 was max number of credits.
- Classes suggested in major were not enjoyable – preferred classes that he/she excelled in.
- I wish no one had to take English. Most disliked area of education.

Q7. Is there anything that would have reduced any stress or fears you have experienced in college if you had learned/been made aware of it in high school?

Overview of responses. Participants cited more college preparatory classes and quality of guidance counseling, as well as simply having a better idea of areas of interest to them as things that would have reduced stress during the college transition.

Comments:

- Pay more attention in English. Gain writing and grammar skills in high school.
- Research classes before you enroll in them. Don't just rely on the descriptions provided.
- Know your core class information (i.e. basic math, English, and chemistry) because it will help to reduce your stress level in college when you build up from the basic information from high school.
- Pay attention in class, and take a challenging college preparatory schedule.
- Talk to your counselor about taking college courses in high school so you can get the credits for free.
- Even though these are things that they consider important now, they were told the same things in high school, and they didn't listen anyway. They don't expect kids in high school now to be any different.
- It's important to have an idea of what you want your major to be, because it will really guide your college experience.
- It is less stressful if you aren't undecided. It's hard to choose which four-year institution to transfer to, if you don't know what you want to do.
- Students shouldn't feel pushed into a popular field. It is much more important to choose a major that is enjoyable and that they're good at.
- Guidance counselors don't necessarily keep the student's best interest at heart. It seems that they recommend that *they* think is best instead.
- One participant's guidance counselor disregarded the student's wishes altogether.
- Many participants didn't feel that their guidance counselors helped them to reach their academic goals.
- One participant cited a year-long high school class as the most helpful resource she had in choosing a career path. She said that there weren't enough guidance counselors in her school, and that she didn't utilize them.
- Most participants' parents didn't go to college, so they couldn't necessarily offer a lot of direction when it came to higher education. It is important for guidance counselors to step in at that point, but they need to be more open-minded about where students want to go with their lives.
- One participant's school didn't offer a lot of options for students to take classes related to their fields of interest.
- An adult student mentioned that a graphic arts program in his high school sparked the interest of many students. It caused them to choose that as a major in college, and many those same students have graphic arts careers to this day.
- A high school business program was in great demand and they had to turn away students in the four least popular classes (even though they were less popular by only a very small margin) rather than hiring another position in the department.
- Sometimes certain schools have specialty programs and a lot of students get pushed in those directions – it all depends on where you live. Larger schools tend to have more options available.
- One student took a class that helped her understand learning techniques that she utilized best and that helps her study. She also became aware of how teachers apply their learning techniques in the classroom.

Freshmen Focus Group – UW River Falls

Q1. Where are you from? If you have declared a major, what is it? Did your parents go to college? Do you have siblings that went/go to college? Do you live on/off campus, or do you commute from home?

Overview of responses. Participants cited majors in the areas of business and agriculture, and they all lived on campus. Their families had a variety of collegiate backgrounds.

Comments:

- Father and half brother went to college.
- Father has a degree, sister went but didn't finish.
- Father went to college for 1 semester.
- All had at least one parent that went to school.
- Parents didn't help a whole lot when applying to school.
- "The stress of getting into school was a lot."

Q2. What has been the biggest surprise (positive and negative) about college so far?

Overview of responses. Participants seemed to think that college was easier than high school and that strong student-professor relationships were a positive.

Comments:

- Two of the students found college relatively easy compared to high school.
- One student talked about the student-professor relationship. "You really can trust your professors. That was a shock."

Q3. What percentage of your friends and acquaintances experience little or no stress, moderate levels of stress, fairly high levels of stress, and high levels of stress?

Overview of responses. Participants categorized the majority of their friends and acquaintances in the little or no stress and moderate stress levels.

Percentages and Comments:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High stress
20-35%	50-60%	~10%	~3%

- Most fit into the moderate levels of stress.
- All agreed last levels would be low.

Q4. What are the major causes of stress for you at college?

Overview of responses. Participants cited tests, time management, and social issues as the major causes of stress for them at college.

Comments:

- Tests.
- Time management.
- Miss people from high school (not having to impress people).
- Having to fit in with a whole new crowd of people.
- “My time management...little things that shouldn’t be a big deal.”
- “I read clocks now!”

Q5. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for you?

Overview of responses. Participants cited academic expectations, degree program requirements, and socializing as their biggest sources of stress.

Comments:

- Grade expectations. “Oh, my God! I have a B, what’s wrong?”
- One student has seen what being dropped out of a program can do to a person.
- Finding new friends.
- Class expectation – different from system in high school.
- Roommates.
- Figuring out which classes to take – some of them don’t relate to your major. “I’m a business major in Oceanography! How does that relate?”

Q6. What do you do to relieve stress?

Overview of responses. Participants used physical activity, cyber communication, and entertainment to relieve stress.

Comments:

- Working out.
- E-mail people.
- “Vegging” out in front of the TV.
- Facebooking.

Q7. Is there anything that would have reduced any stress, anxiety or fears you have experienced in college if you had learned/been made aware of it in high school?

Overview of responses. Participants seemed to think that high schools do a good job of preparing students for college and that every student is different so there is only so much

that can be done to prepare them. They also felt that learning from the experiences of others was beneficial.

Comments:

- High schools are doing a great job already.
- Guidance offices and classes are preparing pretty well.
- One student saw what other friends went through so that helped.
- “It’s different from person to person...So I don’t think you can prepare them (high schoolers).”
- “In my school, you can take college credit courses.”

Q8. Do you have any final comments about the stresses you’ve experiences in moving from high school to college?

Overview of responses. Participants discussed living situations as they relate to the dorm facilities and differences among roommates and the issues that can arise.

Comments:

- Roommates stress people out.
- Showering in a big group facility.
- Moving from home.
- Roommates having different backgrounds. (MN vs. WI, Money vs. not, Farm vs. City).
- “It’s the worst when you’re in between about you’re roommate.”
- “The initial shock of just moving into a new surrounding.”

Additional Observations/Comments:

- All were very thoughtful and honest.
- All generally agreed with one another.

Sophomore Focus Group – UW Barron Campus

Q1. Where are you from? What is your major? Did your parents go to college? Do you have brothers/sisters who go to college? Are you living at home or do you have your own home/apartment?

Overview of responses. Most participants commute to school, they come from a variety of communities, the majority of which are in the area, and they represent a variety of majors. Their families have varying education levels.

Comments:

- Michigan – lives alone here; Psychology major, mother has an on-line degree, brother attends an acting college.
- Cameron – commutes from home; Accounting major, mom went to college, sister attended 1 semester of college.
- Barron – commutes from home; Undeclared major, parents are UW-RF grads, sister is UW-RF grad.
- Cameron, Business Administration major, father attended CVTC, mother attended WITC for one year and then had her first child.
- Chetek – commutes from home; Health Administration major, mom went to school for one year, is the oldest child so siblings aren't eligible for college yet.
- Cameron – commutes from home; Radiation Therapy major, dad went to technical college, no siblings in college.
- Cumberland – commutes from home; both parents went to college, and a twin sibling attends UW-La Crosse.

Q2. What has been the biggest surprise (positive and negative) about college so far?

Overview of responses. Participants seemed to think college was friendlier, in general, than they expected, but they also felt that college was more challenging than expected.

Comments:

Positive

- Professors seem more accessible and caring than instructors in high school.
- There was more bonding among students than was expected.

Negative

- Difficulty of the work, more studying, and more information compared to what they were used to in high school.
- Actually had to pay attention in class.
- Information comes at a faster pace compared to participant's home-schooling experience.
- Had to be a lot more organized and manage time better.
- Easier to pick out the negatives first.

Q3. What percentage of your friends and acquaintances experience little or no stress, moderate levels of stress, fairly high levels of stress, and high levels of stress?

Overview of responses. The majority of participants posted their highest percentages in the moderate and fairly high stress level categories. Smaller percentages fell in either extreme category.

Percentages and Comments:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High stress
0%	75%	30%	1%
5%	85%	15%	10%
10%	60%	35%	0%
10%	60%	9%	0%
15%	5%	30%	5%
5%	50%	15%	5%

- Participants contributed their high percentages in the moderate stress level category to the fact that stress levels were usually keyed to specific events.

Q4. What are the major causes of stress for you at college?

Overview of responses. Participants cited time management, relationship/socialization issues, finances and competing priorities like work as major causes of stress for them in college.

Comments:

- Trying to balance things: going to work after school, and not feeling like doing homework after that.
- Time management – amount of time put into each class.
- Having to do class work – not putting it off.
- Dreading studying for so many classes – finals are all in one week.
- Relationship are big – cause stress and effect stress.
- Have to choose between friendships and romantic relationships.
- 1st couple of weeks it was stressful to meet others.
- Another felt is was less stressful not knowing people.
- Finances – big source of stress: living alone and needing to pay rent.
- Another student lives with his parents and had a good summer job that helped him pay for college, so he had fewer financial concerns. He recognized that this won't always be the case.
- Another student has three jobs and puts in 40+ hours a week.
- Other students cited 20-30 hours/week for work.

Q5. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for you?

Overview of responses. Participants cited time management and finances as well as family issues as their most significant causes of stress.

Comments:

- Time Management. (4x)
- Finances.
- Family issues caused sibs to drop out.

Q6. What do you do to relieve stress?

Overview of responses. Participants used a variety of outlets to release stress including smoking, drinking, outdoor activities, and spending time at home with family, friends, and pets.

Comments:

- Smoke.
- Drink – get drunk as a goal to forget about stress.
- Golf.
- Watch TV.
- Fish/hunt – get outdoors.
- Go for walks.
- Gymnastics.
- Like to go home to pet rabbit.
- Go home for weekend.
- Roadtrips.
- Mostly hang out with high school friends.
- Don't consider University resources, takes too much time.
- Easier to meet people your own age at college.

Q7. Is there anything that would have reduced any stress, anxiety or fears you have experienced in college if you had learned/been aware of it in high school?

Overview of responses. Participants cited a number of things that would help them to reduce their college stress/anxiety in high school, but the underlying theme seemed to be heightened expectations.

Comments:

- Being aware that required courses will be used in college, too.
- Raise expectations in high school in preparation.
- More homework.
- It's hard to get through to students.
- Seems like Junior year of high school is important, but Senior year isn't.

Q8. Do you have any final comments about the stresses you've experienced in moving from high school to college?

Overview of responses. Participants concluded that having higher expectations in high school would have helped them to be better prepared for college. They also felt that having average college students go back to the same high school they graduated from to talk about their experiences would be a more effective means of communicating the transitional experience.

Comments:

- Sitting through class would be helpful.
- Giving an actual college level assignment would help to prepare students for the future. Step by step projects that don't challenge students to figure out how to get from Point A to Point B on their own are defeating.
- Longer papers.
- Lack of responsibility for own time management.
- Stop babying high school students.
- Youth options was good – student who had taken youth options now attends UW-EC and is more prepared than students who hadn't.
- College students came back and talked to high school students about what college was really like.
- Getting someone who flunked out to come and talk to students about *that* experience.

Sophomore Focus Group – UW River Falls

Q1. Where are you from? If you have declared a major, what is it? Did your parents attend college? Do you have siblings that went/go to college? Do you live on/off-campus, or do you commute?

Overview of responses. Four third semester students participated in the focus group. They represented a variety of majors and came from families with varying educational backgrounds.

Comments:

- Apple Valley, MN, Finance Major, neither parent went to college, 2nd oldest in family, older sister is also attending college, living on campus.
- Hennepin County, English Secondary Education major, dad went to college, siblings in college, lives on campus.
- Apple Valley, MN, Business major, parents didn't attend college, is the oldest sibling, has 2 younger brothers, lives on campus.
- Ag business major, both parents went to college, 2 older siblings, one in college, one graduated, lives off campus.

Q2. What has been the biggest surprise (positive and negative) about college so far?

Overview of responses. Participants were pleasantly surprised at the amount of activity on campus, but were also surprised by the level of expectations in their classes.

Comments:

- There are a lot of activities, clubs and sports – for any interest.
- There is always something going on.
- It's easy to meet people if you live on campus.
- Have to study more than expected.
- “Could get A's in high school without studying much at all. In college you have no chance if you don't study.

Q3. What percentage of your friends and acquaintances experience little or no stress, moderate levels of stress, fairly high levels of stress, and high levels of stress?

Overview of responses. The distribution of percentages was varied, however the largest percentages tended to fall in the moderate and fairly high stress categories. Participants cited a number of reasons for their distributional choices.

Percentages and Comments:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High stress
0%	25%	50%	5%
30%	40%	20%	10%
20%	60%	10%	5%

- Fairly high level of stress is her fault for the classes she's taken in addition to the other activities she's involved in.
- Little or moderate stress because he gets everything done right away.
- She prioritizes so she can have fun on the weekends.
- Moderation on both ends.
- Partiers who don't care have little stress.
- More stress during midterms and finals.

Q4. What are the major causes of stress for you at college?

Overview of responses. Participants cited academic-related issues as the major causes for stress at college.

Comments:

- Tests, big projects, speeches, group projects (when no effort from other members of group).
- Homework.

Q5. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for you?

Overview of responses. All cited academic issues as the biggest source of stress.

Q6. What do you do to relieve stress?

Overview of responses. Participants cited a variety of activities that help them to relieve stress, from sleeping to exercise as well as socializing.

Comments:

- Listen to music, watch TV/movies, go to bed, play hockey.
- Call friends up and talk.
- Hang out, do intramurals, weekends mostly.
- Dance team, exercise.

Q7. Is there anything that would have reduced any stress, anxiety or fears you have experienced in college if you had learned/been made aware of it in high school?

Overview of responses. Participants felt that it should have been stressed to them more in high school that they need to be organized and stay on top of their work in college.

Comments:

- Not really, you just need to stay organized.
- Studying reduces stress.
- Keep up with reading homework, do what teacher assigns.
- Be prepared, don't expect teachers to hold your hand.
- Don't procrastinate.
- Senior year is a breeze and you don't really do anything. Don't be surprised that you'll start working as soon as you get here.

Q8. Do you have any final comments about the stresses you've experienced in moving from high school to college?

Overview of responses. Participants recommended that students enjoy college and make the most of it, but keep education at the top of their priority lists.

Comments:

- Keep your dorm door open, and do Weeks of Welcome activities.
- Talk to people in your classes.
- College is a lot more fun than high school.
- Find a club or sport or something you are interested in.
- Don't seclude yourself.
- Have fun, these are the best four years of your life, but study hard. You are here for an education and the education is going to get you that job.

Additional Questions:

During the first week of college, what would be your tips on meeting new people and transitioning?

- Do Weeks of Welcome.
- Walk around the dorm, talk to people, and keep your door open.
- Introduce yourself – you don't have to wait for someone to introduce you.
- Talk to the people sitting around you in your classes.

Do you have any tips for balancing schoolwork and extra curricular activities for new students?

- Get everything done as soon as you can.
- Do homework in between classes, then have fun at night.

- Prioritize – don't get too obsessed with partying that your first semester you fail. (moderation)

Do you think that people who party a lot experience more stress than people who don't?

- People who party a lot and don't care experience low stress.
- People who care, but like to party experience more stress because they want to party, but need to study for their test.
- Be smart about it. You are paying a lot of money to go to school so you shouldn't be partying all the time. Know how to balance it.

Parents Focus Group – UW Barron Campus

Q1. Where are you from? Have you attended college? Do you have a son or a daughter?
Where is your son/daughter living while he/she attends school?

Overview of responses.

Comments:

- From Minong but works in Duluth, went to college, daughter at UW – Barron County, first to go, daughter is living in an apartment.
- From New Auburn.

Q2. Rate your child's level of stress in high school.

Overview of responses. Parents rated the stress level of their children as little to moderate, and cited a number of reasons for the moderate stress for some and lack of stress for others.

Comments:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High stress
3	2	0	0

- Moved during daughter's high school experience and the school she entered was disappointing. She attended school online her senior year, but her stress level went up because of the high expectations. Son still in high school, and goes online, as well.
- Son didn't seem like he had much homework in high school. He is very laid back anyway, and he seemed to learn quickly.
- Daughter had a moderate level of stress in high school, but it was mostly self-induced. She wants to excel in everything she does. It didn't seem to affect her learning, but he worried about her health. Son on the other hand, had little or no stress, but probably should have had more stress. He has done well, however, and seems to maintain a low level of stress in college.
- Son had little or no stress. He is very responsible and enjoys school. Hard things don't seem to bother him, he just does them.
- Son had little or no stress and is doing fine at college. Mother wishes son would have applied himself a bit more.
- Father felt that smaller campus helped to manage his non-assertive daughter's stress better.

Q3. How did your child cope with stress in high school?

Overview of responses. Parents cited physical activity, other activities, organization, and lifestyle choices, among others, as ways that their children coped with stress in high school.

Comments:

- Extra curricular activities – staying busy. Son was in sports, enjoys hunting and fishing, hanging out with friends, poker nights. He was able to mix interests with what needed to get

done. Daughter went to gym and lifted weights, played basketball, ran (and still does this). Son will ask for ideas when he needs help in school.

- Son was not really in the party scene. He'd hang out at home and visit with friends. His stress at school is that he is very far away and is not into the party scene. He'll go to a campus party but is not into throwing up, being hung over, etc. Mother is trying to help son through this but it is nothing compared to what other parents have to do. He's still participating in extra-curriculars like sports. Doing okay academically. Live a pretty unstressful life and taught that to kids.
- Son isn't really into sports – played football. He is a naturally low-key person (like father). Likes paintball, video games, hanging out at home. Mother would like her son to be more driven, but feels that low-key is good because he's happy.
- Son is very organized, sets his agenda for the day, doesn't get behind. He likes to write, so if you took his computer away, it would kill him. Nice base of friends from high school and they were all from solid families. Friends have Nintendo fests and have a great time. Sometimes he'll go running.
- Physical activity seems to be a common theme, but his daughter wasn't interested in sports. Here, she plays piano (got a small scholarship). She'll still go cross country skiing with father, or walk. Tries to exercise her mind and body. Here she tries to get out and walk. She was a bit stressed at school – a little uncertain about expectations, but experiences moderate stress at most.

Q4. What resources did you use in preparing your self and your child for college (books, magazines, guidance counselors, college materials, etc.)? What was most useful?

Overview of responses. Most parents felt that guidance counselors were not a big help, and many of them utilized online resources to pick out schools. Overall, parents seemed involved in the process of choosing schools and preparing to attend.

Comments:

- Talked to school guidance counselor, visited five colleges, did the tours and applied to all of them. Didn't look at books and rankings because he wanted to stay local. They talked to other parents about their experiences. He wanted to come here.
- Son started out wanting to go to Madison. Went down on a Sunday in lots of traffic. Nixed that idea. Took tour but felt he would have been lost there. He is a thinking guy, not a practical guy. We couldn't afford it. Told him he could take the basics at UW-Barron. He took a couple of classes during high school, so he understood the expectations.
- Didn't get a lot of help from guidance counselors. They looked at a lot of schools, and daughter hoped to play college basketball. She wanted to be an engineer so that drove their search. Looked through some books at the library. School system prepared her so well academically that despite playing college basketball and softball, she got a 4.0. Did three semesters and transferred to UW-RF during mid-sophomore year. She was stressed in Milwaukee, but maintained good grades during her transition. Found that visiting the campus and talking to professors, college coaches, and families with college athletes helped.
- Don't think that they talked to a guidance counselor. Mother's sister in Kentucky works in high school transition to college. She sent a college guide and pointed out things to look for

when choosing college. Son wanted to go further away and try something different. If parents move, they want their son to come back because he wants to live there, not because it's the only place he's ever known. Now he thinks he's too far away. Knowing no one was a big deal for him. It was tough to drop him off. Hew was proud to have been accepted at Miami University of Ohio. Concentrated on universities in Midwest. Looked at retention rate (how many people go back to the school).

- Daughter didn't want to be far from home. Looked mainly at UW schools. Guidance counselor didn't exist because she went to school online, but an uncle is a retired guidance counselor, and he suggested some things to think about. He provided some justification for coming to UW-Barron. They used online resources, were familiar with UW-EC, and decided after getting accepted at four choices to attend UW-Barron.
- Looked on-line for courses of study. Talked to professors at orientation sessions. Wanted son to leave home to grow up so that he could become more independent. For son to know himself well enough that he wanted a smaller school helped.
- Kids used on-line resources. One son looked on-line at one school and applied only to that one.

Q5. Prior to your child's going to college what was your biggest concern about this transition?

Summary of responses. Parents cited personal experience and stories of others experiences as cause for concern about college transition. Academic challenges for their children and change of location were also causes for anxiety among parents.

Comments:

- Mother was worried her son wouldn't be as laid back in college as he was in high school. He seems to be taking it more seriously, and he has a lot more homework. He seems to have stepped up to the challenge. She was concerned that he would become more responsible.
- Academics. Mother was concerned that son hadn't been pushed enough in high school. He sends snap shots of his grades...good ones, at least.
- Parents weren't ready for them to be out of the house (close family).
- Mother wanted her son to be close. Pastor had daughters go to school far away and they encountered serious illnesses while they were away. She worried that her son would not be as assertive about getting the care he needed if something like that happened to him.
- One mother was happy that her sister was close to her son, since he was going to school far away from his parents.
- Father was worried that his non-assertive daughter would just be another face in the crowd at a larger school. He is glad that she chose a smaller school where there is a high teacher-to-student ratio.
- Two brothers-in-law of a parent went to Madison and really didn't like being in big lecture halls – even had to listen to a recording of a lecture sometimes.
- When one parent went to college, her parents moved far away unexpectedly. She was mostly on her own. Her son listens to her experiences. Helps both parent and kid if the parent has been to college.

Q6. What has been the biggest surprise (positive/negative) about your child's college experience so far?

Overview of responses. Most parents were positively surprised by their children's college experience so far. They cited orientation and individual ease of transition as highlights, and only one negative experience was brought up concerning a work study program.

Comments:

Positive

- Surprised that so much is done online (few textbooks).
- Son is taking college seriously.
- UW-BC worked very hard to make the orientation day manageable and pleasant.
- Were concerned about son in terms of making a new circle of friends, but it worked out really well. He loves his classes and college.
- Pleased with UW-BC's orientation for parents and students. Did an excellent job.
- It is easy to access help at UW-BC.
- Typical of UW as a whole – do a good job with orientation.

Negative

- Daughter got a work study assignment that didn't happen until just recently. It took a long time to get the job straightened out. There were budget cuts that caused this to be slow. Way different from father's experience with work study.

Q7. What do you think are the major causes of stress for your child at college?

Overview of responses. In general, parents cited social interactions and changing social structures as the major causes of stress for their children.

Comments:

- Finding alternative activities since he isn't a big partier. Slowly getting better at this; finding like-minded people. He left with a girlfriend from home and this cause him stress – she went to St. Cloud State, and they have now broken up.
- My son hasn't had stress because he hasn't really dated. When he first came here the orientation period was a bit stressful. He is on the campus newspaper staff – stepping out of his comfort zone to interview people was difficult.
- Roommates. She has two roommates; one was going to start school but didn't and the other is just out of the military. She is being pulled in lots of directions. She is learning a lot about people.

Q8. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for your child?

Overview of responses. Parents seemed to choose biggest sources of stress according to their students' individual experiences. Their responses didn't seem to follow a theme.

Comments:

- Money.
- Finding like-minded friends in Ohio.
- Roommates.
- My son hasn't really had a very stressful transition.

Q9. Is there anything that, if you had known it while your child was in high school, would have reduced stress, anxiety or fears during the transition?

Overview of responses. Parents cited a number of things that they wish they would have known, but it was also mentioned that only so much preparation could be done, things will always come up.

Comments:

- Nothing they could have told us – he still doesn't have a lot of stress.
- Going away to school was surprisingly stressful. His communication with friends and family may have hindered his transition.
- Those living at home still hanging out with friends from high school.
- You can prepare all you want, but surprises still arrive.
- I expected things at home to remain the same because he is still here, but things have changed. He has a more independent existence.
- My son is also becoming more independent.

Parents Focus Group – UW River Falls

Q1. Where are you from? Have you attended college? Do you have a son or a daughter? Is your child living on or off campus while attending college?

Overview of responses. Parents of three daughters and one son participated in the focus group. One daughter was represented by both mother and father. All of them attend UWRF as freshman, some live on campus, and some live off, a variety of majors and parental college experiences were represented.

Comments:

- Father has a two-year degree and works as a mechanic, son is a freshman at UW-River Falls, he's living at home and seems to be making a good adjustment.
- Both parents attending this focus group, mother spent two years at UW-Barron, father has a four-year degree from UW-Stout and is an instructor at St. Paul College. Their daughter is a freshman at UW-RF, majoring in Elementary Ed. She's living on campus, and struggled with decision of where to go – peer pressure to go further from home.
- Daughter is a freshman at UW-RF, living at home and working on campus, doing pretty well in transition.
- Mother didn't go to college until she was 30 years old, daughter at UW-RF, living on campus with a cousin who is a sophomore.

Q2. Rate your child's level of stress in high school.

Overview of responses. Parents placed their children in low and moderate stress levels during high school; citing most frequently that high school came relatively easy and that they were able to deal with the stress that was placed on them.

Comments:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High stress
2	2		

- Moderate stress because she was an underachiever in school – figured out she could get As or Bs without trying much so her stress was low.
- Moderate stress because she can't take tests which was a stressor, always involved in something, worked two jobs, responsible.
- Little or no stress. Much happier at college level, doesn't miss the drama that went with high school. If she has a problem now, she just closes her door. She's working as well as going to school, so she's pretty busy. She uses scheduling/organization to manage her stress.
- Little or no stress. He never had a problem in school, always got good grades and picks things up easily. Never really got stressed before a test or about grades – breezed through. He seems baffled that professors don't care if you attend class. He had a math class where there weren't assignment due dates, and now he's trying to catch up.

Q3. How did your child cope with stress in high school? – Since none of the parents indicated that their child experienced stress in high school this question was skipped.

Q4. What resources did you use in preparing yourself and your child for college (books, magazines, guidance counselors, college materials, etc.)? What was most useful?

Overview of responses. Parents cited a number of sources for information on the college transition. Some of the most common were talking with others about their experiences or opinions, distance from home, and most frequently, the internet.

Comments:

- Son wanted to go to Duluth, but he wants to be a high school English teacher. Decided to come here after discussing UW-RF's reputation with family swayed his decision (cousin has an ed. degree from UW-RF, aunt also encouraged him to come here). The appeal of working part time, getting some financial aid and staying out of debt was a draw as well.
- Daughter wanted to go anywhere but River Falls, but family persuaded her to live at home, go to UW-RF and save the money. She visited schools, read about them, but wasn't sure what she wanted to do. Mother wasn't sure what the most influential resource was, but mentioned that program availability at another UW campus made a difference.
- Daughter lives a relatively short distance away, she can run back and forth between school and home easily, and she was able to keep her job from high school. She applied to many different schools with the idea that if she went to River Falls she would have to live at home and commute – not what she wanted. Parents encouraged her to live in the dorms because it would be a good transition into independence. She used a guidance counselor as a resource – only a good resource if the student seeks the counselor out. Mother was focused on college from a financial standpoint, and she read magazines and books, used internet resources, and anything else available to her with the goal of helping her children to attain the highest level of education they could for the least amount of money. People re-affirmed that UW-RF was a good choice for her program.
- Daughter went on the internet a lot, and it helped her understand what was out there. She's majoring in early childhood with a specialization in special education. She used teachers she liked as resources rather than counselors. Taking a tour helped her to eliminate Stout. She started with many choices, and used different types of resources to funnel down to her main choices. Also, because mother went to college when her daughters were young, they tagged along with her to the UW-Eau Claire campus. She said she didn't want to go there, because she felt as though she already had. She also took part in a practice teaching program that helped her choose her major. Mother encouraged her to choose school based on major program over where her friends are going, etc.
- Internet for those under 30, internet is the key resource for college decision making. All kids used it for info seeking.

Q5. Prior to your child's going to college what was your biggest concern about this transition?

Overview of responses. Parents were concerned that their children would have trouble dealing with responsibility, financial and social issues.

Comments:

- How responsible would she be? Would she do what we asked? Because she is still living at home there are still rules, how do we loosen the reins while maintaining rules for younger siblings?
- Mother hoped her daughter would realize the amount of work that goes into college compared to the ease of high school for her. Mother went to college when kids were young, but she would wake up early when they were still asleep and do her homework...they didn't see how much work it had been for her. Now she asks how grades are doing and gets "fine". Dorm life was a concern with living with a cousin...would have preferred that she live with someone she didn't know. Filling out FAFSA has caused some financial frustrations.
- Two concerns. First, would he be as responsible in college without a task master watching out for him. Second, that he make the same mistakes that dad did (partying and spending too much money). His son seems to be saving his money, and he takes responsibility for his finances at college. Father cited that his concerns seemed to be unfounded.
- Mother's fear was less about school, but more about the social part of college. She wasn't very social in high school, so the concern was that she would turn into a party animal at college because she hadn't been exposed to that scene, either. Also, money management was an issue, but it has been straightened out.

Q6. What has been the biggest surprise (positive/negative) about your child's college experience so far?

Overview of responses. Positive surprises tended to focus around situations where the parents anticipated high levels of stress in certain areas and then their children handled those stressors better than they expected. Negative surprises tended to focus around availability of financial aid, time management/the large amount of free time of their children, and the socializing in new environments.

Comments:

Positive

- I sent this obnoxious, know-it-all child off to school and within a month suddenly we were pretty smart. Her experience in the real world helped make her grow up.
- Surprised that daughter came home every weekend despite a tumultuous relationship in high school. I was worried about her adjusting to dorm life, but she is coming home less now.
- Daughter hasn't been coming home very often, but that was a good thing.
- Dad was very strict with his son in high school and told him he needed to take responsibility. They have given him more freedom although he is still living at home, but he has been respectful of them and hasn't taken advantage of the freedoms they have given him. Dad felt it was better than what he would have done.
- Daughter has found some friends in the dorms and stayed there a bunch.

Negative

- Sorting out the financial side is the biggest headache. “Where is all of this free money?” Colleges should have a program on how to fill out the financial aid forms. Once you’ve registered and paid for admission, the next thing should be a class on how to fill out financial aid forms. Also, how do you sort out the real offers from the scams when it comes to funding? This is a stress on kids as well as parents, and some scholarship opportunities aren’t offered to students at public universities.
- Counselors and college recruiters promote the fact that there are grants and scholarships, but it isn’t easy to find these offers.
- A talk about financial aid was given at orientation, and mother left feeling that this should have been given back in the spring.
- Seems like my son has too much free time. It’s different than when I went to trade school and we had class all day. He doesn’t spend much time at school, but he’s got a full credit load. He says he’s doing everything he should/could be doing. He works until really late at a pizza place and then doesn’t have class until 10 or 11 in the morning.
- Because she works from 2-6, she has lots of morning classes. All her friends don’t have morning classes and she was missing out on social things because her friends are free then and that’s when they socialize. She is not really social, so I knew it would take her a while to make friends. I really pushed her to be on campus to learn how to socialize – you need to.

Q7. What do you think are the major causes of stress for your child at college?

Overview of responses. Everyone in the room cited money as a major concern during college. Whether the financial stress originated from the child or the family situation, all involved were affected by money.

Comments:

- Her regular mail isn’t being sent to her dorm, and this has caused stress because her cell phone was cut off. She had trouble not communicating with her friends. Also FAFSA is a stressor. (couldn’t choose one as major cause of stress because they are all different) Took a car survival class that helped her.
- Dealing with her car – remembering to get the oil changed, parking, etc.
- I don’t know that my son has a lot of stress, maybe during finals week.
- Money was a stress for all. When I went to trade school, I pretty much knew I’d have student loans, but it didn’t seem like the paperwork was nearly as big of a deal as it is now.
- Costs have increased more than inflation. Costs have increased a lot.

Q8. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for your child?

Overview of responses. This question was combined with question 7 and answered above.

Q9. Is there anything that, if you had known it while your child was in high school, would have reduced stress, anxiety or fears during the transition?

Overview of responses. For the most part, the parents felt that their children had adjusted pretty well, and their individual situations helped them to manage their stress the best way that it could be managed.

Comments:

- I haven't had any surprises. It's been better than I expected. Transition has gone really well for her. When I came to group meeting, it answered a lot for me. When she comes home she doesn't seem stressed or despondent or exhausted. She ended up with a veterinary science major for a roommate, and overall, it's going well. She did experience a drunk outside the door, but so far it's good. She is home in and out 4 days a week.
- If she didn't live at home, I think she'd have had more stress because we wouldn't be there to help with laundry, remind her to service her car, etc. Academically, not an issue but daily living things are more of an issue.
- My child might be a bit different because her dad teaches at college and she saw him doing homework when he was back in school, so she knew what it was about. She knows that if she skips classes, teachers like her dad will give pop quizzes.

Q10. Final Comments

- I was very surprised about how stressed she is about the money. At this point, she doesn't even care if all the aid is loans. Because she is having problems with money, she still hasn't registered for spring semester. She calls and vents to me but doesn't expect me to solve the problem for her. This is relieving my stress. Money is biggest stress.
- A lot of the stress is about money. My father-in-law is well to do and he always told us that his grand kids would be taken care of. For 15 years we've been counting on this and he didn't come through. We would have done things differently if we had known about it.
- For us too, the divorce settlement said the father would pay for 1/3 of the cost and it would cost me \$10,000 to take him back to court. One reason for lack of support is choice of UWRF instead of Stout, alma mater of second wife. This is stress for daughter.

Faculty/Staff Focus Group – UW Barron Campus

Q1. What is your role at the university? How long have you been at this university? What are the types of interactions you have with students?

Participants included 4 faculty members and 3 members of the academic staff.

Q2. What percentage of freshmen and sophomore students experience little or no stress, moderate levels of stress, fairly high levels of stress, and high levels of stress?

Overview of responses. A wide variety of percentages were recorded, but the highest percentages tended to occur in the moderate and fairly high stress categories. Participants cited rigor of coursework and the student's academic goals as reasons for their variation.

Percentages and Reasons:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High stress
2%	30%	40%	5%
10%	30%	40%	5%
15%	40%	25%	15%
5%	65%	25%	20%
15%	30%	75%	0%
20%	18%	30%	15%
10%	20%	25%	40%

- Stress level depends on subject matter. (i.e. biology or natural sciences seem to cause more stress here)
- Need to attain a certain GPA in order to move to next level of education.

Q3. What are the major causes of stress for students at your college?

Overview of responses. Participants cited a variety of stressors, but major themes included time management and financial issues.

Comments:

- Getting into working too many hours.
- Finances – tied to time. Students *have* to have a car to commute – causes financial stress.
- Family and peer relationships. Struggle for control between student and his/her family.
- Balance of time use with clubs and organizations. Over commitment can be a problem if students are involved in many (possible too many things), because they underestimate the time commitment involved in their school work.
- Different levels of expectations at college versus high school.
- Poor health choices – poor food choices, lack of sleep, alcohol consumption.

- Students expect that they are entitled to have the three parts of their lives be meaningful: school, work, and social life. There is pressure involved in balancing all three.
- Other than on test days, stress usually isn't about school, but rather finances and time.
- Putting one's personal and professional self into course work and then not getting the grade one expected can cause an emotional reaction. This can negatively affect class performance for the semester.
- ...but if it doesn't hurt, you're not investing in college.
- Fear of failure. Dealing with issues of self confidence.
- Sometimes professors intentionally cause stress by having high expectations and holding students to them. They feel that it will be there in their future careers. Stress doesn't have to be negative.
- Lack of direction is not a cause of stress at this college, because some students are older and already have it together, and first year students don't tend to stress about their direction as much.
- Drinking isn't as much of a centerpiece for conversation at UW-Barron where the students commute from home, compared to students at a college with dorms where they live, and therefore party, together.
- New relationships are easy to form because classes are small enough that you can get to know people easier and the small campus means that you will see them more frequently. Students may know each other from neighboring high schools, etc. Clubs and in-class projects help students to interact. Commuting can challenge students trying to make connections – causes groups to form according to schedule. Sometimes students who are more introverted may have trouble interacting.

Q4. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for students on your campus?

Overview of responses. Participants cited money, time management as it relates to money, and responsibilities outside of school as the major sources of stress for students at the UW-Barron campus.

Comments:

- Money.
- Health care.
- Time – related to money.
 - Many students work 20 hours/week, many not for very much.
- About 25% are non-traditional students – have families, are older than most students, etc.

Q5. What do students on your campus do to relieve stress?

Overview of responses. Participants expressed a number of different stress relievers utilized by their students. They felt that the university provided few of the stress-relieving resources beyond class time because students leave earlier in the day.

Comments:

- Drugs, alcohol, sex.
- Intramurals – physical activities.
- Hunting/fishing – men and women.
- Overeating.
- Spend time (and money) changing their appearances (dying hair, getting body piercings and tattoos).
- Socializing – going to movies, etc.
- University resources – rarely counselors, technology resources well utilized.
- Web surfing.
- Service learning – issues that relate to their personal lives are more interesting and help them outside of the classroom.
- Talk to friends more frequently than other types of people.
- 2nd year are more likely to talk to professors; 1st year students hold off until the stress has reached a more unmanageable level.
- There are fewer hours during which students can access University resources here such as counselors, computer labs, etc. 90% of the student body is gone by the mid-afternoon.
- Smoking.

Q6. What do you think could be done for students while they are still in high school that would reduce the stress and anxiety they experience in college?

Overview of responses. The participants felt that learning how to recognize stress and their reactions to it would help them to deal with it better in college. Also, they recognized a need for a better understanding of financial issues. (i.e. What is “good debt”, and how can having it *now* be beneficial in the future.)

Comments:

- Paper trail on tools and resources they can use.
- Healthy habits (exercise, eating).
- High school students should identify stresses currently – need to own what causes them stress and their reactions – this is likely in college, but it can’t be told.
- How do they cope with stress now – sharpen those tools so they can gauge the outcome of their reactions toward stress and adjust accordingly.
- Know about and be encouraged to apply for federal student aid.
 - Loans will give you the time you need, but it’s good debt.
 - Negativity about debt may start with parents.
 - Will buy a car with debt, but won’t buy time for college.
 - If they did get student aid, it could save them from minimum wage jobs and open doors in terms of grades and college experiences.
 - Need to help them understand the long-term economic trade-offs of investing in college and getting a good job rather than blowing off education and getting a dead end job. They will make infinitely more money by going to school full time for just a few more years.

- Doesn't matter what you did in high school, this is a whole new game.
- Need to understand that need to work on things outside of class.

Q7. Do you have any final comments about the stresses students on your campus are experiencing in moving from high school to college?

Overview of responses. The focus group discussed the different types of stress faced by students at a commuter campus, but also, the programs they *do* have in place to aid in the transition.

Comments:

- Living at home can lead to stress – many of our students do.
- Many of our traditional students (even without their own family) are caregivers – because they live at home.
- We do have things to help with transition especially in orientation and student services – getting parents involved is important.
- Put child in driver's seat. We've seen more parental involvement in their kid's college career. Helping both parents/kids make the transition. (parents have stress about college, too).
- Suggested requiring courses on note taking, expectations, study skills, time management, etc.
- Transition to less contact with professors (3x/week) versus structure of high school can lead to stress.
- Suggested student support groups at college.
- Lots of dysfunctional family stress.

Additional Observations/Comments:

- Part of orientation – College Classroom Fundamentals: Instructional expectations in lecture, lab, and discussion. Talk about the expectations related to these three areas and then give examples of how it will happen at the college level. This takes place right before school starts so they can apply it right away and reduce their initial stress. Parents are included during this orientation so they understand expectations.
- Lots of our students disappear and we don't know why.

Faculty/Staff Focus Group – UW River Falls

Q1. What is your role at the university, how long have you been at this university, and what are the types of interactions you have with students?

Overview of responses. A mix of nine faculty and academic staff with varying experience levels were present. All of the focus group members have interactions with students on a regular basis.

Q2. What percentage of freshmen and sophomore students experience little or no stress, moderate levels of stress, fairly high levels of stress, and high levels of stress?

Overview of responses. Responses varied greatly, but overall, they felt that the majority of students experience a moderate level of stress. Those who recorded high percentages in the little or no stress category attributed their responses to students who are either very focused and relaxed or students who are going through the motions of attending school, but don't necessarily care about what they're doing.

Percentages and Reasons:

Little or no stress	Moderate stress	Fairly high stress	High Stress
0%	70%	25%	5%
85%	10%	3%	2%
3%	60%	28%	9%
10%	60%	20%	10%
10%	50%	30%	10%
10%	75%	10%	5%
50%	40%	5%	5%
5%	70%	15%	10%
10%	50%	30%	10%

- Stress freshmen year based on professional and enrollment requirements.
- Some students have low levels of stress because they are at school to, “create the illusion that they are moving forward with their lives.”
- Some students have low levels of stress because they are very focused and relaxed.

Q3. What are the major causes of stress for students at your college?

Overview of responses. Members of the focus group felt that the time of year was critical in identifying the causes of stress for students. Getting settled and developing a peer group usually takes place first, followed by academic stress, and then culture shock associated with going back home and dealing with the change in family and friend structures and values. The underlying theme, however, seemed to be that students at this level seem to

struggle a great deal with the issues related to finding themselves, dealing with new responsibilities, and fitting in to new social structures.

Comments:

- Time of year is critical.
 - Freshmen – struggle at first with adapting to new rules and expectations, social rules and expectations and separation from family. Another stress spike occurs in October when students get their first taste of college exams/midterm assignments. They may have to re-evaluate their study habits and deal with getting lower marks than they were used to getting in school. Students start to feel a sense of security and belonging around Thanksgiving time. Another stress hill occurs at finals.
 - Sophomore – question what they are doing. No longer academic as main stressor. Are they in the right major? Do they belong at this university? Is this what they want to do with the rest of their lives?
- The term “stress” is too general...very specific and different stresses that take place during different times in the college career.
- Classroom performance.
- “I just want to know what I’m going to do for the rest of my life...” a quote often heard in Student Services. “Dealing with the uncertainty” is a general and major stress.
- Finding a new place.
 - Finding a comfort level: friends, personal living space
 - Financial concerns associated with independence
 - Going home and realizing friends change, perceptions change, the student changes
 - Figuring out how to deal with the lack of structure...making choices about balance, time management. Learning how to use freedom responsibly
- A lot of the students that leave the university probably do so because of the problems that they came to college with that were just exaggerated during the tough transitional period.
- Students work more than they probably should. School might not be the top priority anymore; but they need to make money to stay in school.
- Family Pressures – lack of family structure.
- Culture shock going home again.

Q4. Which of these is the biggest source of stress for students on your campus?

Overview of responses. The focus group members narrowed down their responses from the last question and focused on the issues related to self-exploration and growth, academic stress peaks and valleys, and social/relationship issues.

Comments:

- This depends on the time of year. Around midterms and finals, their stresses are probably academic.
- Overall, students at this level struggle with finding their places in the world.
 - Having their beliefs, values, and opinions questioned...maybe for the first time, and then having to clarify their own values.

- Anxiety about how to figure out their entire lives, now.
- Fitting in on campus and finding a core group.
- This generation of students didn't have a lot of independence in their decision-making, but now they do all of a sudden, and they have to figure out how to make the right decisions.
- First year students feel less comfortable seeking help for their problems, unlike older students who consult more frequently with their academic advisors after a relationship is built.
- Romantic and interpersonal relationship concerns/issues.

Q5. What do students on your campus do to relieve stress?

Overview of responses. The sentiment seemed to be that simple social interactions and cyber-use were major stress relievers, but most students would not consider them as such. Most students remember partying/drinking, because that's what they talk about the next day.

Comments:

- Exercise.
- Drink/Party.
- Engage in social experiences with one another.
- Cyber-use (on-line gaming, Facebooking (as a verb!), IM-ing, e-mailing).
- Faith-based activities – a surprising resurgence.
- Do they choose productive/unproductive ways to relieve stress?
 - They remember the unproductive ways – more memorable.
 - Don't recognize how simple activities relieve stress.
- Student organizations/Greek life can relieve stress...might also cause stress if they confuse their priorities.

Q6. What do you think could be done for students while they are still in high school that would reduce the stress and anxiety they experience in college?

Overview of responses. In general, the focus group felt that more realistic experiences should happen before students enter into higher education. They should be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and the requirements associated with the areas of study they are interested in pursuing. They should be exposed to higher levels of responsibility and decision-making. They should have access to people who can help them figure out what it is that they are good at, and might want to pursue. They should also be able to engage in self exploration to address the same issues.

Comments:

- More responsibility should be given to students before college concerning issues like finances, extra-curricular activities, and their academic schedules.
- Students should be better prepared for the academic rigors of their chosen major. They should consider the requirements associated with their field and decide if they want to pursue a particular major with that in mind.

- A truer assessment should be made of the student's strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes there is too much positive feedback and not enough honesty. A student may get the wrong impression as to what it is he/she is good at doing.
- Sometimes students get pushed toward college, but it isn't a conscious decision. This can lead to a lack of understanding about the purpose of higher education. It can be mistaken for extended job training, and that's not really the point.
- Better academic communication skills can be developed to help students express their needs/concerns in class, rather than fail the first test and compound their stress.
- A realistic college class experience in high school can help prepare them for the academic experience of college. Perhaps a more rigorous senior schedule would help to ease the transition.
- Families and students are more connected now because of technology. Families need to know how to provide support.
- The question was raised, "Does this high level of communication with the family result in homesickness, or does it make the student's transition better?" – Both ways...it depends.
- Students should engage in self-exploration beginning in Kindergarten! "Why are you learning this?" "How will it affect you later on?" "What do you like to do, and what does this mean for the rest of your life?" – Many students have a tough time answering these simple questions.
- Students don't have the opportunity to use a guidance counselor as a resource.

Q7. Do you have any final comments about the stresses students on your campus are experiencing in moving from high school to college?

Overview of responses. It was expressed that guidance counseling at the high school level could be improved to the benefit of the college transition, and a communication system connecting offices on this campus with information about various aspects of the student's experience would help to address issues related to stress/transition.

Comments:

- Comprehensive guidance models SHOULD be used. They would do a lot of good if they were carried out in the K-12 system.
- Students should be given the opportunity to spend more time with a guidance counselor in high school. (The students that fall in the "bubble in the bell curve".)
- There should be an integrated information system to connect offices with information about students and their performance and issues they may be having. The offices are so compartmentalized right now, and that doesn't happen.