

Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development

Volume 11 | Number 11

Article 12

2012

A Parent's Guide to the Christian College: Supporting Your Child's Heart, Soul, and Mind During the College Years

Brad A. Lau
George Fox University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lau, Brad A. (2012) "A Parent's Guide to the Christian College: Supporting Your Child's Heart, Soul, and Mind During the College Years," *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*: Vol. 11 : No. 11 , Article 12.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth/vol11/iss11/12

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Association of Christians in Student Development at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.

A Parent's Guide to the Christian College: Supporting your Child's Heart, Soul, and Mind during the College Years

Todd C. Ream, Timothy W. Herrmann, and C. Skip Trudeau

Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Brad A. Lau

Everyone who works in higher education has become familiar with the term “helicopter parents” and has probably even met a few of them along the way. Typically, when this term is used, it is used in a pejorative sense to indicate an unwelcome intrusion of parents into their son’s or daughter’s college experience. However, such a narrow view of the partnership between parents and the university limits potential benefits to the students. This is why most universities have added special sessions in pre-orientation summer programs and orientation itself to talk to parents about the university community and their child’s full engagement and participation in it. Ream, Trudeau, and Herrmann have done a great service by offering an excellent resource for parents with information and “education” that is vital to their meaningful involvement in our Christ-centered universities and the lives of their students.

The book is divided into two major sections. The first discusses the various domains of college life and highlights themes about the role of worship in the life of the campus as well as the in-class and out-of-class involvement of students. The authors argue that “common worship” is at the core of the Christian college experience and provides coherence and meaning by “affirm[ing] its responsibility to form the identity of students in ways that prepare them to offer their lives in praise and worship of God” (p. 37). This holistic perspective includes working with students as they encounter others who may not think the way they do and who challenge their beliefs – an important component of true education.

In addition to the dimension of common worship, the authors discuss the classroom experience by offering perspective on the choice of a major, pursuit of a career/vocation, the value of a liberal arts education, and student engagement. Out-of-class experiences are validated as essential to a well-rounded education that “connects what happens in the classroom with what happens outside of it, an idea known as the ‘seamless curriculum’” (p. 83). Research supports that living on-campus is extremely valuable and meaningful involvement and service is also encouraged.

The second section of the book focuses on the seasons of college life through (a) the lenses of the first-year experience, (b) “success” and how that is defined, (c) crisis during the college years, and (d) life after graduation. The authors rightly propose that “hospitality” is the foundation of the first-year experience since “. . . the practice of Christian hospitality begins with the assumption that our well-being is inextricably bound to the well-being of others” (p. 104). Of course, central to any discussion of the first year and beyond are learning how to live well with a roommate and mental and physical health and well-being. The notion of “challenge and support” is also introduced as are issues of safety and security. Finally, the notion of “emerging adulthood” and the transition from college to “real life” are presented as key considerations during the senior year as well as the post-college experience.

There are several points of critique that could be made regarding this excellent contribution to our work as Student Life professionals in general and to the parents of students in particular. First, throughout the book, the authors do a great job outlining the ways that a Christian college can and should meet the expectations and aspirations of Christian parents. They are less clear about what happens when our students have unbelieving parents and how and what we communicate to those families. I would suggest that this is critical as we seek to articulate the value of a Christ-centered education to the diverse families that our students represent. Along with this, I would have liked to see a stronger articulation and affirmation of the value of diversity and cultural competence in our work with students.

A second observation is that one of the significant challenges for many of our institutions is to articulate a meaningful connection between the liberal arts, a sense of vocation/calling, and an actual job after graduation. Clearly, parents may see the value of all three of these, but care deeply about the third as a primary outcome of their significant “investment.” Ream, Trudeau, and Herrmann are entirely correct that “employment is but one of the ways that particular calling is fulfilled” (p. 21), but we must not minimize the importance of this to parents and students – and not just as a function of career services. Is it a concern that 20% of 26-year-olds are living with their parents and that 60% of college students plan to live in their parents’ home after they graduate (pp. 175ff)? If so, is it a concern for parents about the way they parent or universities about the way they educate (or both or neither)? Ongoing dialogue about these tensions will be important as we look toward the future of Christian higher education, and I appreciated the authors’ treatment of this important topic.

Third, even at Christ-centered institutions, there are faculty members who are perceived as deconstructing what they see as the simplistic, childish, and denominational beliefs of students. From time to time, students will have difficulty reconstructing a vibrant faith after considering the difficult questions that have been raised in and out of class. How we reassure parents and come alongside students during this critical period of reflection and disequilibrium remains a significant concern for some parents and a worthwhile conversation for Student Life professionals. While the book touched on this, a fuller discussion might have been helpful as we think about our work with families.

Finally, Student Life staff interact with parents intensely during summer pre-orientation programs, fall orientation, and if parents have specific concerns about their daughter or son during the course of the college experience. Parent Councils, family weekends, or other programs may also offer some time for interaction and dialogue. Nonetheless, the question remains about how Student Life can and should maintain proactive, positive, consistent, and ongoing interaction with parents throughout the college years.

Ream, Trudeau, and Herrmann suggest early in their book that “[t]he question here is not whether parents should be involved, but in what manner” (p. 21). This is a poignant reminder that it is essential for Student Life to engage parents in meaningful and productive ways as we work toward a common end and goal. Our mutual interest is to care for and educate students in a seamless way so that students will come to understand and pursue their calling through their college years and beyond to the glory and praise of God. Of course, it involves much more than this but, as the authors suggest to parents, “Ultimately, the goal is that our students – your daughters and sons – might search for truth in a way

that leads them to desire and discover in ways consistent with the Christian narrative of creation, fall, and redemption” (p. 68). Challenging, supporting, and encouraging students in this pursuit without “living their lives for them” (p. 110) is essential as we equip the next generation of teachers, businesspersons, engineers, artists, and leaders!

Contributor

Brad A. Lau is the Vice President for Student Life at George Fox University.