

# **Want to Get Into College? Learn to Fail**

## **Students shouldn't stress perfection in college applications**

By Angel B. Pérez

January 31, 2012

I ask every student I interview for admission to my institution, Pitzer College, the same question, "What do you look forward to the most in college?" I was stunned and delighted recently when a student sat across from me at a Starbucks in New York City and replied, "I look forward to the possibility of failure." Of course, this is not how most students respond to the question when sitting before the person who can make decisions about their academic futures, but this young man took a risk.

"You see, my parents have never let me fail," he said. "When I want to take a chance at something, they remind me it's not a safe route to take. Taking a more rigorous course or trying an activity I may not succeed in, they tell me, will ruin my chances at college admission. Even the sacrifice of staying up late to do something unrelated to school, they see as a risk to my academic work and college success."

I wish I could tell you this is an uncommon story, but kids all over the world admit they are under tremendous pressure to be perfect. When I was traveling in China last fall and asked a student what she did for fun, she replied: "I thought I wasn't supposed to tell you that? I wouldn't want you to think I am not serious about my work!"

Students are usually in shock when I chuckle and tell them I never expect perfection. In fact, I prefer they not project it in their college applications. Of course, this goes against everything they've been told and makes young people uncomfortable. How could a dean of admission at one of America's most selective institutions not want the best and the brightest? The reality is, perfection doesn't exist, and we don't expect to see it in a college application. In fact, admission officers tend to be skeptical of students who present themselves as individuals without flaws.

These days, finding imperfections in a college application is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Students try their best to hide factors they perceive to be negative and only tell us things they believe we will find impressive. This is supported by a secondary school culture where teachers are under pressure to give students nothing less than an A, and counselors are told not to report disciplinary infractions to colleges. Education agents in other countries are known to falsify student transcripts, assuming that an outstanding GPA is the ticket to admission.

**"Failure is about growth, learning, overcoming, and moving on."**

Colleges respond to culture shifts, and admission officers are digging deeper to find out who students really are outside of their trophies, medals, and test scores. We

get the most excited when we read an application that seems real. It's so rare to hear stories of defeat and triumph that when we do, we cheer. If their perspectives are of lessons learned or challenges overcome, these applicants tend to jump to the top of the heap at highly selective colleges. We believe an error in high school should not define the rest of your life, but how you respond could shape you forever.

I've spent enough time in high schools to know teenagers will never be perfect. They do silly things, mess up, fall down, and lack confidence. The ability to bounce back is a fundamental life skill students have to learn on their own. The lessons of failure can't be taught in a classroom; they are experienced and reflected upon. During my weekend of interviews, another student told me, "I'm ashamed to admit I failed precalculus, but I decided to take it again and got a B-plus. I'm now taking calculus, and even though I don't love it, I'm glad I pushed through!" I asked him what he learned from the experience. "I learned to let go of shame," he said. "I realized that I can't let a grade define my success. I also learned that if you want anything bad enough, you can achieve it."

I smiled as I wrote his words down on the application-review form. This kid will thrive on my campus. Not only will the faculty love him, but he has the coping skills he needs to adjust to the rigors of life in a residential college setting. Failure is about growth, learning, overcoming, and moving on. Let's allow young people to fail. Not only will they learn something, it might even get them into college.

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# Making college matter

Leo M. Lambert & Peter Felten - August 15, 2016

Source: <http://theconversation.com/making-college-matter-63480>

Over the next several weeks 18.4 million students will be headed to colleges and universities in the United States. They, their families and taxpayers are making a monumental investment in the futures of these students, believing, correctly, that an undergraduate education is foundational to success in a global and knowledge-based economy.

Many students arrive in college without a clear sense of purpose or direction. That is to be expected. A significant part of the undergraduate experience, after all, involves grappling with big questions about professional, personal and civic identity. Who am I? What do I want to do with my life? How can I contribute to my community and the world? The best students pursue these questions with vigor.

But many others come to college with too little appreciation for the vast opportunities before them, gloss over foundational curricular requirements as merely hurdles to be cleared, show far too little drive in developing a plan to make the most of their educations and focus too heavily on the party scene.

Analyzing data from a study of more than two dozen institutions, sociologists Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa conclude that many students “enter college with attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors that are often at odds with academic commitment.” And many universities reinforce these beliefs by building lavish amenities and marketing themselves as something akin to a resort with a curriculum.

An undergraduate education is simply too precious an opportunity to squander or to approach halfheartedly. And while college should ultimately prepare graduates to make a living, it can be – it must be – far more than that.

The good news is that there are simple yet powerful things students can do to ensure that they have a transformative undergraduate experience, no matter where they go to college.

In our book *The Undergraduate Experience*, drawing on decades of work and scholarship in higher education and also interviews with leaders and students from many institutions, we identified what matters most for students.

Two factors are most important.

## **Take responsibility for learning**

Too often students (and others) think learning is a simple process of taking knowledge from the professor during class and then returning it, unharmed, on the test.

When sociologist Mary Grigsby interviewed scores of undergraduates at a large midwestern university, many students echoed the words of one who told her:

*"I hate classes with a lot of reading that is tested on. Any class where a teacher is just gonna give us notes and a worksheet or something like that is better. Something that I can study and just learn from in five [minutes] I'll usually do pretty good in."*

Real learning – that is, learning that makes a significant and lasting change in what a person knows or can do – emerges from what the student, not the professor, does. Of course, professors are critical actors in the process, but students are the ones doing the learning.

To take responsibility for their own learning, students need to move past what psychologist David Perkins has called possessive and performative understandings of knowledge, where learning is about acquiring new facts or demonstrating expertise in classroom settings.

Instead, meaningful learning emerges from a proactive conception of knowledge, where the student's goal is to experiment with new and unexpected ways of using what he or she is learning in different settings. This requires students to see themselves as the central actors in the drama of learning.

Whether students choose to take the stage or sit in the balcony matters immensely.

When students jump into learning, challenging themselves to stretch and grow, college is most powerful.

Reflections from an Ohio University engineering student show what this looks like:

*"[My goal for my senior] year was to try to do things that maybe I'm not good at already so that I can learn to do these things. I will have to do this once I have a job so avoiding projects that are uncomfortable for me now won't help me NOT avoid them when I'm a part of the work force."*

### **Develop meaningful relationships**

The relationships students form in college also have a profound influence on their experiences, shaping not only who they spend time with but how they will spend their time.

When scholars asked graduates at Hamilton College to think back on their undergraduate years, these alumni pointed to specific individuals (often professors, coaches or classmates) who shaped their paths.

Students typically think first about relationships with peers. These are essential, of course. Finding friends and cohort groups can be reassuring, but scholars have found that students who interact frequently with peers who are different in significant ways

(racially, ethnically, religiously, socioeconomically and so on) show more intellectual and social growth in college than those who don't.

Again, as with learning, students need to move beyond the familiar to find meaning.

And peer relationships are not only about fun. Decades of research have demonstrated that students who study together learn more and more deeply. As the mathematician Uri Treisman reported in a classic study of undergraduate calculus courses that has been replicated in other disciplines, students from many different backgrounds are more academically successful when they *“work with their peers to create for themselves a community based on shared intellectual interests and common professional aims.”*

Relationships with faculty also are highly significant.

A large 2014 survey by Gallup and Purdue University revealed that college graduates who believed they had a professor who (1) cared about them as individuals, (2) made them excited about learning and (3) encouraged them to pursue their dreams reported being far happier and more successful than their peers years after graduation.

A recent graduate of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Levine Scholars Program, a prestigious scholarship for academically talented students interested in civic engagement, told us how the mentoring of sociologist Diane Zablotsky transformed her view of herself:

*“I arrived at UNC-C shy and uncertain. But Dr. Zablotsky taught me how to go and get what I wanted. She made me do all the work, but coached along the way and helped me develop great confidence in myself.”*

### **What matters for all students**

Critically, what we're describing here doesn't apply only to privileged, 18-22-year-olds at elite institutions.

In fact, Ashley Finley and Tia Brown McNair, scholars at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, have shown that high-impact educational experiences like internships, undergraduate research, capstone courses and study abroad have particularly positive outcomes for students who traditionally have been underserved in American higher education.

A study at the University of California, Davis reinforces this finding by demonstrating that engaging in mentored undergraduate research beyond the typical requirements for biology courses is particularly significant in preparing African-American undergraduates to successfully pursue graduate study and careers in the sciences.

Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) also show that institutional prestige and financial resources do *not* determine the quality of student opportunities: *“Institutions with lower selectivity profiles can and often do offer*

*experiences with faculty that are at least comparable to those at more selective institutions."*

As the NSSE director notes: "Doing those things may not cost any more than not doing them."

Powerful education, in other words, is available to all students at all institutions, if they intentionally choose experiences that are challenging and relationship-rich.

### **Acting on what matters most**

Douglas Spencer, a 2016 Elon University graduate and now young alumnus trustee, captured what's at stake in recent remarks to fellow students.

Doug described coming to campus without a strong sense of who he was as a black man or of what he might do with his life. Then, challenged by friends and professors to think more deeply about his own identity, "I unlocked some sort of hidden energy I did not know I possessed." He began to read not just for class, but (even more) in his free time. Inspired by this reading and his other studies, and echoing W.E.B. Du Bois, *"It became clear to me that the only way I would find real success was if I learned to thrive in times of uncertainty."*

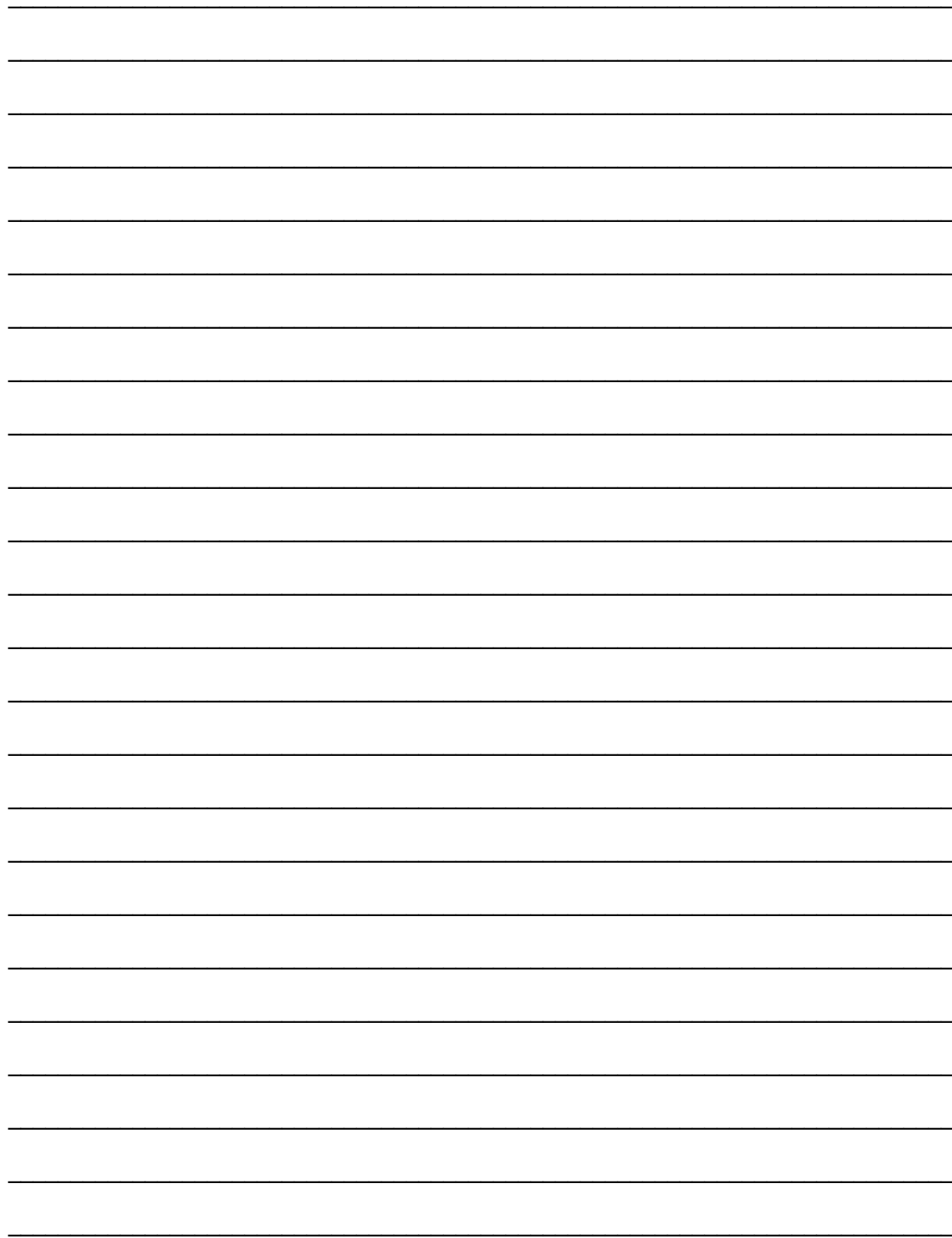
Colleges and universities play an outsized role in shaping the lives of individual students like Doug.

Indeed, we, as educators, cannot recall a time when it mattered more for higher education to cultivate students capable of acting entrepreneurially, ethically, cooperatively and creatively to address complex problems in local, national and global contexts.

That starts with students beginning the academic year ready to act on what matters most for their own learning.







## Source #1

### **Social Media as Community**

By Keith Hampton

Updated June 18, 2012 *New York Times* / *Opinion Pages* Excerpt

Neither living alone nor using social media is socially isolating. In 2011, I was lead author of an article in [Information, Communication & Society](#) that found, based on a representative survey of 2,500 Americans, that regardless of whether the participants were married or single, those who used social media had more close confidants.

A recent follow-up study, "[Social Networking Sites and Our Lives](#)" (Pew Research Center), found that the average user of a social networking site had more close ties than and was half as likely to be socially isolated as the average American. Additionally, my co-authors and I, in another article published in [New Media & Society](#), found not only that social media users knew people from a greater variety of backgrounds, but also that much of this diversity was a result of people using these technologies who simultaneously spent an impressive amount of time socializing outside of the house.

*The constant feed from our online social circles is the modern front porch.*

A number of studies, including my own and those of [Matthew Brashears](#) (a sociologist at Cornell), have found that Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago. However, a loss of close friends does not mean a loss of support. Because of cellphones and social media, those we depend on are more accessible today than at any point since we lived in small, village-like settlements.

Social media has made every relationship persistent and pervasive. We no longer lose social ties over our lives; we have Facebook friends forever. The constant feed of status updates and digital photos from our online social circles is the modern front porch. This is why, in "[Social Networking Sites and Our Lives](#)," there was a clear trend for those who used these technologies to receive more social support than other people.

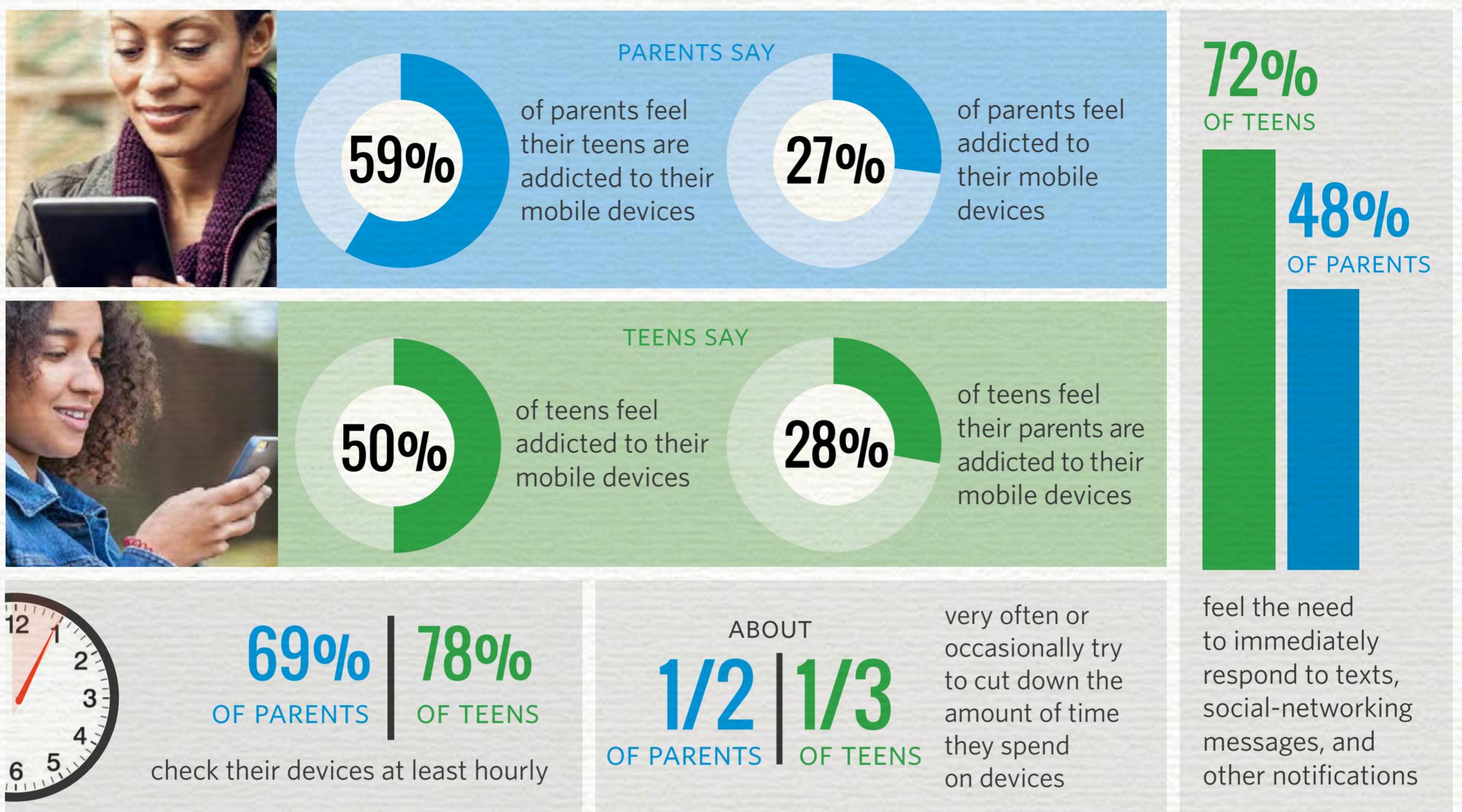
The data backs it up. There is little evidence that social media is responsible for a trend of isolation, or a loss of intimacy and social support.

*Keith Hampton is an associate professor in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers, and a past chairman of the American Sociological Association's section on Communication and Information Technologies. He is on on Twitter as @mysocnet.*



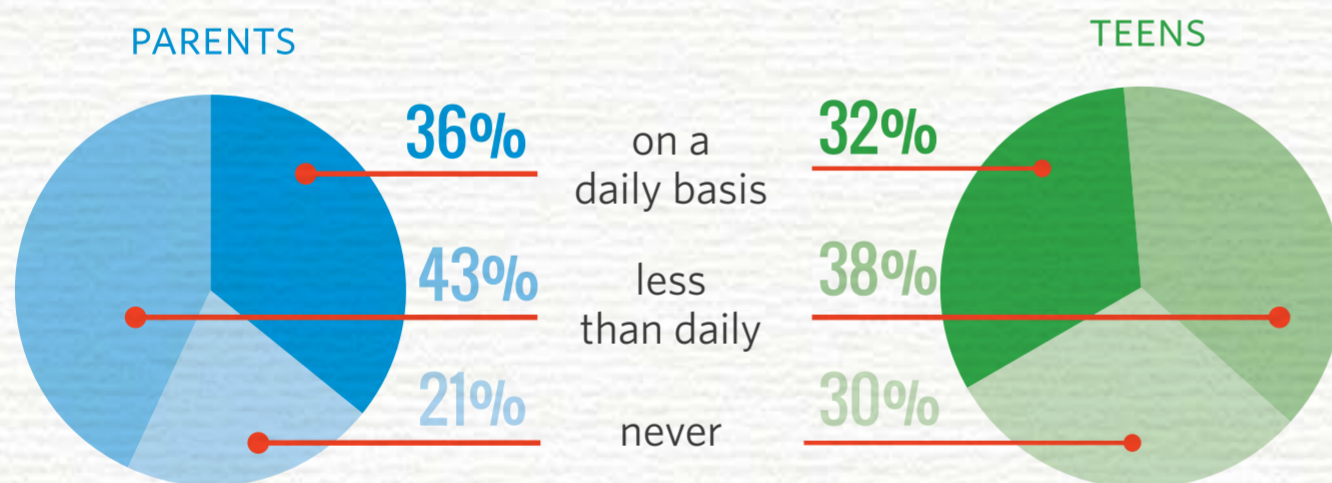
# DEALING WITH DEVICES: The Parent-Teen Dynamic

## Are We Addicted?

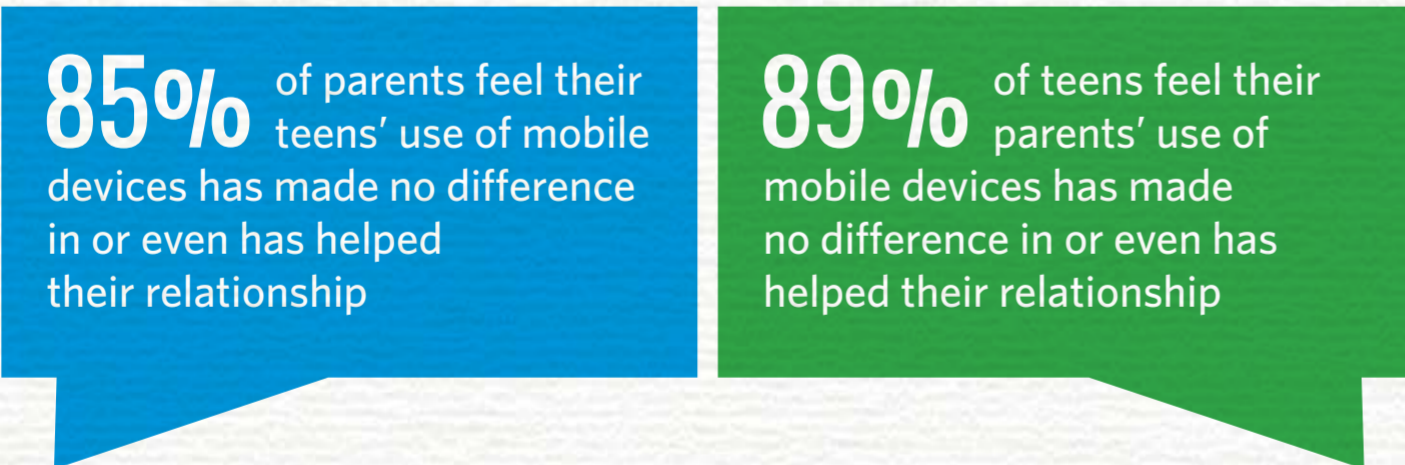


## Is It Causing Family Conflicts?

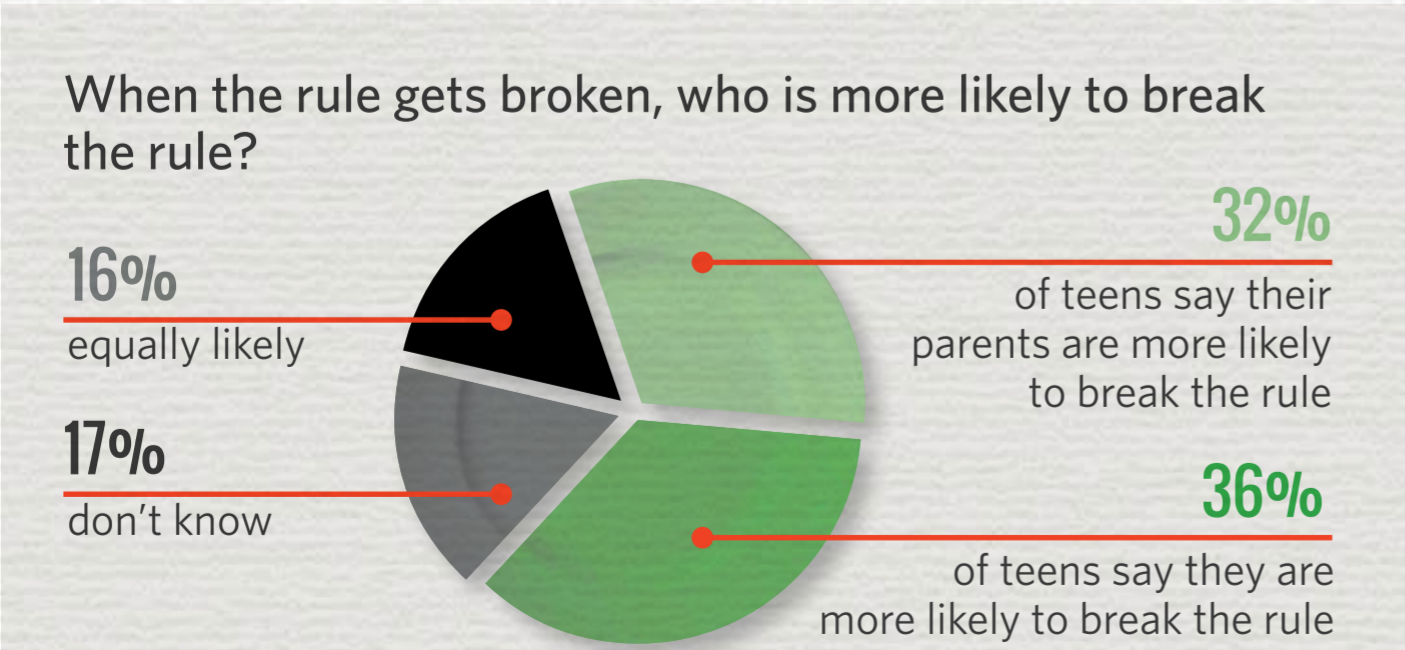
Teens and parents say they argue about device use:



The vast majority of families say devices aren't hurting parent-teen relationships ...



**66%** of parents and teens say mobile devices are not allowed at the dinner table



**METHODOLOGY:** Lake Research Partners designed and administered a nationwide telephone survey from February 16 to March 14, 2016, conducting 1,240 interviews of parents (n=620) and their children (n=620) (between the ages of 12 and 18), both of whom used a mobile device. The data for the parents and children sample were weighted slightly by gender, region, age, and race to reflect attributes of the actual population. The margin of error for this sample is +/-4.0%.

