

Title of proposal:

What Does It Mean To Be Involved? Perspectives on Family Involvement In Higher Education In Cyprus

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General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework (up to 500 words)

Even though relationships between educational institutions and parents/guardians during their children's post-school academic years might be distant, it appears that family involvement is increasingly spreading into higher levels of education as many parents/guardians strive to contribute to and become involved in their children's university experience (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Lynk Wartman & Savage, 2008). Given this shift, it becomes important to investigate the cultural constructions and meanings associated with the phenomenon of family involvement in higher education, particularly given higher education's increasing cost and significance in an individual's life opportunities. This paper presents the pilot findings of a larger research study¹, which investigates whether (and if so, the extent to which) families are involved in undergraduate students' university education and how that might shape students' academic experiences in Cyprus. This study focuses on investigating the perspective of the main actors in the phenomenon (academic and administrative staff, undergraduate students and their families) in an effort to investigate in depth the rationale, nature, and understandings of family involvement in higher education in Cyprus. For the purposes of the study, 'family involvement' was meant to signify any type of involvement from member(s) of a student's family in any matter associated with the student's university studies with the intent of supporting them. The term 'family' referred to one's partner, guardian, or adult(s) with whom one is biologically related.

¹ 2013-15; *Family involvement in higher education* (principal investigator Lamprianou, I., Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Cyprus; Internal Research Projects, Research Committee, University of Cyprus)

Methods/methodology (up to 200 words)

The data set included individual interviews of undergraduate students and academic and administrative staff at a private university and student questionnaire survey data at the same private university and a state university in Cyprus, collected in 2011 and 2012. More specifically, interviews were conducted with twelve purposefully selected undergraduate students of all years of study and ten purposefully selected faculty and administrative staff at a private university in Cyprus; in addition, a questionnaire investigating the phenomenon was completed by a convenience sample of 101 undergraduate students attending a state university and 186 undergraduate students attending a private university (constitution of student sample: 76% women; average age 20.5 years old).

Expected outcomes/results (up to 200 words)

The data analysis indicates the existence of family involvement in higher education in Cyprus which however appears to take different forms in public and private universities. More specifically, it appears that the phenomenon involves a wide variety of aspects in students' studies, beyond merely the family's financial contribution, and extends over quite a wide time span with students drawing on different family members for different aspects of their studies. Both university staff and student participants disapproved of the phenomenon which they saw as hindering the development of students as autonomous individuals but voiced certain conditions under which family involvement could be useful or necessary. Interestingly, family involvement seemed to be more frequent at the private institution. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen if differences and similarities still persist in the case of a representative student sample to be collected as part of the broader study.

This research contributes to a growing body of work investigating parental involvement in higher education (e.g. Brooks, 2004; David, Ball, Davies, & Reay, 2003), the investigation of which is all the more necessary in an age of austerity where families expect to achieve maximum returns on their investment in their children's education.

References

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