

U. Miami Focus Group: Influence of Family and Friends

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This report features quotes from our three focus group transcripts reflecting the influence of family and friends in the respondents' choice of major and career. Focus Group 1 and 2 respondents comprise non-undergraduates. Focus Group 3 comprises undergraduates.

| Focus Group | Name | Field | Status |
|-------------|------|--------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | H | Marine Biology | PhD Candidate |
| 1 | E | Developmental Psychology | PhD Candidate |
| 1 | B | Meteorology | Professor |
| 1 | S | English | Lecturer |
| 2 | D | Academic Services | Associate Dean |
| 2 | A | Oceanography | PhD Student |
| 2 | G | English | PhD Candidate |
| 2 | C | Sustainable Business | MA Student |
| 2 | R | Accounting | MA Student |
| 3 | N | English | Sophomore |
| 3 | P | Political Science | Senior |
| 3 | L | Public Health | Freshman |
| 3 | U | Motion Pictures | Junior |
| 3 | T | Music Business | Freshman |

Observation: Respondents reveal that a significant number of family members give advice, provide personal insights, and, sometimes, pressure their children. Undergraduate participants state that their parents made it quite clear that the purpose of college was to obtain a degree and to move into a high-paying, stable career. However, this influence does not appear to meaningfully impact deciding one's major or career interests. For part of this group, we incorporated an exercise in which participants called out associations with the humanities, liberal arts, and sciences which the proctor then wrote on a whiteboard.

Focus Group 1

In response to terms like “Subjective opinions...written well...” on the whiteboard, an older professor replied:

B: Well that's not what my mom sent me to college for.

H: I come from—on my mother's side I come from a long line of Jewish accountants and I was determined to not do that. My father was a blue collar, he worked for the Metro in Washington DC, and it's funny because my father went into what he loved and my mother went into something where she could have a job and be stable. My mother told me do what you love, my father said you need to make money. I did what I love. To this day my dad still says oh you did the same stuff as a pre-med why you didn't become a real doctor, so....but I stuck with what I loved and I still feel that I have made good decisions in terms ofyou know...really what he was worried about was making sure that I had a job and a way to support myself which I did and I can, I got a job. So you know it's...but I definitely like ...even to this day with my like, impending graduation, he's still likeyou are not a real doctor. But I think a lot of us probably get that. If you're not in the medical field you are not a real doctor. But yeah. Really supportive from my mom, not as supportive from my dad.

H: My sister is a lawyer so I can be what I want, as well as the struggle with there not being a “path”: Yeah my dad couldn't see the path ...'cause like my brother does software engineering, like, you know he's not a doctor but, you know, my dad completely understood that, oh people will pay programmers. He didn't—I graduated early from my undergrad and my dad said, my dad was willing to pay for another semester of college, he was like, you should get a minor in accounting just in case. You should do accounting. I was graduating, I was helping—'cause I was very lucky my parents paid for me to go to college and my dad was willing to shell out more money so I could do what accounting—getting useful—which blew my mind. I didn't do that. But that's how much he didn't understand what I do. He gets it more now but he is still I think is like, you'd make more money if you did that. Even now I'm gonna work for the state. You should work for a private company, you would make more money. I don't care about making money. I care about being happy. Like as you said it's about doing something you love. Not everybody...he did...I think he would have understood because he did something he loved but...it was okay for him to do that. Not for me.

E: Yeah, I had a lot of family expectations. I come from a Persian background so...and Persian culture, I mean, it's gotten a little better but if you are not you know a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, you are not deemed as high, um, in society. And it took a lot with, you know, to kind of go down this psychology route with my family. For them-- it took them a while to um, kind of appreciate it and even going to like a liberal arts college at first it was like a different experience for them, um, but with some time they—they realized the value of it afterwards...I think my parents are now realizing that when you do what you like and ...you know what I mean, there's more... meaning...

Focus Group 2

R: Most family will, uh, ask, ask their students to be in science major because you can have more jobs. I mean, you can have a bigger job range in the future...you come from a wealthy family, or you have a very, um, good position in the society, that your family can support you to be at a good position occur, or, um, you can be a good writer, like, you need, you, you need, you need a lot of things from a family to support you on that. Or, you just be an ordinary clerk in some offices.

R: chose her career path, to some extent, because her mother is an accountant and discouraged R from going into medicine: She strongly persuaded me to choose Accounting major...Yeah, Yeah. She thinks it's good for girls to, to um... to work, like, in offices...And my dad is a doctor in the Emergency Center, so he did night shifts, day shifts a lot, so it's really hard for, for him, I think. So she strongly persuaded me not to be a doctor.

C: I had more pressures, I guess, on trying to get a job right after 'cause I already had a family and stuff. So, uh, you know, that, that influenced more which jobs I picked afterwards, um, not so much the field that I went into, I still kinda chose to go into that same field.

A: ...I'm thankful because my, my mom is Asian and my dad is, um, from, like, he's from America, and I think because of that my parents had, like, talked to each other when I was young about not doing that, like, when I was growing up and they saw, like, the other parents treating their kids that way, so I think I got, like, um, I got really lucky that, like, at first they- my parents were really hard on me and I got a lot of stress, like, from my school- my students- like, the students that I was in school with because, and especially because my parents weren't putting that stress on me I, like, wasn't doing all these extracurricular things, but I, I, I think it was really good because now that all of my friends have like- we've moved out of there, we, like, know what it was like but we're able to, like, reflect on it in a very, like, big way.

D: ...my parents are from the Bahamas, so, aunt came over, she studied, uh, accounting at ...Long Island University, and, um, so I think that planted a seed in my sister's head, which was great, she went to, uh, Miami Dade, and, got an Associate's degree, and she was gonna get her Bachelor's, but she never did, and, um, I've had all those influences - cousin that's a doctor - so all that was great, but, um, I kinda wanted to take my own path, I thought

about joining the service, maybe, I wanted to be a helicopter pilot or fly a plane, and, but I was like, "Well, I'm not goin' into the service," I was - a little defiant about that, that's why I thought about engineering and making money and all that good stuff, um ... I, I think, the influence I guess I had was that, you know, I was definitely going to college, it was like, you had to go to college, that was the best thing to kind of get out of the environment I was in...

G: Neither of my parents really had a background in higher ed. that was applicable to mine, uh, and so, when I got into college they were thrilled, when I declared my majors they were thrilled, uh, I didn't really have a lot of, uh, practical guidance or advice from them, so every step of the way they've been thrilled... I do wish that, uh, I had had someone say, Well, you know, think about taking some other classes - diversify a little bit. Uh, that- ideally, that would have been some good advice.

Focus Group 3

S: My mother is a mechanical engineer and she was pushed very, very hard by her parents to get a degree so that she could get a high-paying job. And she only got to go to college because she got a scholarship to go to an engineering school. And so for me, that was what got her moving forward when she was a teenager and in her early twenties. So I was always pushed to go to college to get a degree that would get you a high paying job. Um, find something either that you love that will pay you a lot of money or find something that you can stand, so that you have enough money to support your hobbies on the side or whatever Um, and that's partly how they let me major in music business now because I um, they said don't be a teacher and don't be singing on the side of the road because you're not going to get any money like that.

S: But yeah they said they said we're sending you to University of Miami to get a degree to get a job.

N: So before I became an English major, before I applied to school, what I really wanted to do, I wanted to work in fashion. And like I pretty much got like, really well supported from my family, it was just like why not do fashion and business because you're probably going to need those skills in like fashion and whatever. So I always think we always, like negate this option of like, pairing things that could be very practical and sustainable in terms of a career.

N: So most of the women in my family are nurses, and I have some sort of medicinal something background, so for me to do humanities is definitely, like, different, but I, I like, didn't get a lot of pushback, like I said before...I tell them I'm an English major they're like "Oh what are you going to do, are you going to become a teacher?" So it's also like — and it's also not like people trying to be insulting, it's like they really don't know like, the possibilities with an English major so I feel definitely like me taking that step is like opening up this whole new world of possibilities in terms of like what one can study.

N: I think a lot of it has to do with access and exposure that a lot of people are not given. Um, and that could be, on a small scale level like in families, having family members who have done things and then championed those things but it could also be on a wider like society level about who can study what, and go here, and do this, and make it and be successful...in terms of the concept of humanities, that's always been something I've been surrounded by and loved so I loved like looking at Black poetry and literature and history and all this other stuff, and my mom, like exposed my sister and I to the arts, so humanities was always a concept that I was comfortable with, I just didn't have a word to put to it. Nor did I ever consider like, making it a career, until the last couple of years or so.

L: One thing that was a driving force for me is that my dad's an immigrant from Ethiopia so his big thing is that, you know, like we come to this country and like achieving the American dream, part of that is through educational attainment, like, you know, like it's—he has such a generational mindset where I was able to — like, it's almost like you know what's that thing in the Olympics when you go running, pass the baton, yeah like, if I was able to pass the baton to you and I've gone this far then here, this is your baton, this is your chance, now see how far you can take the next generation of us...Yeah, so it was never like a heavy pressure, but at the same time it was like, run bitch...Drive me home, you know what I'm saying, like drive bitch, like you can go to law school, you can kind of read through the lines, you can't be a Walmart people greeter even if I really want to, like yeah.

M: So, that's how I got into the film major, and as I kept telling people that I wanted to do the film major, they'd just look, stink eyes again, just what are you doing, and like as I told my family, this is what I'm really passionate about, this is what I really love, they kind of got more accepting. But even when I tell my coworkers, because a lot of my coworkers, they're like generation, they're like immigrants from here, I'm like, like they talk about what their kids went to do and they're like no, you have to do engineering and stuff, they're kind of like, why are you doing that? So it's just — for me, my family, they like learned to love. Like learned to support me, but they, like I still get questioned.

M: I think, at the end of the day, my mom reminds me that the reason to go to school is to get a job... it's kind of like so my mom's kind of encouraging me, like don't rush, she's kind of like, she'd rather me do what I'm really satisfied with then just trying to get it over with. So it's kind of like along the way things change.