



Family Engagement in Postsecondary Education

***2017 3rd Annual Post-Secondary
Education Symposium***

Brian Freedman, Ph.D.

brianf@udel.edu

Thanks to...

- UD staff, students and families
- Sean Roy, Transcen, Inc.
- Dana Yarbrough (VCU)
- Think College

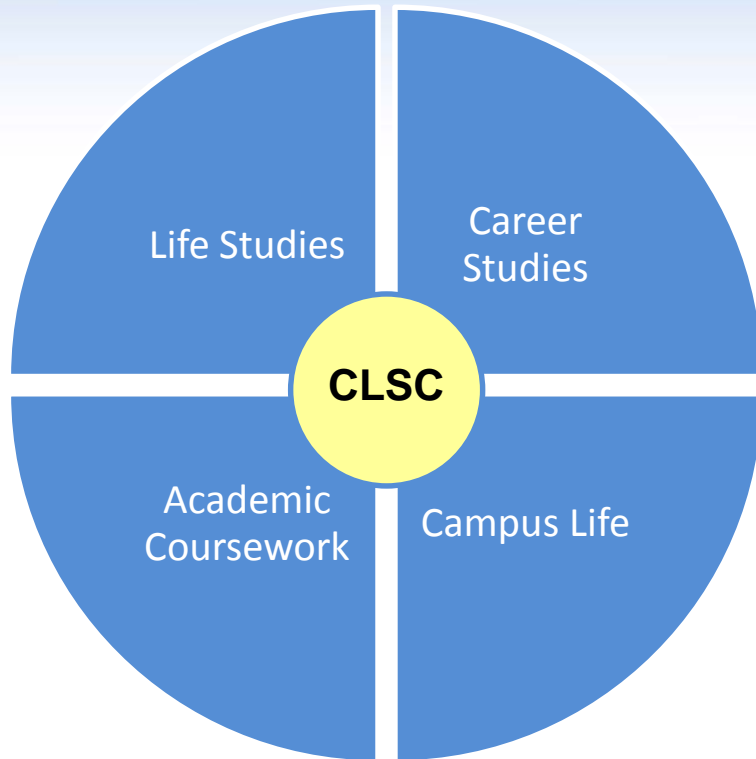
UD Career & Life Studies Certificate (CLSC)



CLSC is....

- 2-year program (Fall, Winter, Spring)
- Admit 10-12 students per year
- Housed in the *Office of Professional and Continuing Studies* and administered by the *Center for Disabilities Studies*

Program Components



Drivers

- Person-centered planning
- Inclusive opportunities
- High Expectations
- Self-reflection
- Skill Development
- Natural Consequences
- Network development

Outcomes

- Interdependence
- Career Plan/Employment
- Community engagement
- Social Networks
- Add'l postsecondary ed
- Independent living



Supporting Families

- Families and other caregivers as *partners*:
 - Student remains the leader of the team
- Group monthly meetings for families
- Heads-up to families
- Correspondence stems from the student
- Confidentiality of students is maintained
 - Promote reflection and consideration for how the student wants family members to be involved
- Respect that family members will likely remain important people in the lives of the student post-program

Some initial questions (staff)

- What does your program wish to accomplish by engaging families as partners?
- What are the policies, processes, and traditions at your college that make partnering with families difficult?
- How can you partner with families, *and* keep the focus on student independence and self-determination?

Some initial questions (families)

- What level of program engagement is the “right” level of engagement?
- What steps will it require on your part to facilitate increased independence?
- How can colleges work with families, but keep the focus on student independence and self-determination?



Talk amongst yourselves...

Understanding the history



Families are used to playing a strong role

- Families learn to become vigilant and advocate during special education
- Mandated partner in special education
- Families feel the aftermath of problems
- Often falls back onto families to coordinate services
- No preparation or support for postsecondary transition

Understanding the Fears



Families want their children to be happy and safe. That leads to concerns/questions:

- My youth is vulnerable
- My youth makes impulsive decisions
- Will they have friends?
- Will they be supervised?
- What is the process if something goes wrong?
- Who helps with school work?

Understanding Wants

- Parents want impactful college experience
- Something meaningful and typical that happens between high school and a lifetime of services
- Parents want their adult children to thrive

Traditional Parent Engagement

- Minimal parent engagement in PSE
- Special education ideally promotes significant parent engagement
- Program staff usually represent one or both of these traditions
- Conflicting processes → represent great opportunities to re-shape post-secondary parent engagement

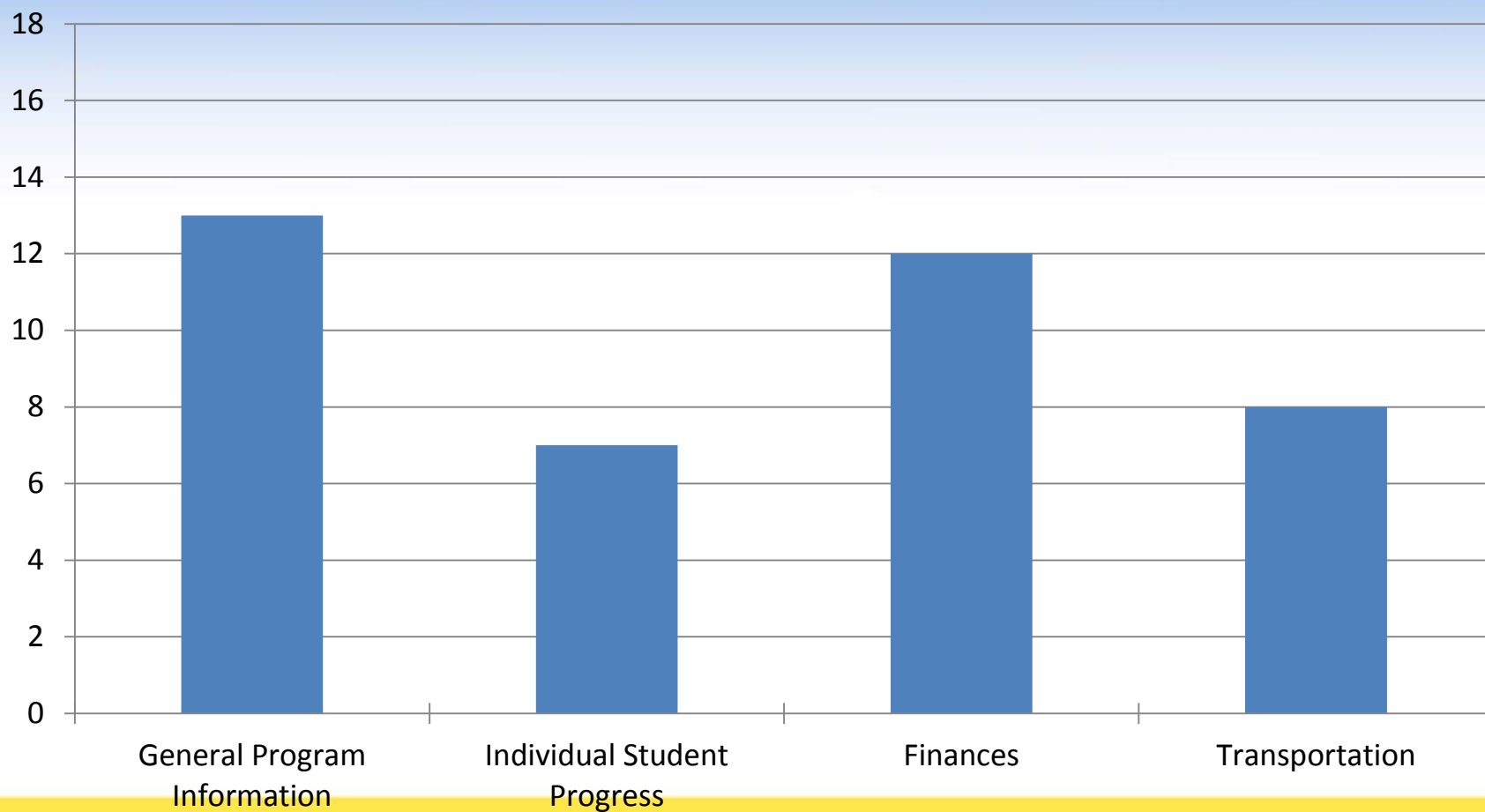


“Letting Go”

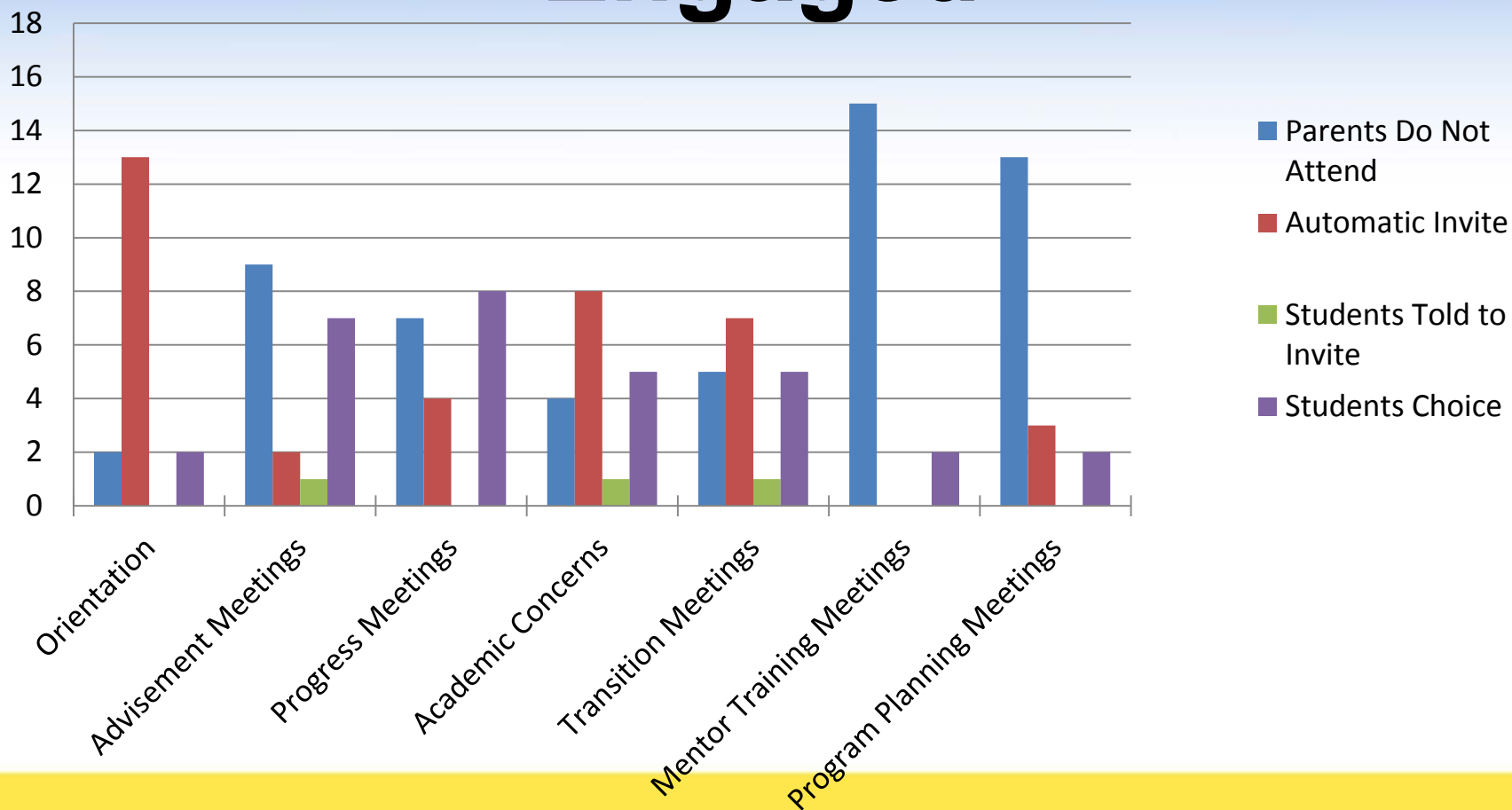
Parents have a *strong* investment in seeing their youth become independent, but may bristle at being told to “let go”. Why?

- Trust us vs. provide parents with information
- Programs can't be One Size Fits All. May have to be tweaked based on health, safety and behavior
- Respect informal supports already in place (cell phones, e-mail, checking-in)

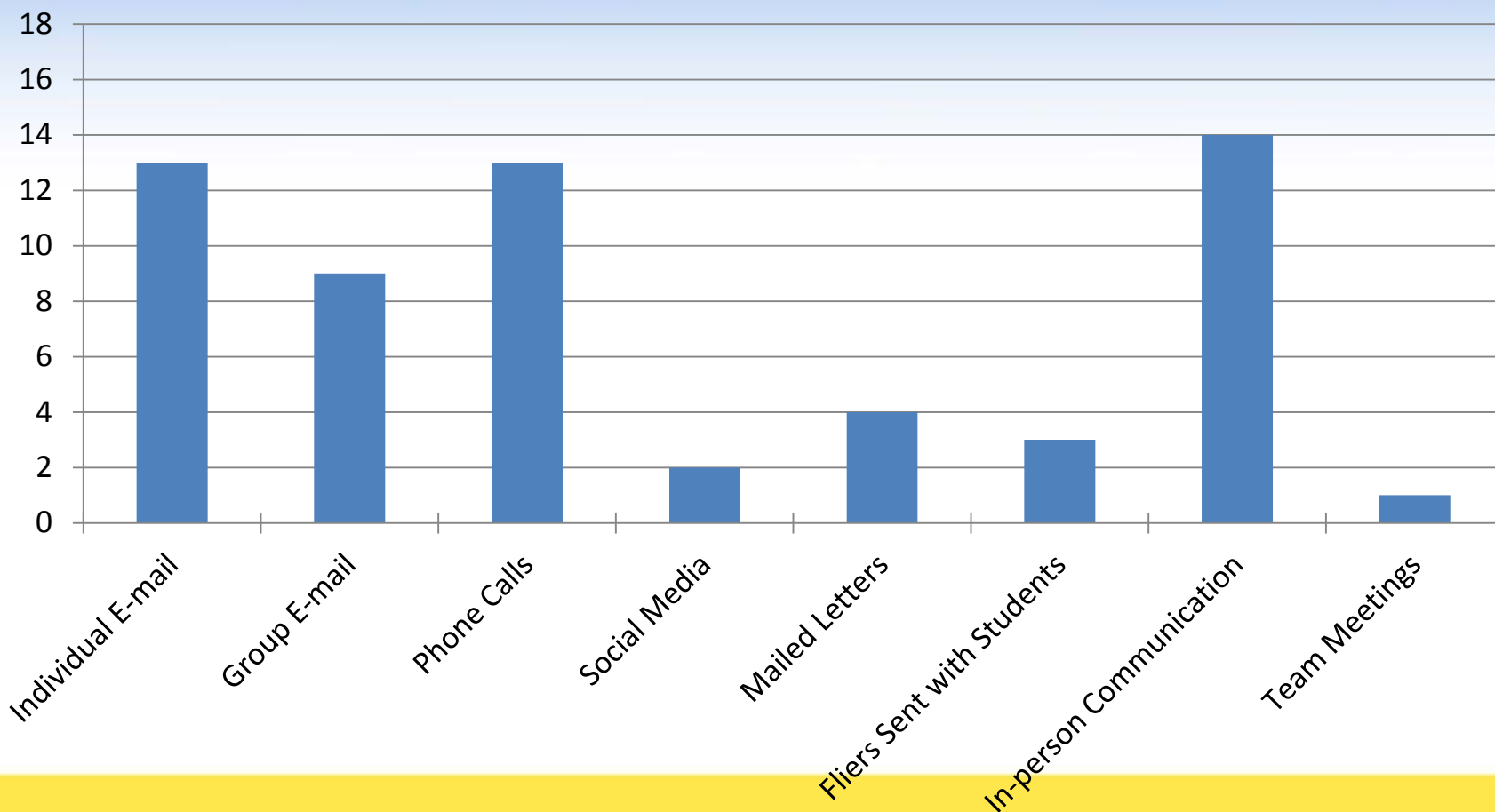
Communication Directly with Families/Support Systems without Students



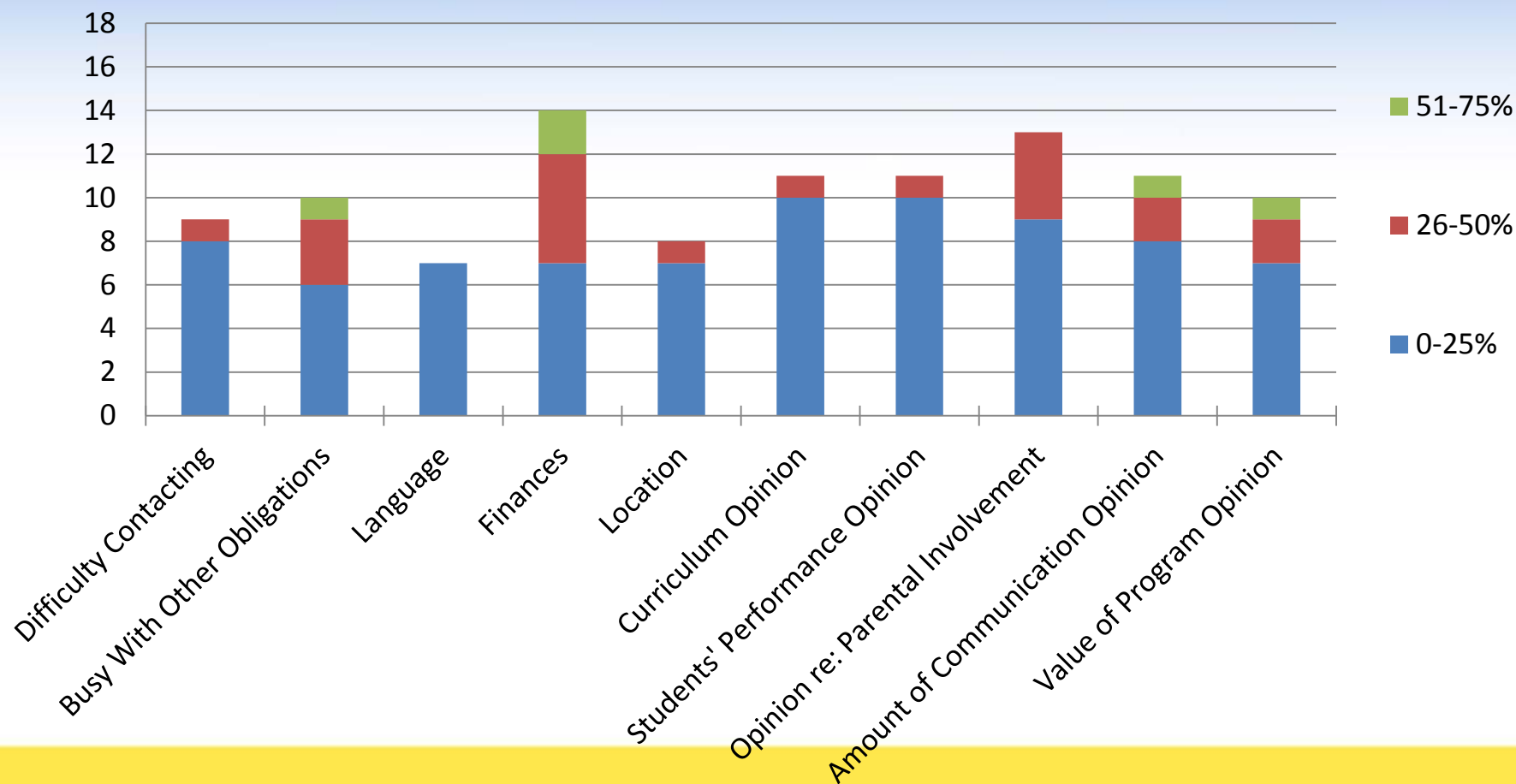
How are Parents Invited and Engaged



Effective Strategies for Engaging Families



Challenges to Parent Engagement



Strategies for Effectively Engaging Families

- Work to earn their trust – make yourself available, especially initially when anxiety is higher
- Find opportunities for them to learn about the program
- Set clear and consistent policies and standards for engagement
 - Communication
 - Participation in meetings regarding student
 - Reiteration of when families will always be notified
- Consideration of MOU's with families

Example wording:

Please read the following statements. If you are in agreement, please place your initials next to each of these commitments. As a family member/caregiver of a UD CLSC student, I:

- _____ understand that it is my responsibility to attend at least two family/caregiver support and resource meetings each semester.
- _____ understand that it is the student's responsibility to participate in activities on the University of Delaware campus that may take place during the evening.
- _____ understand that there will be times when the student will be on campus by him/herself without a staff member present. In general, students are expected to participate independently in CLSC activities.

I also understand that the student is responsible for all aspects of his/her UD CLSC program and that my role as a parent will likely be different than in previous settings (like high school). My role is to support the student in engaging independently in all activities including:

- _____ completing assignments.
- _____ contacting the CLSC staff regarding any questions about class or assignments.
- _____ informing UD staff or instructors if he/she will be late or absent from class due to transportation problems or being sick
- _____ being responsible for his/her behavior while on campus and that he/she will be held to the University of Delaware Student Code of Conduct (<http://www.udel.edu/stuguide/12-13/code.html>).

Strategies for Effectively Engaging Families

- Offer access to program information
 - Orientation and open house events
 - General resources (e.g., newsletters)
 - GREAT opportunity to model student engagement and independence
- Offer supports specifically for families
 - Separate and/or connected to other university programs for parents (e.g., support/education groups and trainings)
 - Heads-up notifications on major happenings in program/university





Including Students in Family Engagement

- Some students may want families more or less involved
- Thinking through and communicating preferences
- Helping students to develop leadership skills through self-led meetings, etc.
- Support in developing communication strategies

Families as Partners:

- Find ways for their voices to be heard
 - Have them share experiences that have worked well in the past
 - Model how their opinions/ideas will be considered, e.g., during person-centered planning
- Inclusion in program evaluation process
- Sitting on advisory councils
- Create leadership opportunities for facilitating and extending university activities

Additional consideration?

- FERPA
- Guardianship
- Residential
- Health and safety – how determined?

Contact Information

Brian Freedman, Ph.D.

CLSC Director

Associate Director, Center for Disabilities Studies

CLSC-info@udel.edu

brianf@udel.edu

302-831-4688