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Family Factors and School

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Eastern Kentucky University

Family Factors and School

Honors Thesis

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Spring 2016

By

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Abstract

Family Factors and School

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One of the most overwhelming issues at Eastern Kentucky University is academic retention. In 2013, Eastern had a four-year graduation rate of 23.5%. Each university has a goal to keep academic retention as high as possible. ECU has one of the highest rates of enrollment from students of the Appalachian region, an area of Kentucky that is diverse both ecologically and culturally than other regions of the state. ECU is also known among its students for being a “suitcase school,” a college or university that is active Monday through Friday, but is quiet on Saturday and Sunday due to students heading home for the weekend. This “suitcase” issue could be a result of familial tethering, which is linked to lower university connectedness and lower academic performance, and may be more prevalent among students from an Appalachian culture. A study was conducted to explore possible factors that may influence higher familial tethering (and, thus, more instances of the campus being “suitcased” on the weekends), and an analysis was conducted to see if Appalachian students are more likely to be tethered to home, and whether familial tethering affects academic retention and performance.

Keywords: familial tethering, Appalachia, students, academic performance, retention, school

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Family Factors and School

One of the most overwhelming issues at Eastern Kentucky University is academic retention. In 2013, Eastern had a four-year graduation rate of 23.5%, and, while that is an improvement over the previous few years, is not at an ideal 100%. ECU has one of the highest rates of enrollment from students of the Appalachian region in the state, an area of Kentucky that is diverse both ecologically and culturally than other regions of the commonwealth. ECU is also coined among its students as being a “suitcase school,” a college or university that is active Monday through Friday, but is quiet on Saturday and Sunday due to a large volume of students heading home for the weekend. With this in mind, what can we do to help solve the issue of academic retention? Does coming from an Appalachian background contribute to the lower graduation rate? Are students missing their lives from home and are missing out on a good quality education because their minds are focused on going home for the weekend? Does the “suitcase” issue affect their academic performance? These are the burning questions that came to mind upon

reflecting my experience at Eastern Kentucky University. In this thesis, I explore what are the possible factors of the “suitcase” issue, and how we can solve these problems in the university setting.

Literature Review

Appalachian Culture

Many students that attend Eastern Kentucky University are from the Appalachian range of Kentucky. Appalachia is defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) as the “region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi” (www.arc.gov). In particular, the region of the mountainous rural areas of Kentucky is the area of interest. For this region, some people have argued that it is a region of diversity, and that it is diverse in culture, geography, and economy (Latimer & Oberhauser, 2005; Tang & Russ, 2007; Zilik, 2007). The Appalachian states of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee (Tang & Russ, 2007) are described as economically distressed (www.arc.gov). The recession has taken its toll on Appalachian regions, and has created a larger increase in poverty rate and decline in median household income when compared to the rest of the United States (Jacobson, Lee, & Pollard, 2013; Wilson, et. al, 2015).

Academic retention in the Appalachian region is very low, especially in the Central Appalachian regions (Kentucky is included in this region). High school completion rate is 55% - 78% compared to the national average of 85.7%. College completion rate in this region is only 5.5% - 19.5% in comparison to the national average of 28% (www.arc.gov). Adolescents growing up in Appalachian regions do not have role models that can help motivate them through college, or provide resources that could help

or benefit their child with school, because fewer people have a college degree and have the experience of going to college. Poverty, inadequate schooling, and unemployed parents are all factors that hurt Appalachian college-bound students (deMarrais, 1998).

Appalachian culture is described as being collectivistic in nature (Gore, Wilburn, Treadway & Plaut, 2011), which differentiates from the rest of the country that tends to be individualistic. Collectivism is a larger part of other cultures in the world, like Asia, where family, community, and ties with others is more important than the individual self. Individualism-collectivism is largely a spectrum that, as Komarraju & Cokley (2008, p. 336) states, focuses on a “cultural group’s beliefs, norms, roles, and values regarding an individual’s membership in a group, as well as relationships with others” (Triandis, 1996). This region is also culturally identified as being different from mainstream U.S. culture, and often emphasizes family and strong interpersonal ties (Tang & Russ, 2007). These ties can include a strong sense of family origin (Beaver, 1986; Halperin, 1990; Keefe, 1998; Jones, 2002) and ties to the people around them (Batteau, 1982; Bryant, 1981; Matthews, 1966; Tang & Russ, 2007), and feeling as though they are a part a community in terms of a larger social identity (Beaver, 1986). Individuals from Appalachian cultures score higher on assessments on collectivism than they do on assessments on individualism. They also score higher on horizontal collectivism, which means these individuals feel they are in equal status among one another and they are part of a larger, collective Appalachian group (Tighe, 2007). Appalachian students may have an entirely different view of the importance of family and the importance of home life than students of other cultures in Kentucky.

For all of the above reasons, being of Appalachian culture could hinder a student from succeeding academically, especially if proper steps to ensure that one's cultural needs are met are not taken correctly. Eastern has a program for Appalachian students called the Center for Appalachian Regional Engagement and Stewardship (CARES). The goal of CARES is to improve the relationship between the university and the Appalachian region of Kentucky.

Familial Tethering

University connectedness refers to the concept of feeling connected or feeling like one "fits in" with the university, and that one is accepted and supported by others (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990). College students who feel more connected to others can predict higher educational outcomes, since most people desire and long for feeling connected and supported by other people (Osterman, 2000), and many studies have shown a positive correlation between feeling connected and academic success (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Zea, Reisen, Beil, & Caplan, 1997). Children who report a higher sense of connectedness to the classroom are found to have higher academic motivation and performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

In a study by Wilson and Gore (2009), a positive relationship was found between university connectedness, GPA, and Appalachian students, yet a relationship did not exist among non-Appalachian students. This could mean that, among Appalachian students, feeling connected to their university, in a similar way to feeling connected to the in-groups from their Appalachian home communities, is a predictor of academic success.

Familial tethering is a relatively new concept that is ongoing current research. Appalachian culture is known for its interpersonal ties and feelings of family origin and

kinship ties, as mentioned earlier. College students from Appalachian cultures that emphasize interdependent family relationships may find themselves struggling to keep up with university obligations and family obligations (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). A study by Wilson, et al. (2015) found that being of Central Appalachian origin predicted higher levels of familial tethering, which, in turn, predicted lower university connectedness. Lower university connectedness is correlated with lower academic success (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Zea, Reisen, Beil, & Caplan, 1997). In turn, being of Appalachian origin is indirectly connected to lower academic success.

Familial tethering has been identified into three sub-categories of tethering. A person may be tethered through social internalization, where a person wants to see the people they are attached to from home. They can be tethered through ecological internalization, in that they may be missing the familiar environment of home or miss familiar structures or features from home, such as buildings, mountains, lakes, etc. Lastly, they can be tethered through externalization, where a person is expected by other people to be attached to home. For example, it could be mom and dad telling someone to come home more often, or having a feeling of obligation to go home in order to satisfy others.

Research Gaps

A link between Appalachia and familial tethering has not been heavily researched. There are gaps in the current research. Extensive research into the factors that may contribute to the rates of familial tethering among Appalachian students have not been conducted. Prior research has indicated that familial tethering does have an effect on Appalachian students, but in what way does it affect them? Does it impact their academic

performance? What factors make Appalachian students more likely to be tethered to their life at home? The current study was conducted to find whether specific factors are correlated with each type of familial tethering, and to find if higher rates of familial tethering is correlated with lower academic performance. Familial tethering was predicted to correlate with Appalachian origin, family background (the education, economy, and health of the family), isolation, fear of success, university connectedness, gender, year of birth, GPA, number of children or extended family in the household, and independent, interdependent, relational, and physical self-construals.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In order to determine what factors may be at work with familial tethering, a study was conducted, sent out, and results were received for analysis. A total of 298 students from Eastern Kentucky University enrolled in introductory Psychology courses participated in the study. 51 participants were male (17%), 246 participants were female (83%), and 1 did not respond. 123 participants were identified as being from an Appalachian county (42%), 169 from non-Appalachian counties (58%), and 6 either did not respond or did not identify where they lived. 272 participants were Caucasian/White (91.6%), 8 were African American/Black (0.3%), 4 were Hispanic/Hispanic American (0.1%), 3 were Asian American (0.1%), 4 were Native American (0.1%), 6 were Other (0.2%), and 1 did not respond. Participants of the study completed an online questionnaire by clicking on a link on an online system through Eastern Kentucky University and volunteering to take the survey. An informed consent statement was provided prior to taking the survey. Participants will complete the measures for the

current study, in addition to associated assessments. Survey items are going to be presented in the same order for all participants. Upon completion of the survey, participants were given a debriefing statement, detailing the purpose of the study and what the study was looking for.

Materials

As familial tethering is linked to academic performance, factors that may influence academic performance could be a link for familial tethering. The following factors are examined in the current study for familial tethering.

Familial Tethering. As an indicator for the current level of familial tethering, participants were asked questions regarding social internalization (feeling connected due to friends and people you are acquainted with), ecological internalization (feeling connected due to the environment one grew up in or is familiar with), and externalization (feeling connected due to an expectation, like being expected by mom and dad to come home every so often). Prompts include, “You think about family members back home” and “Your family members expect you to visit them in person,” and participants selected one of five responses in response to each statement (5 – *daily*, 4 – *several times weekly*, 3 – *once weekly*, 2 – *several times monthly*, 1 – *less than once a month*, and 0 – *never*).

Appalachian Origin. In order to determine which participants were of Appalachian origin, participants were asked, “In which county and state did you spend most of your childhood? ____ (e.g. Madison County, KY.)” Responses to this question were coded as “Appalachian” or “Non-Appalachian” based on the county of residence provided as a response. Coding was done in referral to the Appalachian Regional Commission’s list of counties in KY (<http://www.arc.gov/counties>).

Family Background. Participants were asked free-response questions regarding family education (“How many of your immediate family members (e.g. parents, siblings) attended college?”), economy (“What is the total household income of your family?” and “Which economic sector best represents your family?”), and health (“How many family members living back home suffer from a chronic illness or condition (i.e. something that requires significant medical care)?”) These questions could be influencing familial tethering by making family matters more important than their connectedness and education at Eastern Kentucky University.

Independent and Interdependent Self-Conceptualization. A key element to Appalachian culture is self-construal. There are two ends of a spectrum with self-construal: independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal. Individualistic cultures tend to identify more with an independent self-construal, meaning they think of the talents, abilities, and traits of the individual, while collectivistic cultures tend to identify with an interdependent self-construal, where they think of these abilities in terms of the community or group instead of an individual. Appalachian cultures are more collectivistic in nature, and thus are predicted to have a more interdependent self-construal. This may be affecting academic performance in addition to other factors. To assess self-construal, the Singelis Self-Conceptualization Scale (Singelis, 1994) was used in the survey. Statements were provided like “My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am,” and “When I think of myself, I often think of my close friends and family also.” Participants then rated on a scale how much they agreed with each statement (1 – *strongly disagree*, 2 – *disagree*, 3 – *disagree somewhat*, 4 – *neutral*, 5 – *agree somewhat*, 6 – *agree*, and 7 – *strongly agree*).

Relational Self-Construal. Another type of self-construal that may affect Appalachian students is relational self-construal. Individuals who score highly with relational self-construal identify themselves in terms of their close relationships with others rather than identify as an individual. The Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal scale (Cross, et al., 2000) was used to assess relational self-construal, and participants rated to what degree they agreed to each statement (1 – *strongly disagree*, 2 – *disagree*, 3 – *disagree somewhat*, 4 – *neutral*, 5 – *agree somewhat*, 6 – *agree*, and 7 – *strongly agree*).

Physical Self-Construal. The last type of self-construal that might be working on these students is physical self-construal. Those who rate highly in this type of self-construal might identify themselves as being more physically-oriented, or they might think of their abilities in terms of how well one can accomplish a task with their hands. The Physical Self-Construal scale (Gore), and participants rated how much they agreed to each statement (1 – *strongly disagree*, 2 – *disagree*, 3 – *disagree somewhat*, 4 – *neutral*, 5 – *agree somewhat*, 6 – *agree*, and 7 – *strongly agree*).

Isolation. We predicted that feeling isolated while in college could have an impact on academic retention and performance. Participants completed the Perceived Isolation subscale of the Sense of Belonging (SB) instrument (Hoffman et al., 2002). Items included, “It is difficult to meet other students in class,” and “No one in my classes knows anything personal about me,” and participants rated how much they agreed to each statement (1 – *completely untrue*, 2 – *mostly untrue*, 3 – *equally true and untrue*, 4 – *mostly true*, and 5 – *completely true*).

Fear of Success. It may be possible that Appalachian students have a fear of success. To evaluate this, participants completed the Fear of Success scale (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976), which included items like, “The only way I can prove my worth is by doing well in school” and “Even when I do well in school, I sometimes feel phony or a fraud.” Participants then scored how much they agreed (1 – *strongly disagree* to 5 – *strongly agree*).

University Connectedness. University Connectedness has been found to correlate with familial tethering. To assess this factor, participants completed the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale (Goodenow, 1993). Items included, “I feel like a real part of ECU,” and “Sometimes I feel as if I don’t belong at ECU,” and participants rated on how much they agreed (1 – *not at all true* to 5 – *completely true*).

Demographic Information. To assess other variables, free-response questions were provided. Questions about basic information (sex, year of birth, racial group, and citizenship status) were asked. To assess family size, questions like, “How many children do you have?” and “How many grandparents or members of your extended family lived in your home?” were also prompted to participants. GPA was asked to assess academic performance. To assess the economic sector of the family, a multiple choice question was provided with four responses (Agricultural, Business, Industrial, and Service.) Lastly, questions about how many family members attended college and the likelihood that their peer group went to college after high school were asked. Due to irrelevant and insufficient responses, questions regarding the number of friends attending college,

graduating, and receiving postgraduate degrees have been omitted from the results. (See Appendix for the detailed demographic information questions that were asked.)

Results

The Effects of Familial Tethering

To test if being of Appalachian origin was correlated with social internalization, ecological internalization, and externalization, a series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted with Appalachian origin as the independent variable and social internalization, ecological internalization, and externalization being dependent variables. Being of Appalachian origin correlates with ecological internalization ($M_{non-app} = 1.79$, $SD = 1.79$, $M_{app} = 2.05$, $SD = 1.22$, $t(290) = -1.91$, $p = .05$) and externalization ($M_{non-app} = 2.30$, $SD = .94$, $M_{app} = 2.05$, $SD = .78$, $t(290) = -.30$, $p < .05$). The correlation with social internalization was non-significant ($p > 0.5$).

Intercorrelations Among Tethering Types

Each type of tethering was tested for correlation with each other. A bivariate correlation was conducted between each type of tethering. All three types of familial tethering are significantly correlated with each other. Social internalization is correlated with ecological internalization ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) and externalization ($r = .49$, $p < .01$), and ecological internalization is correlated with externalization ($r = .33$, $p < .01$).

To test the hypothesis that familial tethering and university connectedness are correlated with academic performance, a series of bivariate correlations were performed with familial tethering and university connectedness as the independent variables and GPA was the dependent variable. No significant relationship between any types of

tethering was found with GPA ($p > .05$). As in line with previous research, university connectedness was positively correlated with GPA ($r = .14, p < .05$), but being of Appalachian background did not significantly correlate with university connectedness.

Factors that May Influence Tethering

For each factor, bivariate correlations (unless noted otherwise) were conducted to assess the correlation between a factor (independent variable) and social internalization, ecological internalization, or externalization (dependent variables).

Individual Factors. An independent samples t -test was conducted to test whether gender correlates with any form of tethering. Gender and social internalization was found to be significantly correlated ($p < .01$), with females ($M = 3.22$) being more socially tethered than males ($M_{female} = 3.22, SD = .905, M_{male} = 2.80, SD = .97, t(295) = -2.99, p < .01$). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess whether race correlates with any form of tethering, and was found to be non-significant with any race. Birth year was found to correlate with externalization ($r = .11, p < .05$).

Self-Construct. Participants who scored higher in relational self-construct were strongly correlated with all three forms of tethering, social internalization ($r = .37, p < .01$), ecological internalization ($r = .25, p < .01$), and externalization ($r = .26, p < .01$). Those who also scored higher in physical self-construct were also strongly correlated with all three forms of tethering as well, social ($r = .16, p < .01$), ecological ($r = .30, p < .01$), and externalization ($r = .29, p < .01$). Both independent and interdependent self-construct were strongly correlated with all three forms of tethering. Independent self-construct correlated with social ($r = .24, p < .01$), ecological ($r = .22, p < .01$), and

externalization ($r = .21, p < .01$). Interdependent self-construal correlated with social ($r = .20, p < .01$), ecological ($r = .15, p < .01$), and externalization ($r = .19, p < .01$).

Family Factors. The number of children was positively correlated with ecological internalization ($r = .11, p < .05$). The number of parents in the home is strongly correlated with ecological internalization as well ($r = .15, p < .01$). The number of extended family members in the home (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) was correlated with externalization ($r = .11, p < .05$). The number of family members who are suffering from a chronic illness or condition at home is strongly correlated with externalization ($r = .16, p < .01$).

Economic Sector. To test how economic sector may be correlated with each type of tethering, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The economic sector of the family was found to correlate with ecological internalization ($F(3, 280) = 3.22, p = .02$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that no particular sector was significantly more likely to have higher ecological internalization than another ($p > 0.5$), but those who come from a family of an Agricultural sector was slightly (but not significantly) more likely to be ecologically tethered than others ($p = .07$).

Classroom Factors. There are several classroom behaviors that may be connected to familial tethering. However, differences in isolation, GPA, fear of success, and university connectedness were not found to strongly correlate with any one particular type of familial tethering.

Appalachian Families

For a more descriptive analysis on how being from Appalachia affects how a student studies for class and how many family members attend college, independent

samples *t*-tests were conducted. The two variables for these tests were Appalachian origin (independent variable) and the factor being tested (dependent variable). Being from Appalachia does not correlate with rates of GPA, skipping class, or how many hours an individual studies for class. Appalachian families are significantly much less likely to graduate from college, both immediate family ($M_{non-app} = 1.31$, $SD = 1.22$, $M_{app} = 1.14$, $SD = .998$, $t(270) = 1.29$, $p < .01$), and with extended family ($M_{non-app} = 4.21$, $SD = 5.01$, $M_{app} = 2.73$, $SD = 3.58$, $t(240) = 2.64$, $p < .01$). Appalachian extended families are also significantly less likely to attend college ($M_{non-app} = 4.75$, $SD = 5.32$, $M_{app} = 3.43$, $SD = 4.27$, $t(244) = 2.13$, $p < .05$), and are less likely (but not significantly) to attend a graduate school or be post-graduate students ($M_{non-app} = 1.02$, $SD = 1.55$, $M_{app} = .83$, $SD = 1.08$, $t(244) = 1.12$, $p = .05$). Lastly, Appalachian families are significantly much less likely to have extended family in the same household ($M_{non-app} = .65$, $SD = 1.12$, $M_{app} = .48$, $SD = .79$, $t(286) = 1.48$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

Appalachia has a few effects on students at Eastern Kentucky University. The present study found that Appalachian students are more likely to be tethered to their homes through social internalization (missing friends, familiar faces) and ecological internalization (missing familiar buildings, locations), but are not necessarily correlated with externalization. All three forms of familial tethering are correlated to one another, so a person with one type of tethering is likely to have the other two types. In the current study, familial tethering does not appear to correlate with GPA. University connectedness (or how connected a student feels to Eastern Kentucky University as a whole) does

correlate with GPA, a finding that is consistent with prior research. Being of Appalachian background does not seem to correlate or predict university connectedness.

Female students at EKU are more likely than males to be tethered to their homes socially. Race has no effect on familial tethering. Birth year has been found to correlate with externalization (this could mean the younger you are, the more likely you are expected to go home to mom and dad.)

Relational self-construal and physical self-construal are both correlated with all three elements of familial tethering. The more you identify yourself in terms of your close relationships instead of your individual self, and the more you identify with your physical body and abilities, the more likely you are to be tethered. Surprisingly, both independent self-construal (identifying as an individual) and interdependent self-construal (identifying as a group) are positively correlated with familial tethering.

The number of children and parents in a family is positively correlated with ecological internalization, meaning, the more children and parents are present, the more a person is tethered to familiar buildings like schools and offices. The number of extended family members in a household is correlated with externalization. Perhaps this could mean that, the more grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins you have in your household, the more you feel tethered due to an expectation (for example, “Grandma wants me to come home every other day.”) However, Appalachian families are less likely to have extended family in the household than non-Appalachian families.

The economic sector of a family (what type of career or income a family has) is correlated with ecological internalization, in particular, the Agricultural sector. Perhaps

families that are from agricultural backgrounds are more tethered to their farms and livelihood than other families.

In the classroom setting, a student that scores higher in isolation than other students in the classroom is correlated to score higher in externalization. Perhaps it could mean that, the more secluded a person is from their students and peers, the more they feel expected to go home.

Lastly, more analyses were conducted to help target demographic information of Appalachian students. Students from Appalachia are no more likely to have differences in GPA, study less hours, or skip class than students from non-Appalachian regions, a finding that is consistent with prior research. However, members of Appalachian immediate and extended families are less likely to graduate and complete their college education, and extended families are less likely to attend college at all.

Limitations to the Study

There are a few limitations to the study. Most of the participants were female, which could contribute to a gender bias. All of the participants are college students at Eastern Kentucky University enrolled in introductory psychology courses. While an introductory psychology course can be taken by all students at ECU, there can be a bias.

Other limitations can include how the study defined which participant was considered part of "Appalachian culture." Just because a person was born into a county that is identified as "Appalachian," doesn't necessarily mean one isn't influenced by a neighboring city or county. Madison County, an Appalachian county for example, may be influenced by Fayette County, a neighboring county that is not Appalachian. A person

may have moved into an Appalachian county from a non-Appalachian county and are now take a part in two cultural identities.

What This Means for EKV

There are several solutions that Eastern Kentucky University can implement to help these issues on hand. From the results of this study, it was found that Appalachian students are likely to be tethered to their families and homes through social internalization and ecological internalization. While these students are not expected to go home, they may go home because they miss their loved ones and miss seeing the familiar roads where one grew up, or a familiar school one may have attended in the past. Previous research has indicated that higher rates of familial tethering correlates with lower university connectedness (Wilson, et al., 2015), and the results from this study indicated among non-Appalachian and Appalachian populations, students who do not feel connected to the university are correlated with lower GPAs.

Gender also has a role in familial tethering. Women are more likely to be socially tethered to friends and family than men are. This could be a gender-based difference that Eastern Kentucky University should focus on in order to lower familial tethering and make students feel more connected to the university.

Relational and physical self-construals are correlated with higher levels of familial tethering. Both of these self-construals are common elements of Appalachian cultures. Appalachian students identify more with kinship ties, especially with the people around them (Batteau, 1982; Bryant, 1981; Matthews, 1966; Tang & Russ, 2007), and many Appalachian students may identify with higher physical self-construals. These two self-construals are correlated with higher familial tethering, as they are more likely to

hold on to those close kinship ties from home. The current study also found that those from Agricultural economic backgrounds may be more likely to become tethered than other economic sectors. Eastern Kentucky University should keep these in mind.

What Can ECU Do?

Eastern Kentucky University already has a little bit of momentum in establishing support for students from Appalachian cultures. Eastern has a program for Appalachian students called the Center for Appalachian Regional Engagement and Stewardship (CARES). The goal of CARES is to improve the relationship between the university and the Appalachian region of Kentucky. ECU has a higher rate of attendance of students from the Appalachian region than other universities in the state, so proper care needs to be taken for these students so they can excel in their studies.

The best approach for Eastern Kentucky University to do is to offer events and incentives that engage students while they are attending college. The number one complaint among ECU students is that the university is a “suitcase” school. Involving students in events and activities helps to promote university connectedness. While ECU cannot remove familial tethering among its students across the board, increasing the feeling of being connected to a larger campus should give a leg up on both Appalachian and non-Appalachian students. Offering more events, like a fair outside the Powell building, will help to increase student engagement.

One of the reasons that explain a low amount of student engagement and higher rates of students going home on the weekends is the lack of weekend events. Consequently, the reason why events are not held on the weekends is because of lack of interest or lack of students on campus to attend the weekend events. It is a cycle that

EKU finds themselves to be stuck in, however, this cycle will not be broken unless ECU starts creating weekend events. It is already known that students are likely to stay on-campus if there is a weekend event they would rather not miss, such a football or basketball game or an event happening in a fraternity or sorority. Therefore, holding events on the weekends that are interesting to ECU students will likely keep them on-campus and keep them from hypothetically taking their suitcase home with them.

Events that occur at ECU are usually held during the school week, sometimes during class time, and are not convenient times for students. Often times, events will be held in the afternoon around the Powell Student Center during lunch time. This is not a convenient time for students to attend an event. If a student is able to attend, they are unlikely to stick around for very long due to class. If an event needs to happen during the school week, it should be planned for evenings when students are most likely to not have class. Events that are held at 5-7pm rather than 10am-1pm are more convenient to students, especially if it is well-known to students that the event is occurring.

Eastern Kentucky University should offer more diverse events for all cultures and all interests. Not all students are interested in hearing live band performances or going to fairs where one talks to people sitting at booths. Offering a wide range of events, like offering something akin to First Friday Berea or celebrating and exposing students to cultures around the world, will capture more student interest and foster an openness to cultural diversity.

Providing tools and resources to help understand education and to help students learn is also an excellent way to help bring student engagement up. Offering helpful resources, such as the Noel Studio and study groups, can help make students feel as

though they are not isolated from their peers, or feel as though there's a wall between professors and students. There is a correlation with university connectedness and academic success (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Zea, Reisen, Beil, & Caplan, 1997), so offering more ways to increase academic success will likely raise university connectedness as well. The more successful a student feels in the classroom, the more likely they may be able to connect with others on-campus.

A great way to motivate students to stay on-campus for the weekends is to offer events that families can attend. A student is unlikely to come home if an event is happening at ECU that their family can attend as well. In the past, it seems that Eastern only holds events for families a few (maybe even a couple) times a year, usually geared toward freshman students. Offering more events for families to come will resonate well within the Appalachian student population if they are tethered with social internalization, as they are able to be with the people they are tethered to while still engaging in university activities.

Eastern needs to keep in mind not to provide too many events as well. If there is an event every weekend, or only lesser, non-important events happen on the weekends, students may go home anyway, feeling like they aren't "missing out" on anything special. It is important, then, to create an "atmosphere" of sorts where weekend activities are unique and wouldn't be something a student would want to miss. Perhaps it should be considered to hold the most popular events at Eastern on the weekends and the less popular ones during the weekdays. This way, events and happenings are occurring often, but the best ones are on the weekends and going home would be a shame because a student would be missing out.

If Eastern Kentucky University would rather not do more events, then they should, at minimum, provide support for Appalachian students. Familial tethering is higher among these students, and their identities are more focused on interpersonal relationships than the individual self (Tang & Russ, 2007). Students may be more likely to adapt successfully to the change of going to college if they are from Louisville, as their sense of identity is more geared toward the individual self rather than the community they grew up in. In contrast, students from Appalachian counties may find this harder to separate. Rather than forcing students to be a Colonel no matter what, ECU should focus more on integrating “being a Colonel” into their already pre-existing identities. Perhaps one thing ECU can do is offer ways of tying in family into the cultural identity of ECU students. Instead of just “ECU students,” offer ways for family members to be “ECU moms,” “ECU dads,” or be a part of the “ECU family.” Potential students who are touring the university often receive t-shirts with a slogan on it, sometimes with “#FutureColonel” or “Class of 2016” on it. Maybe, instead of just students receiving t-shirts, offer t-shirts for the entire family so that they can also feel like they are a part of ECU as much as the student is. If mom and dad have t-shirts that say “Proud to be an ECU parent” on them, they may feel connected to ECU with their college student. University connectedness can be more likely to occur in Appalachian students if members of the student’s pre-existing community feel like Eastern Kentucky University has become part of their identity as well. Embracing family instead of solely focusing on the student will be much more familiar with Appalachian students and foster inclusion of ECU in their cultural identity rather than remain a separate identity.

Visitation at Eastern Kentucky University is already complicated and difficult for most students, as Housing regulations often require students to check in their guests and guests are often expected to be out at certain times. However, if EKU was to offer a way for parents and families to visit students at the dorms without being checked in (such as a card that identifies them as a parent of an EKU student) and being able to visit their child without having a barrier, that would likely go well with Appalachian students who are socially and externally tethered to their family. More “guest swipes” for EKU students, or granting students to share their meal plan with others, will also go well, as students will be able to provide lunch and dinner for their visiting family. Appalachian families are more economically distressed than families of other cultures (www.arc.gov), so offering this would go well with Appalachian students who want to eat lunch or dinner with the families that they miss. Both of these may also encourage families to visit students during the weekdays, making students less likely to go home on weekends if they are socially or externally tethered.

College has always been traditionally viewed as “cutting the apron strings” between a child and family. “Going off to college” is seen as a large step toward adulthood and living on one’s own. However, in Appalachian cultures, family is a large part of one’s cultural identity, and thus going to college often means becoming detached from the family and community that make up one’s cultural identity. This is challenging for Appalachian students. More careful planning for these students and providing more ways to adapt to the challenges of making students feel included will go a long way.

Eastern Kentucky University is already doing a good job, but not a great job, and there are areas to improve. If a student feels more relief in terms of their familial

tethering and experience lower tethering as a result, then they are more likely to feel connected to the university (Wilson, et al., 2015), and more university connectedness is likely to improve academic performance (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Zea, Reisen, Beil, & Caplan, 1997). This may lead toward higher rates of retention, as students are performing better in their classes. Instead of the 5.5-19.5% college retention of Appalachian students (www.arc.org), maybe we can see this number jump to the national average.

In conclusion, Appalachian students are not statistically different in terms of how they perform in classroom settings. However, their retention rates are lower and they are not doing as well in their classes. Familial tethering may be a connecting link to this issue, and minimizing the effects of familial tethering among Appalachian college students may help to raise academic retention.

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Appendix

Section Questions

Listed below are questions for this section of the survey. Please provide a response for every question. If you are given the option to decline to answer a question, then declining to answer is considered a response.

1. In which county and state did you spend most of your childhood? (e.g., Madison county, KY.)
2. Are you a citizen of a country other than USA? If so, what country?
3. How many children do you have?
4. How many parents lived in your home while you were growing up?
5. How many grandparents or members of your extended family lived in your home while you were growing up?
6. What is your racial/ethnic group?
 - Hispanic/Hispanic American
 - Caucasian/White
 - African American/Black
 - Native American
 - Asian American
 - Other
7. What is your sex?
8. What is your year of birth?
9. How many hours per week do you typically spend studying for classes?

10. How many times per week do you typically skip a class?
11. What is your current GPA?
12. How many of your immediate family members (e.g., parents, siblings) attended college?
13. Out of those immediate family members, how many of them graduated?
14. How many of your immediate family members went on to receive a post-graduate degree (e.g., MSW, MBA, JD, MD, MA, PhD)?
15. How many of your extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) attended college?
16. Out of those extended family members, how many of them graduated?
17. How many of your extended family members went on to receive a post-graduate degree (e.g., MSW, MBA, JD, MD, MA, PhD)?
18. How many of your friends attended college?
19. Out of those friends, how many of them graduated?
20. How many of your friends have gone on to receive a post-graduate degree (e.g., MSW, MBA, JD, MD, MA, PhD)?
21. What is the total household income for your family?
22. How many family members living in back home suffer from a chronic illness or condition (i.e., something that requires significant medical care)?
23. Based on your family's history across generations, which economic sector best represents your family?
 - Agricultural
 - Business

Industrial

Service

24. What is the likelihood that someone from your graduating class went on to college?

Not at all likely

Very unlikely

Somewhat likely

Very likely

Extremely likely