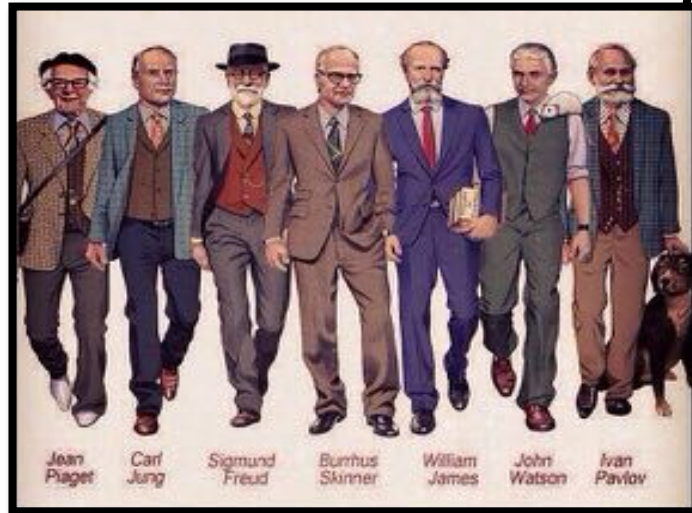


Perspectives on Friendship and Social Networks of Students and Alumni of an Inclusive Postsecondary Education Program (IPSE)

Stephanie Spruit

My College Experience



Your College Experience

- What was your everyday life like as a college student?
- What are your best memories from college?



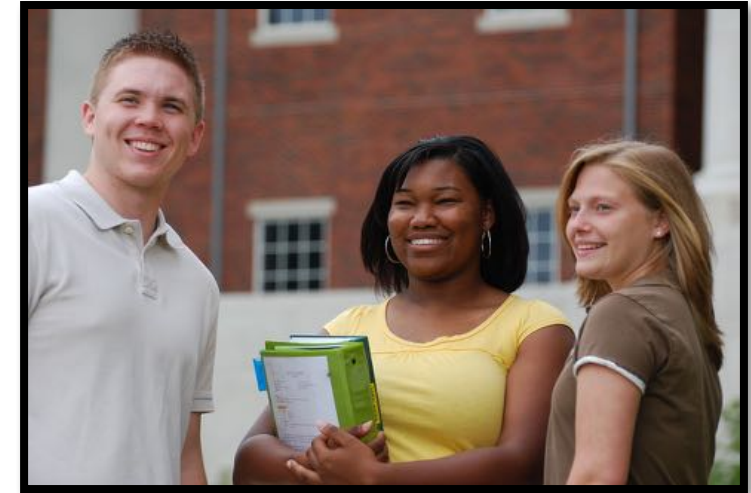
Next Steps at Vanderbilt

- Federally recognized Comprehensive Transition Program
 - Expanded from 2-year to 4-year program
 - Primarily for students with intellectual disabilities
- Students enrolled in Next Steps experience the full range of college activities
 - Classes, extracurricular activities, events, internships, sessions with peer mentors.
- Each student has a circle of support
 - 8-12 peer mentors, called Ambassadors
 - 4 Ambassador roles
 - Lunch Partner, Workout Partner, Academic Tutor, Daily Planner



Why Students Came to Vanderbilt

- “...opening many doors and many opportunities for me to be able to someday have a job and live on my own and do things for myself that I’ve never done before.” – Jeremiah
- “...because when I was visiting my brother, Issac, at college, he would have all these fun things and like, and have all these friends that he would hang out with, and I thought, oh, I want to go to college and be just like him.”- Cassidy
- “I’ve had both of my parents and my, both of my grandads went, both of my parents went to college here. ... And then my mom’s sister and her husband went here...I wanted to carry the tradition on, so.” - Emily



Rationale

What is important about friendship?

- “Relationships are what make the difference between being in the community and being part of a community” (Carter et al., 2013).



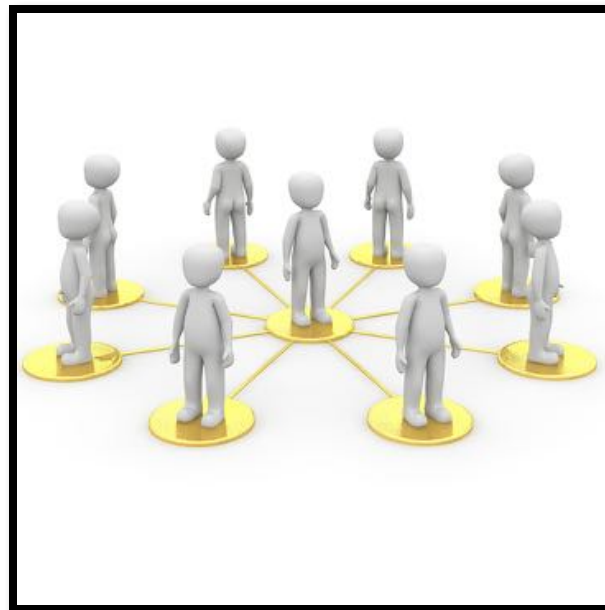
Your Thoughts on Friendship

- What does friendship mean to you?
- How do you interact with your friends?



Rationale

- van Asselt-Goverts et al. (2015) found that the social networks of young adults with intellectual disability (ID) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were smaller than those of typically developing young adults.



Rationale

Table 75. Friendship interactions of young adults, by disability category

	Learning disability	Speech/language impairment	Mental retardation	Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment	Autism	Traumatic brain injury	Multiple disabilities	Deaf-blindness
	Percent											
In the past year, percentage who saw friends outside of school or work at least weekly	82.5 (3.51)	84.4 (3.03)	58.1 (4.28)	75.2 (4.42)	76.3 (4.79)	77.2 (4.56)	66.0 (4.68)	80.0 (3.75)	48.2 (4.94)	77.3 (6.69)	52.8 (5.97)	62.3 (7.31)
Percentage communicating by computer at least daily	33.8 (4.29)	43.0 (4.07)	17.0 (3.25)	31.5 (4.67)	51.4 (5.50)	49.0 (5.78)	41.5 (4.82)	34.2 (4.40)	24.5 (5.50)	32.3 (7.37)	20.9 (4.78)	41.2 (7.37)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings regarding friendships are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school from 1 to 8 years so as not to include high school experiences; findings regarding electronic communication are for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 8 years. NLT52 percentages are weighted population estimates based on samples of approximately 4,000 young adults with disabilities for friendships and 4,120 for electronic communication.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLT52), Wave 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2009.

Newman, L. et al (2011). The post-high school outcomes of young adults with disabilities up to 8 years after high school. A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLT52) (NCSER 2011-3005). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Rationale

- Limited research
 - Perspectives of students with IDD in IPSE
 - Friendships of young adults with IDD
- College settings are abundant with social experiences
- IPSE provides young adults with IDD the opportunity to access college experiences

Research Questions

- What does friendship mean to current students and alumni of an IPSE program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)?
- What is the nature of the reported interactions between current students and alumni and their friends?
- How has the IPSE experience contributed to the friendships of students and alumni? What are potential areas of improvement in terms of supporting friendships?

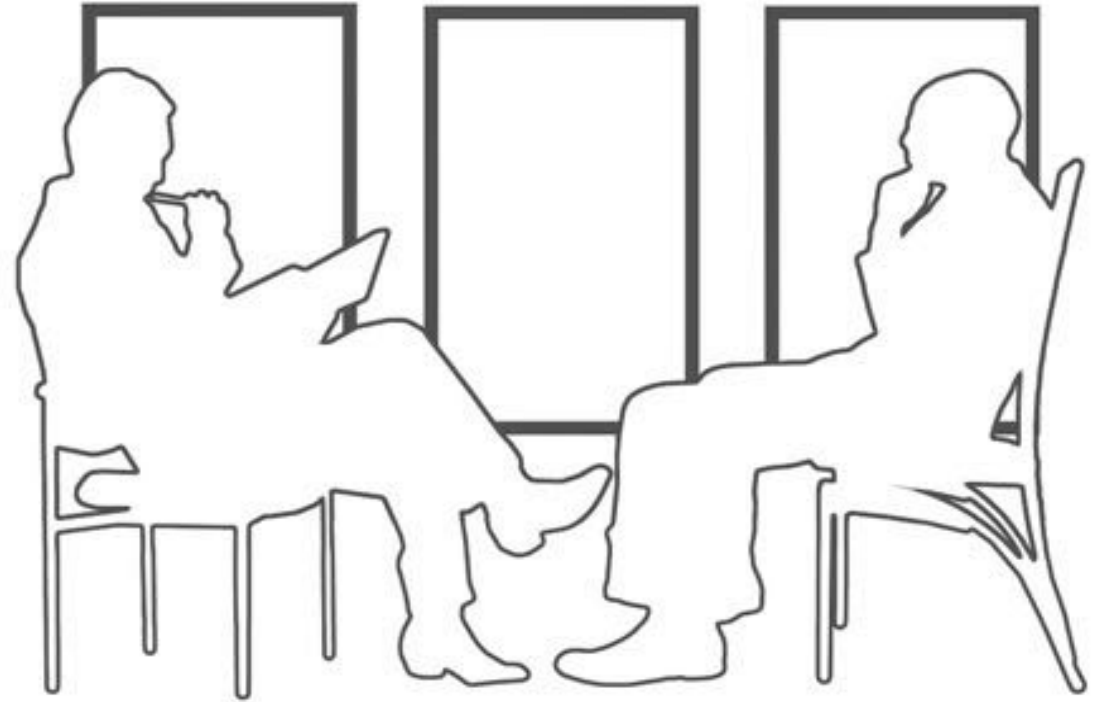
Method: Participants

- 12 of participants
 - 5 Current students
 - 7 Alumni
- Demographics
 - 9 Males, 3 Females
 - Ages 19 - 31
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - 83.3% White
 - 8.3% Asian
 - 8.3% Black

Self-Description of Disability
Staying focused for long periods of time.
Mild cerebral palsy
Did not provide description
Learning disability and I stutter.
Hard to focus with a lot going on.
I tend to ask questions frequently to help remind me.
Unique
Nothing to be disappointed of.
Left handed
CP- limited transportation issues
Very mild
Autism spectrum disorder
Staying focused for long periods of time.
Mild cerebral palsy

Method: Semi-Structured Interview

- Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews
 - In-person
 - On campus or in participant's home
 - Approximately an hour
 - Recorded
- Social Network Chart

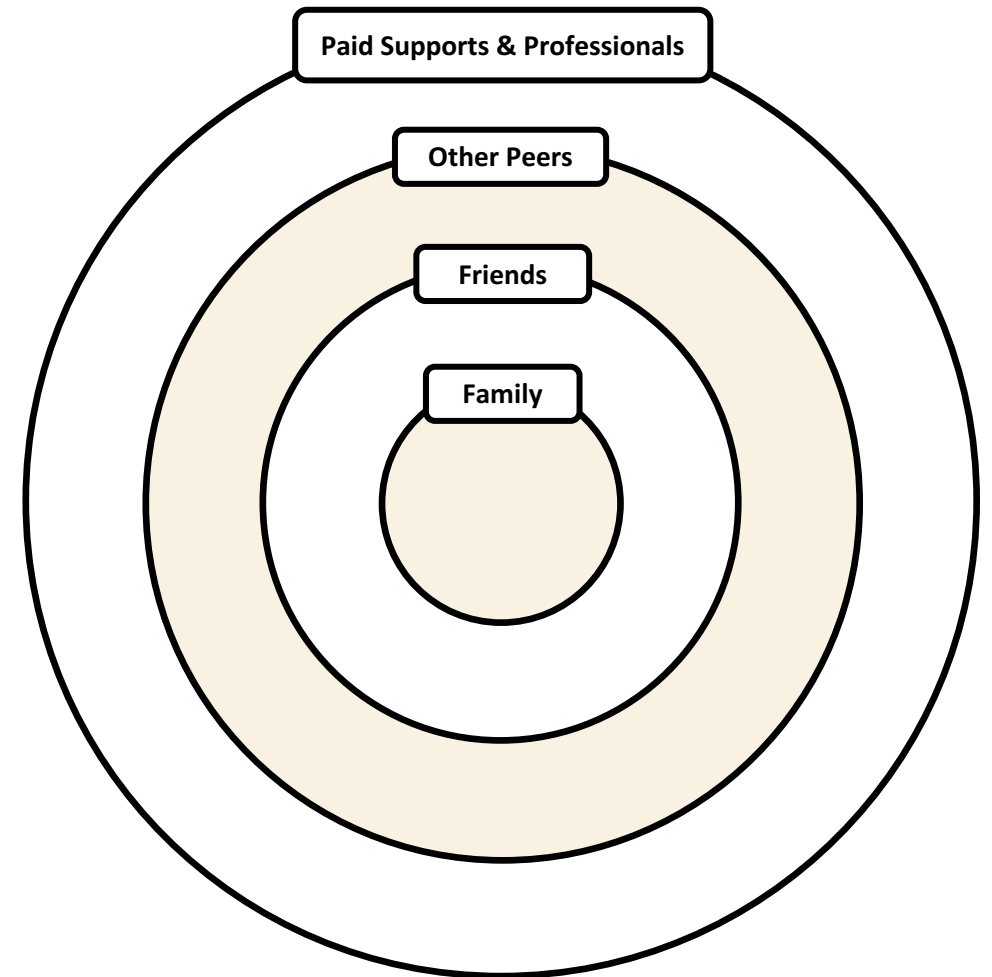


Method: Sample Questions

- What does friendship mean to you?
- How do you know someone is your friend?
- Are you friends with any of your classmates from the IPSE classes?
- How do you keep in touch with your friends from IPSE?
- Why are your friends important to you?

Method: Social Network Diagram

- During the interview, participants were asked which people in their life fit into each of these categories:
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Other Peers (Acquaintances)
 - Paid Supports & Professionals



Method: Data Analysis

- The meaning of friendship was coded based on Kersch, Corona, & Siperstein (2013)
- Themes that arose from the interviews were coded to address:
 - The nature of student interactions
 - The contribution of IPSE to friendship as well as areas of improvement
- The number of people in each social network group was totaled
- The proportion of the social network made up by each group was calculated

Predictions

- How do you think current students and alumni of IPSE would describe friendship?
- What do you think their social networks will look like?
- How do you think students have been impacted socially by participating in an IPSE program?

Results

- Support
 - Provides help, someone to rely on
- Examples:
 - “A friend is somebody that’s there for you and that’s, that has your back no matter what.” -Scott
 - “Somebody who can be there by your side whenever times you’re down or even when times you’re happy...”- David
 - “You know, friends are there for each other no matter what situation they go through.” –Prisha
 - “...help them out with taking their, helping their lunch, their lunch, what they have a wheelchair or a walker or anything, and help them with carry the tray for them, and help them with what they need...” – Jack

Results: What does friendship mean?

- Companionship
 - Interactions and shared activities with friends
- Examples:
 - “They’re important to me because I like hanging around with friends and being social with them.” – Cassidy
 - “My friends, like they’re here to hang out, have fun with, laugh, joke. Just make good, great conversation with and all around have a good time with them, basically.” – Hadley
 - “That I’m not alone. ” - Aaron

Results

- Intimacy
 - Trust, self-disclosure, sharing thoughts and opinions
- Examples:
 - “Yeah, I think a friend is definitely someone that’s loyal and, you know, you have full faith in them. ... And you can easily get, you know, tricked and a lot of people get tricked, and they just don’t see it coming.” – Noah
 - “Just they’ll listen to what I have to say. They’re good listeners and if I have to say something, they’re, they can listen and either agree or disagree, but just they’re there for me and if I need help or something, they’re there to support me.”
- Hadley

Results

- Stability
 - Enduring relationships with longevity
- Examples:
- “He’s been my brother since my childhood pretty much. Like he and I just, we’re really tight.”- David
- “I met her in kindergarten. So, and the, this is my like close-knit of friends. We’ve known each other since kindergarten and, we’ve been, we were in Girl Scout group with each other and stuff like that, so.”- Emily

Results

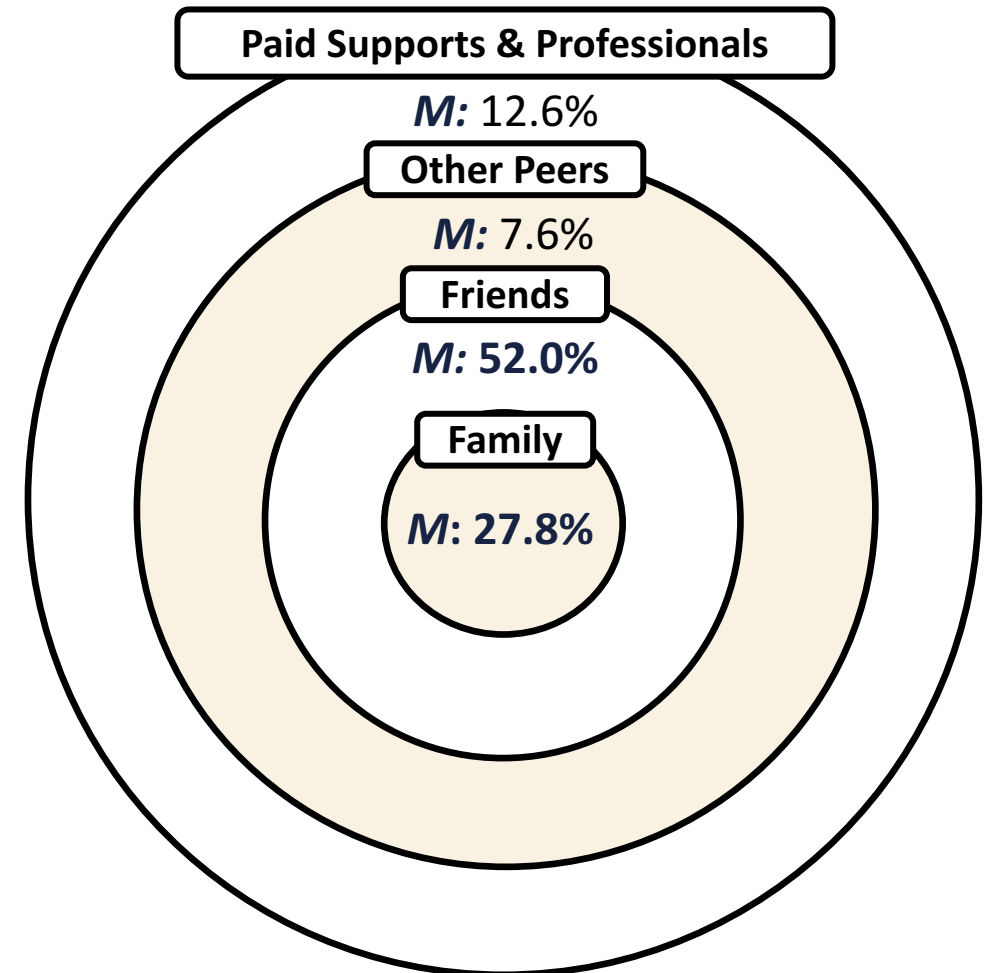
- Similarity
 - Shared interests and characteristics
- Examples:
 - “He and I, bugs don’t bother us, and we’re just the two outdoorsy kinda guys that, you know, get along really well. ... If you put my sister in with us, me and my sister and Jim, we’d be like the outdoor king. Hey, us three combined in knowledge, we’re, it’s pretty impressive.”- David
 - “...But we’re still best friends because we both love the Rockets Baseball Team, so. We’re the only two that like the Rockets...” - Wyatt

Results

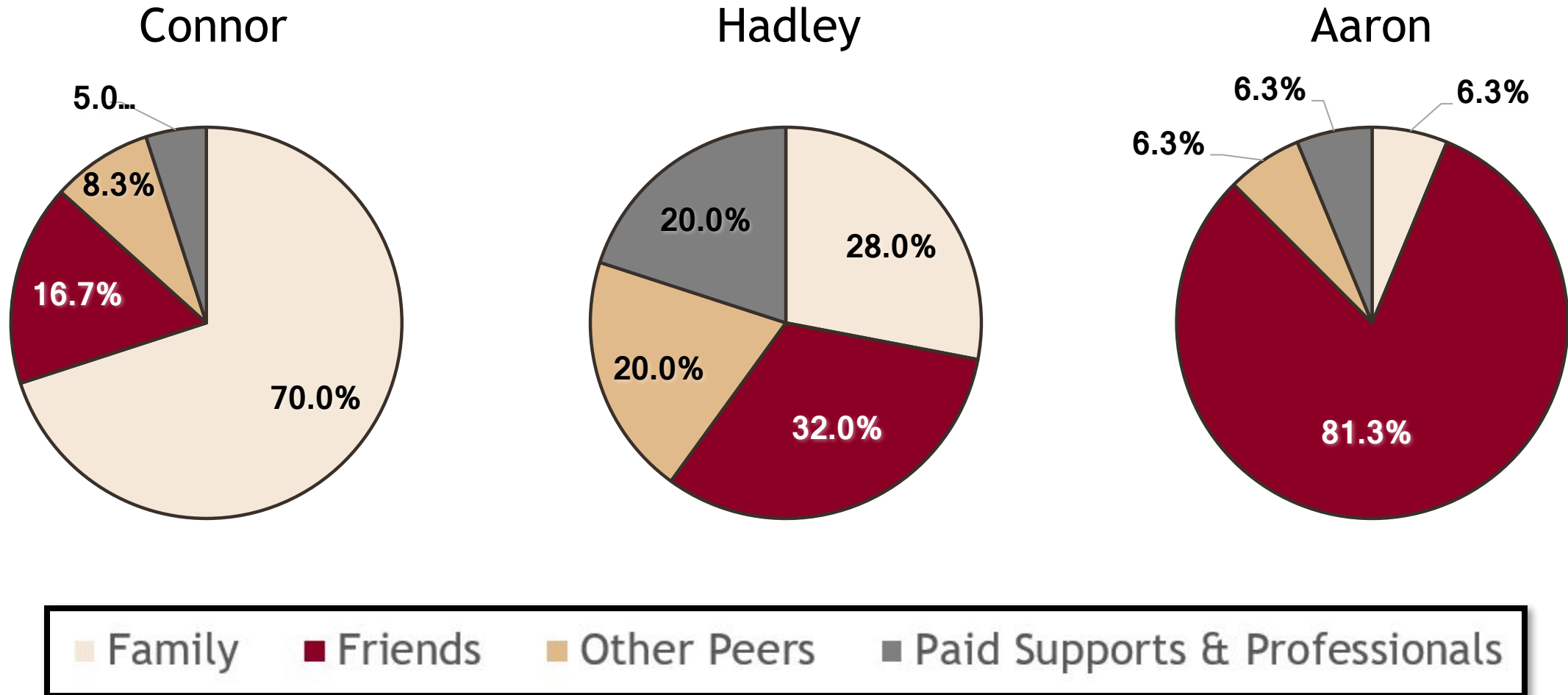
- Other
 - Friends are like Family
 - “Despite I don’t have a brother in my family, I, he’s my non-biological brother, you know, first so.”- David
 - “...I didn’t have an older sister growing up so they were my older sisters...”
- Emily

Results: Social Networks

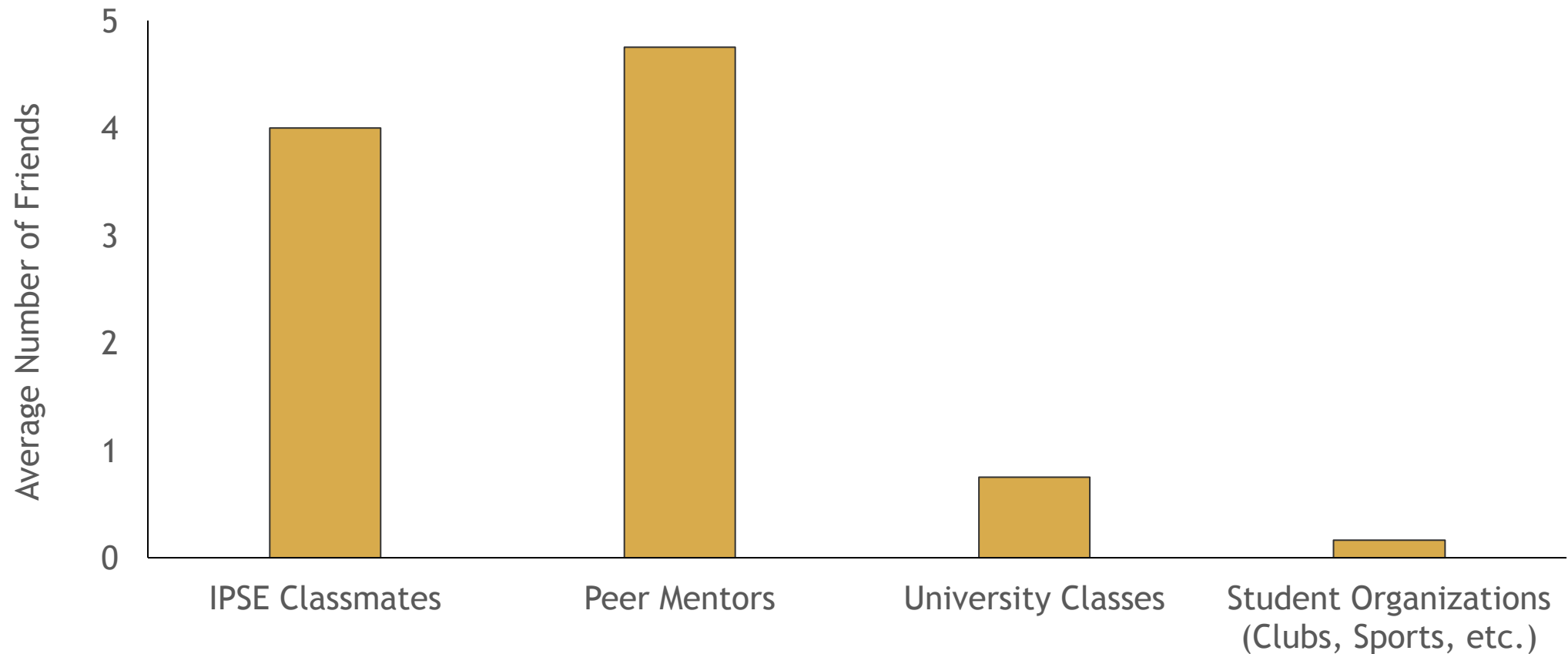
- Participants' social networks were varied
 - Range: 15 to 96
 - Average: 47
 - Median: 43



Results: Social Networks of Individual Participants



Results: Social Networks in the IPSE Community



Results: How has IPSE contributed to friendship?

- Developing friendships and meeting new acquaintances
- Teaching social skills
- Promoting engagement within the greater campus community
- Through formal and informal social opportunities
- Connecting students with natural supports through internships
- Through improving their social confidence
- Facilitating the continuation of a pre-existing friendship
- Through developing a sense of social support on campus

Results: How has IPSE contributed to friendship?

- “...when I first came into the program, I was kind of shy and quiet-spoken and when I, when I came here it was like my talk, it just increased and I kinda like became more independent and I have a lot of friends.”
- Cassidy
- “It’s just a bunch of friends who take time out of their day just to hang out with us and they’re your friends till after you graduate...” – Hadley
- “Made me more willing to talk to people.” - Aaron

Results: How might IPSE improve in promoting friendship?

- Involvement in the greater campus community through student organizations
 - Students have access, but they have not been part of clubs
 - Only 2 out of 12 had been involved in a club
 - Next Steps is working on this as it now gets all students involved in Best Buddies
 - “I have not taken any clubs. I really wanted to do like the martial arts club. And if I had to go back and do a club, it would be the martial arts club.” –Wyatt
 - “...a little more inclusive in the sororities and fraternities is one of the students wants to be a sister or a bro and they’re not...” - Scott
 - “It helps you, it helps you provide more friends and more soon to be your, in the future, closest friends, someone you really want to look up to.” – Connor

Results: Interactions with Friends

- Current students and alumni spend time with their friends by hanging out on or off campus, playing sports, going to the movies, etc.
- Social media plays a big role in maintaining friendships
- Students often did not have conflict with their friends

Facilitators and Barriers to Friendship

FACILITATORS

- Shared experiences
 - Having class together
 - Peer mentoring
 - Classmates
 - Internships
- Technology

BARRIERS

- Distance
 - “...So many people in the program I got to know really well and now they’re gone...” -Noah
- Transportation
- Scheduling

Takeaways

- The IPSE experience contributes to friendships for students with IDD
- Peer supports and classmates compose many of the friends students and alumni make on campus
- Maintaining friendships and making new friends after the IPSE experience can benefit from improvement

Your Thoughts?

- What does friendship look like at your programs?
- What are you doing to prepare students for the world in which established peer support networks do not exist?

Implications for Practice

- Involvement in student organizations and clubs
 - Does any one have successful examples?
 - Have students identify activities of interest to them by experiencing different clubs on campus
 - Help students be persistent in reaching out to clubs
 - Create an inclusive organization and invite students to join
 - Similar to peer supports that are already in place
 - Teach students to navigate the campus student organization website

Implications for Practice

Maintaining Friends and Developing Friends After IPSE

- Continue teaching about social networking media
- Teach students to recruit their own social networks in natural environments
- Teach students how to host activities at their homes to avoid transportation issues
 - Poker nights? Movie nights?
 - Use students' interests
- Make a plan for navigation

Implications for Practice

Maintaining Friends and Developing Friends After IPSE

- Work with current students to find on-going social experiences within their home/future communities to prepare for the exit from IPSE
 - Volunteering
 - Faith Community Experiences
 - E.g. Bible studies
 - Meet-ups
 - Library book club
- Create a community map of social opportunities

Your Thoughts?

- Additional ideas?

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