

How Parental Relationships Influence Adolescents During the Transition to College

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Social relationships are an integral part of college life (Kennedy, 1999). Before leaving home, parents continuously shape how their children interact with others. At college, adolescents have a new opportunity to seek out individuals and relationships in their own way. Because early childhood attachments are incredibly meaningful for adolescents, these past relationships may ultimately shape how they connect with new people on campus (Nijhof & Engels, 2007).

In this survey, we aimed to explore new Auburn students' views on their transition to college and connections to home. We collected data from 106 undergraduate freshman or transfer students, who were surveyed through the Psychology Department's participant pool (83% Women, 22% Men, 0.9% Non-Binary/Gender-Nonconforming; 84% White American, 5.7% Asian/Asian American, 7.5% Biracial/Multiracial, 2.7% Other). We surveyed them on how negative to positive their overall transition to Auburn was, how easy or difficult it was to make friends at Auburn compared to home, how they coped with stress at Auburn, and how their relationship with their guardians had changed since coming to Auburn, what they communicated about with their guardians and their feelings of being at home at Auburn.

Participants ranked their transition to Auburn very positively even during a commonly difficult transition period (M=7.05, SD=2.10 on a 0-10 scale). In addition, this transition was strongly correlated with their sense of place at Auburn (M=5.35, SD=1.24 on a 1-7 scale), $r=.62, p<.001$. In turn, sense of place was also strongly correlated with students' current sense of well-being (M=3.84, SD=0.80 on a 1-6 scale), $r=.48, p<.001$. Although many participants said it was easier making friends at Auburn (47.47%), a similar number said it was easier at home (40.40%); 12.12% said it was the same. This shows that as incoming students have a better transition, they are also feeling more connected to Auburn, and they are doing better overall.

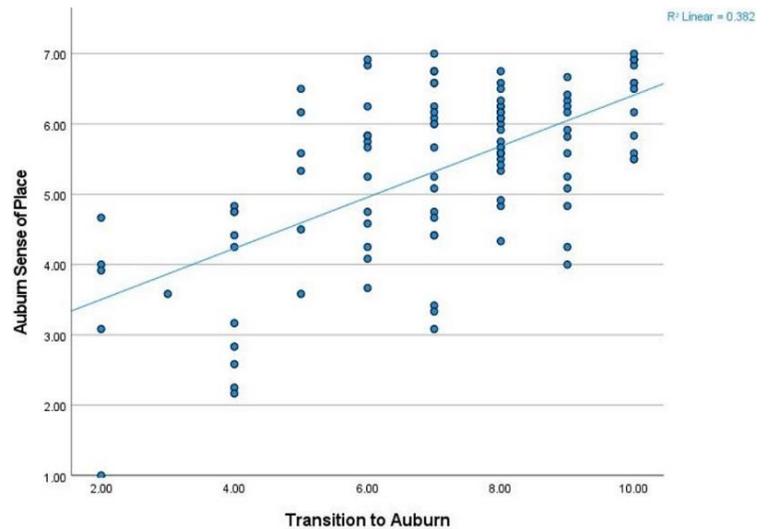


Fig. 1. Scatter plot with fit line illustrating the positive correlation between how positively students rated their transition to Auburn and their feelings of a sense of place at Auburn.

Participants reported that they talked with their guardians about many major stressors, including finances (M=5.08, SD=1.80), academic stressors (M=5.75, SD=1.44), life decisions (M=5.63, SD=1.46), and feeling unsure about their decisions (M=5.32, SD=1.80), all on a 1-7 scale. 46.2% of participants reported that connecting with guardians is one of the main ways that they cope with stress and deal with homesickness. This shows how important these connections to home still are for many students.

We found that incoming Auburn freshmen and transfer students still have positive experiences during this transition period, which relates to their sense of place at Auburn and sense of well-being. We also found that their ongoing conversations with guardians imply students still need and value support and guidance for the everyday stressors of colleges. This research is important for understanding what factors are correlated with student struggles in a new

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environment and their ability to have positive first-year experiences and social interactions. Although starting college is an exciting time to be independent and away from guardianship, college students often rely on their parents for support and comfort when embarking on this new journey full of highs and lows.

Statement of Research Advisor

Gabby conducted an expansive correlational study examining numerous important factors for understanding when incoming students struggle and when they thrive in their new social environments at Auburn. Learning more about these factors can help students have more positive transitions to Auburn as well as more fulfilling student life at Auburn. Gabby’s research also has implications for the broader academic, health, and overall personal concerns of first year and transfer undergraduate students at Auburn University.

- Sara Driskell, *Department of Psychological Sciences*

References

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2021-22 Undergraduate Student Research Fellow and Research Advisor Biography



Gabby Thompson is pursuing a degree in the College of Liberal Arts, specifically in Psychology. During her undergraduate research experience, she was mentored by Dr. Sara Driskell.



Dr. Sara Driskell is a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences. Dr. Driskell’s research focuses on intergroup processes in applied social psychology, including how groups perceive and interact with each other and the consequences of group membership in a variety of modern contexts, including

the classroom, the workplace, and the courtroom.