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University Faculty's Response to Student Loss by Death or Romantic Break-up

Sarah E. Dietz
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

UNIVERSITY FACULTY'S RESPONSE TO STUDENT

LOSS BY DEATH OR ROMANTIC BREAK-UP

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Sarah E. Dietz

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of Psychology

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Sarah E.Dietz

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Psychology

_____   _____
                                  Gordon Thornton, Ph.D.
                                  Professor Emeritus
                                  Committee Chair

_____   _____
                                  Kimberely J.Husenits, Psy.D.
                                  Associate Professor of Psychology

_____   _____
                                  Mary L. Zanich, Ph.D.
                                  Psychology Department Chair

ACCEPTED

_____   _____
Michele S. Schwietz, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Research
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: University Faculty's Response to Student Loss by Death or Romantic Break-up

Author: Sarah E. Dietz

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Gordon Thornton

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Kimberely Husenits

Dr. Mary Lou Zanich

Coping with a significant loss is an issue that many college students will encounter while in an environment not conducive to the mourning process. As an institution that plays a large role in students academic and personal growth, universities need to be made aware of the unique challenges bereaved students face. This study was designed to assess university faculty response to and awareness of loss in college students. Types of loss assessed were the death of a family member, the death of a boyfriend, and the break-up of a 3 month or 3 year relationship. Faculty were recruited from four Pennsylvania universities via email; 533 responded to a fictitious case by completing an on-line questionnaire.

As expected, the type of loss, length of relationship, and type of relationship all contribute to the degree of support given to the griever. As far as faculty accommodations, the student experiencing the death of her brother received the most academic accommodations, followed by the student who lost her boyfriend by death. The student experiencing a romantic break-up was less accommodated. The faculty viewed the student going home to be with her family or having time off from school to deal with her emotions as most important if the student suffered the death of her brother. However, they perceived returning to normal school responsibilities as most important for the

student experiencing a break-up of a 3 month relationship. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not have a pre-established policy regarding student loss. When asked about expectations for the student returning to normal functioning, the most frequent choice for a student experiencing a death was 1 to 2 months. The findings of this study indicate a great deal of variability in how student losses are managed by faculty members. Faculty members must be made aware of the impact losses can have on students so they can begin to develop policies and practices that provide an environment that encourages student success.

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CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Grief and bereavement are two reactions every person will experience at some point in his or her life. The words grief and bereavement are often linked largely to the experience of death. However, the impact of grief and bereavement reach far beyond the experience of losing a loved one to death. Bereavement is a term used to refer to the state of being deprived of something or someone, due to a significant loss, not restricted to a loss by death. As Rando (1995) points out, the words *bereave* and *rob* are derived from the same root. Thus, both imply an unwilling or unjust deprivation, which leaves an individual feeling victimized. Grief is the reaction felt in response to any type of significant loss. Mourning is a term very closely related to grief and is often, mistakenly, used as a synonym for grief. However, mourning does not refer so much to the reaction to the loss but instead the *process* by which the bereaved incorporates the loss into his or her ongoing life (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006). In fact, some believe that grief is actually the beginning phase of mourning (Rando, 1995). Grief allows the individual to recognize the loss and prepare for the process of mourning. Without the experiences and lessons derived from acute grief, mourning cannot take place. Mourning is necessary to move the individual beyond the passive reactions of grief to a place where change is required in order for the individual to continue following the loss (Rando, 1995). Although grief, mourning and bereavement can be experienced in relation to any number of losses, the majority of research focuses on these experiences in relation to losing a significant person to death, ignoring the emotional distress caused by other types of significant losses.

The loss of a romantic relationship is one type of loss that is often not recognized in the current literature as a significant loss. However, the dynamics of a romantic relationship, in fact, establish a sense of connectedness and attachment to a partner which in turn lead to a vulnerability to the loss of that partner (Bowlby, 1980). Therefore, the end of a romantic relationship can be a major loss in an individual's life and create a grief response. Bowlby (1980) describes the grief process as a four part progression: early shock or numbness and protest, yearning and searching, disorganization and despair, and gradual reconstruction and reorganization. According to Bowlby's description of the grief process, one can see how the loss of romantic relationship would lead one to begin the mourning process. Initially, the individual may experience a sense of shock, a desire to deny the loss of the relationship, regain that relationship, or find meaning in the loss of their relationship. The individual must learn to let go of the relationship that has been ended and learn to adapt to their environment without the partner and relationship that were lost.

The view of mourning as a process following any type of loss is not a new concept. The idea of "grief work" is one of the most widely accepted concepts in the discussion of bereavement, which has been central to theories of bereavement since Freud. Although this concept is viewed in different ways depending on the specific model of grief work being utilized, the overall concept is that "the bereaved must let go of his or her bonds of attachment…by gradually working through these attachments and relinquishing them" (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005, p. 281). Although the concept of grief work and most models of the mourning process were created primarily for a loss

through death, it is easy to see how such models could overlap with the process one goes

through following the loss of a romantic relationship. Theresa Rando (1995) explains:

> Mourning is initiated by the need to detach from the lost object, and the reason
>
> mourning is such a struggle is that the human being never willingly abandons an
>
> emotional attachment, and only does so when he or she learns that it is better to
>
> relinquish the object than to try to hold on to it now that it is lost" (p. 212).

 Therefore, according to Rando's statement, one could purport that, when discussing

grief, the type of loss is important but the attachment itself is equally as important. Why,

then, does the loss of a romantic relationship remain largely unacknowledged by others?

According to Doka (2002), each society has "grieving rules" that define the role

of the griever. For example, in the United States and many other Western societies, grief

is socially acknowledged when a family member dies. Fowlkes (1990) purported that any

loss of a relationship that is not family-based will not be fully socially recognized or

supported. Doka (1987) was the first to term this concept "disenfranchised grief," which

is "grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly

acknowledged, publicly mourned and/or socially supported" (p. 3). According to Doka

(1989), society disenfranchises grief for three reasons: 1) the griever is not recognized, 2)

the relationship is not recognized, and 3) the loss is not recognized. Doka's concept could

explain why those grieving the loss of a romantic relationship are disenfranchised. There

is the possibility that others minimize the loss and grief incurred by the end of a

relationship. The relationship may not have been socially sanctioned, such as someone

involved in an extramarital affair. It is also possible that others do not acknowledge the

griever, possibly because they do not classify him or her as experiencing grief as a result of the loss.

Disenfranchised grief following a lost relationship is especially an issue in college-age youth. The loss of a romantic relationship in college-aged individuals can be as intense, if not more intense, than the death of a loved one (Kaczmarek, Backlund, & Blemer, 1990). In fact, nearly three-quarters of all major losses reported by young adults have to do with another significant person in their life. The two most frequently occurring losses were the death of a loved one and the end of a love relationship, respectively (LaGrand, 1986). However, many of those in the individual's support system will view a break-up simply as part of growing-up. Others may view the griever as too young to be in serious love. Often the griever is told by others that he/she will "get over it" or that "there are other fish in the sea." These comments, in fact, exacerbate the problems brought on by grief because the griever is not able to access support systems they normally would (Martin, 2002). All of these factors lead to the minimization of the griever's feelings of loss, resulting in disenfranchised grief (Robak & Weitzman, 1994-1995).

Aside from the disenfranchisement of their grief, college-aged individuals may be particularly vulnerable to more intense grief reactions following a break-up. Tomko (1983) reported that grief reactions may be intensified in this age group because, not only is the individual grieving the loss of the relationship, he/she is also grieving the loss of the dreams of the perfect future in the relationship that has ended. When the relationship ends, these fantasies end and must also be grieved. Rando (1995) adds that along with the loss of these fantasies the individual is likely to experience a multitude of other secondary psychosocial losses. These secondary losses multiply: the more the mourner was attached

to the lost loved one; the more the lost one played numerous and important roles in the mourner's life; the more meanings the relationship embodied; the more interaction, and reinforcement involved the lost loved one; and the more the mourner's needs, feelings, thoughts, memories, hopes, wishes, fantasies, dreams, assumptions, expectations and beliefs were linked to the lost relationship. Given the nature of romantic relationships in college-aged individuals, it is likely that they are susceptible to multiple secondary losses in addition to the primary loss of the relationship.

Furthermore, one must consider college-aged individuals from a developmental perspective. Adolescence to early adulthood is a period of transition and stress. Though adolescence is often defined as ages 10-18, some scholars extend that definition to include late teens and early twenties as being in late adolescence (Arnett, 2000). A key developmental trait of adolescents or college-aged individuals is egocentricity (Martin, 2002). Jackson (as cited in Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006) comments, "Adolescents are apt to think that they are the discoverers of deep and powerful feelings and that no one has ever loved as they love" (p. 368). As a result, they may view their grief following lost love to be unique and individual, thus hard for others to understand.

Late adolescence and early adulthood are often viewed as the period when the central developmental concern is establishing a personal identity (LaGrand, 1989). Steinberg (as cited in LaGrand, 1989) suggested five psychosocial issues of adolescence and early adulthood: identity, autonomy, intimacy, sexuality, and achievement. The task of individuals in late adolescence is intimacy and commitment and the conflict in this developmental period is closeness versus distance (Corr, Nabe, Corr, 2006). Therefore,

when a relationship ends, the person loses not only a partner and a relationship but also a sense of personal identity as well.

According to Erickson's theory of development, the key milestone facing young adults include the task of intimacy vs. isolation. However, one must also consider that at the beginning of this stage identity vs. role confusion is concluding and still lingers in many ways (Erikson, 1950). Young adults continue to want to blend their identities with their friends. Approaching the milestone of intimacy vs. isolation, the young adult should be prepared for intimacy, a close personal relationship, and isolation, the fact of being alone and separated from others. According to Erikson (1950) it is during this stage that one is ready to commit to a romantic relationship. However, finding a balance at this stage is important in preparing for when unwelcomed or unexpected isolation occurs, for example the death of a loved one or dissolution of a romantic relationship (Erikson, Erikson, Kivnick, 1986). All of these factors are included in the developmental period of college-aged individuals and indicate that the end of a romantic relationship may cause a greater, more intense grief reaction than in those of another age group following a break-up. That being said, it is also important to note that how college-aged individuals manage the loss can impact their continued development. According to Pistole (1995), the loss of a relationship can "evoke developmental progress, because it demands reorganization of meaning and of self in relation to others" (p. 53). Individuals in this developmental period may or may not be experiencing a major loss for the first time. Regardless, they are likely to have less experience than the average adult to draw from in terms of managing their grief. Therefore, how they manage the loss will influence their well being, their continued

development, and their ability to manage new love relationships (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988).

College-aged individuals may experience their grief in a number of ways. They are often without the necessary resources or information to cope with loss. One must also consider that this may be the student's first serious loss (Janowiak, Mei-Tal & Drapkin, 1995). Depression, loneliness, and feeling of emptiness are among the most common emotions reported following a break-up. Anger, feelings of rejection, and guilt are also often cited as reactions (LaGrand, 1989). A student may be more prone to depressive symptomotology, lower life satisfaction, or poorer academic performance following the end of a relationship (Kaczmarek, et al., 1990). Although some recent research has studied college student bereavement (Servaty-Seib &Hamilton, 2006), other research often looked at younger adolescents. Given the transitional period being experienced by both young adolescents and college students, the literature regarding the impact of a loss on high school students was reviewed. The Harvard Child Bereavement Study found that a fifth of children reported having some sort of learning difficulty in school, and a similar percentage experienced difficulty concentrating following a death. Additionally, the study found that adolescent boys, in particular, were the most vulnerable group for learning problems (Worden, 1996). Furthermore, Santrock (as cited in Kaczmarek, et al., 1990) noted that the break-up of an intimate relationship may be the precipitant to suicide in young people. LaGrand (1985) reported that other outcomes of grief may be deteriorating health, lack of motivation, and inability to concentrate. All of these reactions are comparable to what one might expect to see in someone grieving the death of a loved one.

Due to the disenfranchised nature of grief following the loss of a romantic relationship and given the nature of college student's social support networks, friends often tend to function as the major source of support following a break-up, particularly because non-peers tend to minimize the loss. Fowlkes (1990) believes this use of friends as social support is due to the fact that it gives the student a "community of like-minded people" (p. 643). Social support systems are important in grieving loss at any age but may be particularly important to young adults because the support systems serve multiple functions. Social support systems allow the individual to discuss feelings, ideas, and decisions in an attempt to gauge the acceptance of the emotions. In addition to this, social support systems also help the individual review the lost relationship and share their loss in way that helps them to feel unburdened (LaGrand, 1986). However, friends may sometimes feel unprepared to provide the support that the individual needs because they are unsure of what to say to help the griever, much like when someone is grieving the death of a loved one. Friends may also serve to minimize loss if they attempt to get the griever to begin dating again too soon (LaGrand, 1989). There are also some romantic relationships in college students that are overly dependent, that is, there is a tendency for one partner to "forfeit his or her individuality to the extent that the other is expected to provide for most personal needs, make decision, and give nurturance" (LaGrand, 1989, p. 179). This can lead to the overly dependent partner discounting his or her own strengths or abilities. More importantly, the increased time and energy spent focusing on the romantic relationship is at the expense of other healthy relationships in the person's life (Gilmartin, 2005). In these situations, it is likely that when the romance fails, the

individual will have an even weaker support system to turn to than other college-aged grievers.

If the student's primary support group (i.e. friends and family) are unavailable or unsupportive, the student may turn to professors or other campus services for help in dealing with the grief response. Although support is often viewed in a psychosocial context, support can be of a practical nature. By recognizing the impact of loss on cognitive functioning, reflected in the Harvard Child Bereavement Study, providing temporary respite from some class responsibilities would be appropriate. However, those (e.g. faculty) sought out by the student may be unable or unwilling to provide support. Professors, for example, may not recognize a break-up as a loss, only recognizing the loss of a family member as significant. When students perform poorly academically, miss class, withdraw from activities, or appear unfocused during lectures, professors may assume that the student is uninterested or not committed to the class (LaGrand, 1985). In reality, the student may be trying to cope with a significant loss and manage intense feelings. A recent study showed that an emotionally-close, non-family loss can be as distressing to college students as the loss of a family member (Hardison, Neimeyer, & Lichstein, 2005). The lack of recognition by faculty will not only exacerbate the feelings of isolation and despair the student may already be experiencing but may also negatively impact the student's academic performance to an even greater degree.

Hypotheses

This study is designed to assess university faculty's responses to a student who has suffered a loss. Because some losses are not recognized by the general public as causing grief reactions, it is expected that the faculty member's response will vary

depending on the type of loss. For example, the loss of a romantic relationship is especially significant in the lives of college-aged individuals and can be as intense as the death of a loved one (Kaczmarek, et. al, 1990). However, many people, including professors, may not recognize the impact of this type of loss on the student. Furthermore, even when the loss is the death of a boyfriend, the grief can remain disenfranchised because the loss is not family based (Fowlkes, 1990; Doka, 1989).

Given that research shows that the type of loss, length of relationship and type of relationship all contribute to the degree of support given to the griever, then as these factors vary, it would be expected that the degree of support given and beliefs regarding the loss would also vary. In dating relationships, it is expected that the student grieving the death of her boyfriend would receive more accommodations by faculty for completing course work than the student dealing with the loss of a three-year romantic relationship. In general, it is expected that faculty are more likely to make accommodations for the student grieving a loss by death rather than break-up because the break-up of a romantic relationship continues to, largely, be a disenfranchised loss (Robak & Weitzman, 1994-1995).

Additionally, because romantic relationships are largely disenfranchised and not recognized as legitimate grief, it is hypothesized that the student suffering the loss of a short-term relationship will receive fewer accommodations than the student grieving the loss of a long-standing committed relationship or a loss by death. Furthermore, it is expected that faculty will view the student going home to be with her family or having time off from school to deal with her emotions as most important if the student suffered the death of her brother, as compared to the loss of her boyfriend whether by death or the

end of a romantic relationship. Returning to normal school functioning is expected to be viewed as more important for the student experiencing the loss of a romantic relationship than those experiencing a loss through death. In relation to the amount of time the faculty expect it should take the student return to normal functioning, it is expected that faculty will expect a longer time for the death of the student's brother, death of her boyfriend, break-up of a long term relationship, and break-up of short term relationship, respectively. Also, because grief following a break-up remains disenfranchised, it is expected that faculty would be more likely to refer a student experiencing a death to other on-campus services. In addition, it is believed that faculty's rating of the importance of developing a policy regarding student loss will vary by type of loss, with those reading the vignette with the death of a brother or death of a boyfriend rating it as more important than those responding to either of the break-up vignettes.

College is a time filled with many new experiences and transitions, both academic and social. Though some students will manage the stressors of the college experience with minimal support, other students find themselves unable to navigate the course quite as easily. Previous research has illustrated a desire from students that faculty be more accommodating following losses experienced by students (Thornton, et. al, 1997). Using a similar experimental design, questionnaire, and vignettes, students were asked to rate on a Likert scale how much they agreed with the eight accommodations discussed in this study. These included: granting extra time to complete assignments, allowing the student to miss class(es), being more lenient in assessing the quality of the students work, allowing the student to miss an exam and make it up later, being more lenient about contributions to group work, allow the student to drop an assignment, allowing the

student to receive a grade of "Incomplete," and allowing her to withdraw from the class for the semester. They were also asked to rate the importance of the student going home or having time off to work through her feelings. The work of Thornton and colleagues (1997) acted as a basis for the current study, particularly in determining the gender of the student described, the overall description of the vignette, and what questions would be investigated. The purpose of creating similar vignettes and questionnaires was to allow for possible comparison between the two studies.

In addition to the work of Thornton and colleagues (1997), Wrenn (1999) identified several needs of students who have experienced a loss, one of which included having teachers that "allow late work, a make-up exam, or an Incomplete for the class" (p. 133-134). Faculty need to be sensitive to the impact of non-death losses because they may affect learning. This project was designed to assess university faculty response to and awareness of loss in college students. The purpose of this study is to assess how faculty manage losses that have the potential to be disenfranchised.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

The Institutional Review Board of the 14 universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) were asked permission to recruit their faculty for this research project based on approval of Indiana University of Pennsylvania's (IUP) Institutional Review Board's (IRB). Of those 14 universities, seven universities indicated they would be willing to accept IUP's IRB approval, rather than requiring the study be resubmitted to each university's IRB. After receiving approval from the IRB at seven universities, approval had to be obtained from each of those seven university's provost in order to have access to faculty email addresses. Of the seven universities that accepted IUP's IRB approval, four universities allowed the distribution of the questionnaire via faculty email addresses. The faculty of the four universities, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Slippery Rock University, Clarion University, and Bloomsburg University were recruited by email. The email was distributed to a total of 2147 faculty members across the four universities.

Respondents to the email distribution of the questionnaire totaled 533 faculty members, indicating a reply rate of approximately 25%. Of those 533 faculty members there were 526 respondents answering all the questions, with seven respondents omitting answers to questions asking if they had a pre-established policy regarding student accommodations following a loss and the perceived importance in developing such a policy. Subjects were randomly assigned by the Student Voice program to read one of four vignettes.

Measures

Vignettes

Four vignettes were used describing a female student grieving loss by death of a

brother or a romantic partner or grieving a break-up of a 3 year or 3 month romantic

relationship (See Appendix A). The vignettes were slightly modified version of vignettes

used in a previous study (Thornton, et. al, 1997). Because of this connection, it was

determined that a female student would be used as the griever in the vignettes. Vignettes

were identical for all participants except the cause of the student's grief. The vignettes

included a description of the loss and grief symptoms including feeling sad, trouble

eating and sleeping, and difficulty concentrating. The following are the vignettes for the

death of a boyfriend and the break-up of a 3 year romantic relationship, respectively:

Rachel is a 19 year old college student in one of your classes. She receives mostly B's on
all of her assignments and exams and has missed only once since the semester began.
Approximately half way through the semester, Rachel comes to see you during office
hours and tells you that her boyfriend of three years had unexpectedly broken up with her
two days ago. Since then she says has been unable to eat or sleep and cries often
throughout the day. She has also been unable to concentrate on her schoolwork and is
worried she will fall behind. Rachel wants to know what, if any, accommodations you are
willing to make for her.

Rachel is a 19 year old college student in one of your classes. She receives mostly B's on
all of her assignments and exams and has missed class only once since the semester
began. Approximately half way through the semester, Rachel comes to see you during
office hours and tells you that her boyfriend died unexpectedly two days ago. Since then
she says has been unable to eat or sleep and cries often throughout the day. She has also
been unable to concentrate on her schoolwork and is worried she will fall behind. Rachel
wants to know what, if any, accommodations you are willing to make for her.

Questionnaire

After reading the vignette, faculty were asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale,

from not at all likely to very likely, the likelihood that they would give the student

specific accommodations. The four-point Likert scale was used so that the option of "neutral" would be omitted, encouraging faculty members to respond to each item. The accommodations explored include: extra time to complete assignments, allowing a missed class or classes, lenience in grading, lenience in participation in group work, permission to miss an exam and make it up later, and dropping an assignment. In addition to accommodations, subjects were asked to rate, again on a four-point scale, the likelihood that they would refer the student to another on-campus service, such as counseling. Participants were also asked to rate, on a four-point scale ranging from very important to not at all important, how important they feel it is for the student to go home to be with family or the student having time off from school to deal with her emotions regarding the loss. The participants were also asked how important they perceived returning to normal school responsibilities, such as attending class and taking exams, to be following the loss. Another question addressed the amount of time the participant felt it would take the student to return to normal academic and psychological functioning. Finally, participants were asked if they had a policy in place to handle students' losses and what that policy was, as well as how important the participant feels it is for the university to develop a policy regarding student loss (See Appendix B).

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

A letter was sent to the 14 universities of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) requesting permission to contact faculty members of each university to participate in the research (See Appendix C). Once permission was granted to conduct the research by each university's IRB and the Provost of that institution approved the use of faculty email addresses, faculty members of four universities in the

PASSHE were recruited for the current study via email to complete the questionnaire online. The introductory email to faculty provided brief information about the study, a link to the online web survey and indicated that completing the survey was indicative of the faculty's consent to participate. All participants were assured that their responses were confidential and anonymous. Before beginning, participants were shown a statement of informed consent. Once subjects agreed to participate, they were presented with one of four vignettes to read, which was randomly assigned by the Student Voice program, a secure data collection website. Each vignette described a student coming to the faculty member looking for support following a loss. After reading the vignette, participants completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions regarding the likelihood of the faculty member granting the student certain accommodations, the importance of processing the loss, and the time it would take for the student to recover from the loss. While completing the questionnaire, respondents were unable to leave items blank or go back to reread the vignette due to the Student Voice set-up. An email follow-up was sent to remind faculty about the study and encouraging them to complete the survey if they wanted to participate. Following the completion of the study, a brief summary of the study was sent to university faculty.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

An invitation to participate in the study was sent to 2147 faculty members. Of the 533 faculty members who responded to the study, 526 respondents completed all questions of the questionnaire. In the vignette of the student experiencing the break-up of a 3 month relationship, 127 of 129 respondents answered all questions. The two participants that did not answer all the questions omitted answers asking if they had a pre-established policy regarding student accommodations following a loss and the perceived importance in developing such a policy. In the vignette of the student experiencing the break-up of a 3 year relationship, 133 of 138 respondents answered all questions. The five participants that did not complete the questionnaire also omitted answers to the two questions about having or developing a policy regarding student accommodations following a loss. For the two vignettes describing a student experiencing a loss by death, all respondents completed the full questionnaire. The vignette of the student experiencing the death of her brother was read and the questionnaire completed by 138 respondents. The vignette describing the student whose boyfriend died was read and the questionnaire completed by 128 respondents.

Academic Accommodations

The scores on each of the eight questions regarding accommodations following a loss were analyzed using a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to determine the effect of the type of loss on academic accommodations made for the student. The MANOVA indicated that the type of vignette effected the ratings of the faculty accommodations, Wilks' lambda $\Lambda = .54$, $F(24, 533) = 14.77$, $p < .001$. In

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general, faculty perceive themselves as making fewer accommodations for the student

experiencing a break-up compared to the student experiencing a death. In dating

relationships, the student grieving the death of her boyfriend was more likely to receive

accommodations than the student experiencing a break-up of a romantic relationship,

with the break-up of a 3 month relationship receiving the fewest accommodations.

To further explore the impact of type of loss on faculty accommodations, ANOVAs were

computed on the ratings of each of the eight specific accommodations. Table 1 presents

the results of the ANOVAs and indicates that there were significant differences in the

ratings based on type of loss for all eight accommodations. The Tukey HSD post-hoc

procedure was used to test mean differences within each specific accommodation.

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Likelihood* and F ratios for Academic Accommodations

	Breakup 3 month		Breakup 3 yrs		Death Boyfriend		Death Brother		F	df
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Extra time	2.64	1.02	2.82	.98	3.63	.84	3.77	.54	66.30**	(3, 529)
Miss class(es)	1.83	.94	2.15	1.00	3.05	.84	3.50	.75	104.18**	(3, 529)
Lenient in grading	1.28	.60	1.41	.67	1.71	.90	1.70	.89	10.29**	(3, 529)
Miss an exam	2.25	1.02	2.57	1.06	3.39	.84	3.55	.73	63.12**	(3, 529)
Lenient group work	1.51	.74	1.67	.82	2.29	.94	2.44	.97	37.41**	(3, 529)
Drop an assignment	1.21	.50	1.29	.63	1.56	.83	1.72	.96	13.62**	(3, 529)
Incomplete	2.30	1.17	2.61	1.14	3.38	.91	3.52	.82	45.38**	(3, 529)
Withdraw	2.87	1.15	3.23	1.01	3.52	.90	3.64	.79	16.97**	(3, 529)

* 1= Not at all likely; 2 = Slightly likely; 3 = Somewhat Likely; 4 = Very Likely
**p<.001 for all items

Faculty perceived themselves as significantly more likely to allow the student extra time to complete assignments and papers when she was experiencing the death of her brother or boyfriend compared to experiencing a break-up. Faculty perceived themselves as significantly more likely to allow the student to miss class when experiencing the death of a brother or the death of a boyfriend, as opposed to the student experiencing the break-up of a 3 year relationship or the break-up of a 3 month relationship. Furthermore, the student experiencing the end of a 3 year relationship was significantly more likely to be allowed to miss class than the student experiencing the loss of the 3 month relationship. Respondents perceived themselves as significantly more likely to be lenient with grading with the student experiencing the death of her brother compared to the student experiencing the break-up of a 3 year or 3 month relationship. This was also true of the student experiencing the death of her boyfriend; however, post-hoc comparison revealed there was not a significant difference in mean ratings for the two death vignettes or the two break-up vignettes. Faculty perceived themselves as significantly more likely to allow a missed exam with a make-up exam later for the student experiencing the death of a brother and the death of a boyfriend compared to both the break-up of the 3 year and 3 month relationship. The student experiencing the 3 year relationship break-up was also significantly more likely to receive this accommodation than the 3 month relationship break-up. As for the likelihood of being lenient about group work, faculty perceived themselves as more likely to make this accommodation for the student experiencing the death of brother and death of boyfriend when compared to the 3 year break-up and the 3 month relationship. This pattern was also true of the faculty perceptions regarding the likelihood of the student being allowed to drop an assignment.

Faculty perceptions for death of brother and death of boyfriend were not significantly different when compared to each other; however, each of the two death vignettes was significantly different than the break-up of 3 year relationship and 3 month relationship. Post-hoc comparisons of faculty mean ratings regarding the likelihood of allowing the student to receive a grade of Incomplete for the semester revealed faculty perceived themselves as significantly more likely to make this accommodation for the student experiencing the death of a brother or boyfriend than for the 3 year or 3 month break-up. Post-hoc comparisons of means revealed a faculty perception of being more likely to allow the student to withdraw from the class in the case of death of brother compared to the end of a 3 year or 3 month relationship. The student experiencing the death of her boyfriend or the break-up of a 3 year relationship was more likely to be permitted to withdraw than the student experiencing the break-up of a 3 month relationship.

<p align="center">Faculty Recommendations</p>

A MANOVA was used to analyze the effect of the type of loss on faculty recommendations for the student experiencing the loss and indicated that type of loss had a significant effect on the ratings of the three recommendations, Wilks' lambda $\Lambda = .63$, $F(9, 533) = 29.96$, $p < .001$. Table 2 shows the ANOVAs for each recommendation. As predicted, the faculty viewed the student going home to be with her family or having time off from school to deal with her emotions as most important if the student suffered the death of her brother, as compared to the loss of her boyfriend whether by death or the end of a romantic relationship. Returning to school responsibilities was viewed as more important for the student experiencing a break-up than the student grieving a death.

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Importance and F Ratios for Faculty Recommendations*

	Breakup 3 month		Breakup 3 yrs		Death Boyfriend		Death Brother		F	df
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Going home	2.83	.87	3.06	.83	3.55	.71	3.76	.48	16.98**	(3,529)
Having time off	2.21	.88	2.58	.81	3.30	.71	3.51	.66	46.47**	(3,529)
Back to school	3.56	.64	3.52	.64	2.98	.81	2.98	.81	84.42**	(3,529)

*1= Not at all important; 2 = Slightly important; 3 = Somewhat important; 4 = Very important
**p<.001 for all items

Tukey's HSD was used for post-hoc mean comparisons. Comparisons were made on the mean ratings regarding the importance of the student going home to access additional support, having time off from school to deal with emotions, and returning to normal school responsibilities. Comparisons of the importance of going home to access support found that all means were significantly different from one another, except death of brother was not significantly different from the mean score for death of boyfriend. This was also true in regards to the student having time off from school to deal with her emotions regarding the loss. Faculty perceived it as more important for the student experiencing the death of her brother or boyfriend to have time off from school than the student experiencing the break-up of a 3 year or 3 month relationship. It was also perceived as significantly more important for the student to have time off from school to deal with her emotions when she was experiencing the end of a 3 year relationship compared to a 3 month relationship. As for the student getting back to normal school responsibilities, post-hoc comparisons showed faculty members perceived it as more

important for a student who is experiencing the break-up of a 3 month or 3 year to return to school responsibilities than the student whose brother or boyfriend died.

Length of Recovery

Faculty members were also asked how long they perceived it would take the student to return to normal academic and psychological functioning following the loss. It was expected that faculty expect it should take the student experiencing a death longer to return to normal functioning than the student experiencing a break-up. Table 3 provides a break-down of the faculty member's expectations by group. Results showed that the majority of respondents expected the student to return to normal functioning in less than one month with a 3 month or 3 year romantic breakup. For the vignette with the student experiencing the death of her boyfriend or death of brother the most frequent choice was 1-2 months. Values are listed by the percentage and number of respondents for each vignette that chose that particular response.

Table 3

Expected Length of Recovery to Normal Functioning from Loss by Percentage and Number of Participants

	Breakup 3 month		Breakup 3 yrs		Death Boyfriend		Death Brother	
	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent	n
Less than 1 month	63.77	88	50.39	65	17.19	22	16.67	23
1-2 months	24.64	34	23.26	30	32.81	42	26.09	36
3-4 months	6.52	9	16.28	21	17.97	23	22.46	31
5-6 months	3.62	5	3.10	4	16.41	21	11.59	16
7-8 months	0.00	0	3.88	5	1.56	2	2.17	3
More than 8 months	1.45	2	3.10	4	14.06	18	21.01	29
Total	100	129	100	138	100	128	100	138

Policy

Seven respondents opted not to answer questions regarding a pre-established policy for students experiencing a loss. Therefore, the responses of 526 faculty members were included in the data analyses for questions regarding policy following a loss. In regards to having a pre-established policy regarding student accommodations following a loss, a 461 of 526 faculty members indicated that they did not have such a policy, regardless of which vignette they read. The ANOVA indicated that the faculty's response as to whether they had a pre-established policy was not different across the various vignettes, F (3, 526) = 1.301, p =.273. Table 4 illustrates the total number of respondents that indicated they did or did not have a pre-established policy regarding student loss.

Table 4

Number of Faculty with a Pre-Established Policy for Student Loss

	Breakup 3 months	Breakup 3 years	Death Boyfriend	Death Brother	Total
Yes	16	22	11	16	65
No	111	111	117	122	461
Total	127	133	128	138	526

The type of vignette did, however, have a significant effect on how important faculty members perceived it was for universities to develop a student policy that addresses accommodations following a loss, $F(3, 526) = 3.64$, $p = .013$. A Tukey HSD post-hoc comparison indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of faculty members presented with the vignette in which the student's brother dies (M = 3.05) and the vignette in which the student breaks up with her boyfriend of 3 years (M = 2.70). There was not a significant difference between mean scores of faculty

members presented with the vignette in which the student experiences the death of her boyfriend (M = 2.91) or the vignette in which the student experiences the break-up of a 3 month relationship (M = 2.85) and any other vignette.

<center>Referral to Other Services</center>

Faculty members were also asked how likely they would be to refer the student to another on-campus office or service. Results showed that there was not a significant difference in the likelihood of the student receiving a referral based on what type of loss she was experiencing, F (3, 529) = 2.04, p = .107. Choices ranged from one, meaning not at all likely, to four, meaning very likely. On average, the student experiencing the death of her boyfriend (M = 3.74) was more likely to be given a referral than the student experiencing the death of her brother (M = 3.62), the break-up of a 3 month relationship (M = 3.59), or the break up of a 3 year relationship (M = 3.54). Again, there was not a significant difference between these means, indicating the loss the student was experiencing did not significantly impact the likelihood of receiving a referral.

Faculty members were also asked an open-ended question as to what service they would make the referral. There were a total of 494 respondents to the open-ended portion of this question. Faculty members who responded to this question were able to provide more than one referral source. These responses were divided into five general categories, including: counseling center or other on-campus mental health service, religious or faith-based services, academic support or academic services, health services, and other. The latter category included responses of the registrar's office, student affairs, residence life, and retention services. As illustrated in Table 5, the great majority of faculty recommended a referral to a counseling center regardless of the type of loss. Of interest is

that approximately 13% of faculty indicated they would recommend religious or faith

based service or academic support services when the loss is by death; however, this type

of referral was much less likely to be made when the loss is by break-up. The percentage

of respondents for each vignette are listed in the table below.

Table 5

Percentage of Referral to On-Campus Services for Students Experiencing a Loss

	Breakup 3 month	Breakup 3 yrs	Death Boyfriend	Death Brother
Counseling services	90.4%	94.1%	95.0%	92.3%
Religious/faith-based services	5.6%	2.5%	8.3%	13.1%
Academic support/services	9.6%	5.9%	9.2%	12.3%
Health Services	4.8%	9.3%	9.2%	2.3%
Other	8.0%	3.4%	6.7%	4.6%
Total Respondents	125	118	121	130

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

This project was designed to assess university faculty response to and awareness of loss in college students. One type of loss explored in this study was the death of an immediate family member. It was expected that faculty members would recognize a student who suffered this loss as a griever and would make accommodations for the student. A second type of loss was the death of a boyfriend. Because death of nonfamily members is perceived by our society as less significant than a death of a family member, it was expected that faculty would make fewer accommodations (Fowlkes, 1990; Doka, 1989). One of the most frequent losses for college students is the loss of a romantic relationship (LaGrand, 1986). However, often the person who suffers this loss is not perceived as a griever. Although a relationship lasting a short time may create highly emotional bonding, usually the longer the relationship, the stronger the bond is.

Accommodations & Types of Loss

One prediction was that the break up of romantic relationships would be associated with fewer accommodations than the loss by death. As expected, the type of loss, length of relationship, and type of relationship all contribute to the degree of accommodation given to the griever. As these factors varied, results showed that the perceived degree of support given by faculty members also varied. Indeed, as far as faculty accommodations, faculty perceived themselves as more likely to grant academic accommodations to the student experiencing the death of her brother, followed by the student who lost her boyfriend by death. The student experiencing the loss of a romantic break-up was less likely to be accommodated.

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Previous research illustrated students' desire to have faculty be more accommodating to a student experiencing a loss. Using a similar experimental design, questionnaire, and vignettes, students were asked to rate on a Likert scale how much they agreed with the eight accommodations discussed in this study. These included: granting extra time to complete assignments, allowing the student to miss class(es), being more lenient in assessing the quality of the students work, allowing the student to miss an exam and make it up later, being more lenient about contributions to group work, allow the student to drop an assignment, allowing the student to receive a grade of "Incomplete," and allowing her to withdraw from the class for the semester. They were also asked to rate the importance of the student going home or having time off to work through her feelings. The perceptions of the students were comparable to the finding of this study. Students wanted faculty to be more accommodating to a student experiencing a death related loss than to a student who experienced a break-up related loss, with the highest rated accommodations for the student experiencing the family death. In break-up related losses, the mean rating for accommodations increased as the time in the relationship increased (Thornton, et. al., 1997). Interestingly, even college students perceived a romantic break-up as less of a loss and grief experience than a family or boyfriend death.

It is not surprising that faculty perceived themselves as less likely to grant academic accommodations to a student experiencing romantic losses than the student experiencing a death loss. As noted by Doka (1989), certain losses and the grief response caused by that loss are disenfranchised for a number of reasons. In the situation of a romantic relationship ending, disenfranchisement occurs because the loss is not acknowledged as being a genuine or significant loss. Related to unacknowledged loss is

another type disenfranchised grief which occurs when the griever is unrecognized. The grieving student is not recognized by society as someone who is entitled to experience grief over the loss or have a need to mourn the loss (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006). Often, the end of romantic relationships in the life of a college student is viewed quite simply as a part of growing up. People often provide support to the student in the form of platitudes. These reactions to the student's experience further indicate the disenfranchisement of the student.

Break-ups of college students are minimized for a number of reasons. Regardless of the reason behind the minimization of the loss, according to LaGrand (1989), it is important to acknowledge "differences in perception of the event between support persons and the griever" (p. 178). These differences lead to isolation of the student rather than connectedness, which is key in supporting the student as he or she is coping. The minimization or lack of acknowledgement of the grief being experienced by the student can cause them to become disenfranchised.

Although in this study faculty members were asked to think of the student as a griever, LaGrand referred to college students as the "forgotten grievers," as cited by Zinner (1985), because of the overall lack of research addressing the topic of college student bereavement. Due to the this lack of information, college students bereaved by the break-up or death of a loved one and attempting to reach key developmental milestones and attend to the demands of the college lifestyle, have the additional burden of coping with the loss without adequate understanding by others in their environment. While functioning in an environment of a college or university campus that can be very unsupportive, the student is often removed from the support of family or friends, whom

they may have relied on in the past (Janowiak, Mei-Tal, & Drapkin, 1995). College life

today consists of a variety of demands on the student, many of which they have not been

faced with previously. They are faced with the task of developing a sense of autonomy,

making academic and career choices, coping with academic pressures, and creating and

maintaining a social life (Balk et al., 1998). As a result of these demands, bereaved

college students may encounter significant difficulty, which may be unique to this

population when attempting to cope with their bereavement. Although many students will

effectively cope with the loss of a loved one, it is important for members of the university

community to acknowledge that some will not.

Research has shown that how a young adult adapts or copes with a loss will

impact his or her development and coping skills later in life (Carter & McGoldrick,

1988). As an institution that plays a large role in students' academic and personal growth,

universities need to be made aware of the unique challenges bereaved students face.

Furthermore, universities need to educate themselves on the potential impact of a loss on

students, the risks for complicated grief, and the factors that may help facilitate adaptive

and successful resolution of the student's grief.

Findings of this study indicate that, on average, faculty members are likely to

allow the student extra time to complete assignments and papers, to miss class, to miss an

exam and make it up later, to receive a grade of Incomplete, or to withdraw from the

class, particularly when the loss was a death. However, despite the research indicating

that the loss of a romantic relationship in college-aged individuals can be as intense, if

not more intense than the death of a loved one, the student experiencing the non-death

loss was consistently less likely to receive these accommodations, according to faculty

perception (Kaczmarek, et al., 1990). This finding illustrates that faculty are somewhat responsive to a student facing a loss. There were, however, some accommodations faculty were less willing to make for grieving students. Faculty members were, overall, less likely to allow the student to drop an assignment, receive leniency in grading, or leniency in the student's contribution to a group project. Mean values for these accommodations indicate that, regardless of the type of loss, faculty perceive themselves as not likely to slightly likely to grant the accommodations of dropping an assignment or being lenient in grading or group work. Because of the low ratings of likelihood of these items, it is assumed that faculty considered the fairness of granting these accommodations to only students who mentioned to the faculty member that they had experienced a loss.

Recommendations from Faculty & Types of Loss

Similar to the findings regarding academic accommodations, the faculty viewed the student going home to be with her family or having time off from school to deal with her emotions as most important if the student suffered the death of her brother, as compared to the loss of her boyfriend whether by death or the end of a romantic relationship. Conversely, faculty perceived returning to school responsibilities as more important for the student experiencing a break-up than the student grieving a death. Though some faculty members perceived the student going home for support or having time off from school as important for the student experiencing a break-up, the data showed that consistently faculty perceived it as more important in death losses. Again, this could be an indication that faculty members perceived a family death as more serious or significant than the non-family death or romantic break-ups. This can be supported by

the finding that they perceived it to be more important for the student experiencing a break-up to return to normal school responsibilities. Underlying this finding is the assumption that the student is better able to return to normal school responsibilities more quickly than the student experiencing a death loss.

Length of Recovery

Another aspect of this study was to explore faculty perceptions regarding the length of recovery of functioning. When asked how long they would expect for the student to return to normal functioning, seven of the thirty unsolicited emails received from faculty members indicated that they did not feel qualified to make such a judgment and, therefore, were uncomfortable answering that particular question. However, the faculty members did not acknowledge that in many ways they infer the answer to that question when faced with a student coping with a loss, establishing academic expectations of the student despite the fact that he or she is still actively grieving. Furthermore, it must be noted again that, for the student experiencing a death, the most frequent choice was one to two months for the student to return to normal functioning. Though functioning and actively grieving are not mutually exclusive, most researchers agree that one to two years is a reasonable expectation for the mourning process in someone experiencing non-complicated bereavement (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2006). The bereaved may return to normal functioning long before the mourning process is over; however, it is important to recognize that the impact of the loss doesn't stop once someone returns to day-to-day functioning.

Policy

The majority of respondents indicated that they did not have a pre-established policy regarding student loss, with the oft cited explanation that they "make accommodations on a case by case basis." In fact, 88% of the respondents indicated that they did not have a pre-established policy regarding student loss. Though it is undeniable that grief experiences are extremely individualized, faculty members may find it beneficial to create a pre-established policy that helps both the student and faculty member have clear expectations of how to assist the student in the time immediately following the loss.

According to the 2004 National College Health Assessment, the death of a family member or close friend is the eighth leading cause of a decline in academic performance among all college students (American College Health Association, 2004). This is supported by recent research that showed that a student's GPA significantly decreased during the semester of the loss (Servaty-Seib & Hamilton, 2006). Osterweis (1984) also included social isolation, sleep disturbance, on-going somatic complains, and an increased vulnerability to disease and eating disorders as other possible consequences for bereaved college students. Additionally, being distracted by thoughts of the lost loved one can impact emotional, social and academic functioning, making it harder to maintain the normal tasks of college life, which can be quite demanding (Janowiak, Mei-Tal, & Drapkin, 1995). When students perform poorly academically, miss class, withdraw from activities, or appear unfocused during lectures professors may attribute these behaviors to character traits of the student, when in reality the student is still trying to cope with the loss they have experienced. It is possible that the reactions of professors may add to the

isolation and despair the student may already be experiencing and may also negatively impact the student's academic performance to an even greater degree.

When asked about a university policy addressing student loss, more than one faculty member commented, again through unsolicited emails to the researcher, that they did not want the university dictating the policies for their classroom. One faculty member commented, "Faculty do not like to have their academic freedom impinged upon and so few would like university administrators to over-legislate faculty actions. I work situations out with students such as this on a case-by-case basis." However, this again places the onus of responsibility on the faculty member to dictate policy, which this study indicates is not frequently occurring. One faculty member remarked, "The accommodations to be made depend on the humanity of the faculty staff and administrators, not on policy. Any institution for which this is a 'very important' issue is an institution for which students aren't important in the first place." Comments like these acknowledge the influence of faculty's own experiences and attitudes when determining their own policies or advocating for a university-wide policy.

One idea that has been developed regarding a university-wide policy is the establishment of "bereavement leave" policies for students. Servaty-Seib and Hamilton (2006), point out that, despite bereavement leave policies being common for university faculty and staff, there are very few establishments that have such a policy for students. They advocate for a university-wide policy that faculty members are required to follow. Servaty-Seib and Hamilton propose that such a policy would provide more consistency and protection for bereaved students, rather than leaving decisions regarding the granting or denying of accommodations to faculty members. One example of such a policy is Ball

State's "Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities." It grants students the right to funeral and bereavement leave. It delineates the amount of time that will be granted to students, determined by the distance of funeral services. It also explains that students unable to attend funeral services will also be granted three days of bereavement leave. Furthermore, it addresses the impact of the relationship on the amount of leave granted. Additionally, it allows the student to request a notice be sent to their instructors, which requires the instructor to excuse the student from class and provide opportunities to earn credit for missed assignments (Ball State, 2006). Ball State has made a positive step in addressing student bereavement by creating such a policy. Hopefully, future policies would be even more inclusive of various losses and more comprehensive about accommodating those losses.

Referral

It is promising that such a high percentage of respondents indicated they would refer the student to counseling services. While counseling centers are valuable resources, they are often not the first source of support a student seeks out. Many students do not see grief as a mental health problem and often do not feel counseling centers are the appropriate place to go for their concerns (Balk, 2001). Therefore, faculty members should realize that, as instructors, they may be one of the first people the student turns to for support. Though referral to counseling centers are an appropriate step for faculty to make, the student may not always follow through with the referral. Faculty should attempt to keep an open dialogue with the student regarding the loss and its impact on the student academically, while still encouraging the student to pursue counseling services.

Faculty Comments

Despite this study's finding that faculty members are likely to make some accommodations for students experiencing a death related loss, one cannot ignore the lack of accommodations for the student experiencing the loss due to a romantic break-up. Though it cannot be inferred from this study that faculty members are unsympathetic to the student experiencing a break-up, it does demonstrate a significant degree of variability in how these various types of losses are managed in an academic setting. One faculty member, reading a romantic break-up vignette, remarked, "I consider a 'loss' as a death of a close friend or family member and I really almost always make accommodations so that the student can deal with the loss. I consider your scenario just part of every day life of a 19 year old!"

Upon completing the questionnaire, some faculty members felt compelled to elaborate on their answers by providing unsolicited explanations of their responses via email. In total emails were received from 30 different faculty members, addressing a number of issues. Aside from qualifying specific answers from the questionnaire, emails addressed concerns about the set-up of the survey and particularly issues with the Student Voice program. Others offered personal stories of encounters they have had with students regarding the topic or simply offered thanks for being reminded of the survey. One email from a faculty member also pertained to concerns outside the scope of this research by discussing the faculty member's opinions about the current state of psychology and psychiatry.

A qualitative review of the comments indicated a number of themes. Many cited being lied to by students in the past about "multiple dead grandmothers" as reasons they

are not more accommodating to students' losses. Other faculty expressed confusion or anger at being asked to consider the student's break-up as a loss. Another common theme in responses from the faculty members was the concept that the student should not have accommodations made following a loss because this does not adequately prepare the student for real-life situations, such as workplace expectations. Others indicated that they believed the student should "get over" the loss because it is an expected part of life. One faculty member commented, "…the student has to understand that their grandmother was 93 and one has to simply expect these things. (Even if, as an orphan, they were raised by that grandmother!)." Others cited personal experiences as informing their decision on how to manage the student's loss, illustrated in the statement of one respondent:

> Many workplaces do not accommodate loss at all and students need to learn to continue to function somehow. For example, my mother died one week before the start of a semester, I was in the classroom and functioned on the first day of class and thereafter. My husband of 15 years walked out on me in the middle of a semester, I did not even miss one day, because there would not be anyone to cover classes for me. Part of becoming an adult is learning how to cope with these situations because unfortunately life is filled with them.

Lastly, many faculty members noted problems that accommodating the student's loss could create for them as a faculty member. Some of these problems were logistics, such as teaching lab courses that cannot be made up. One faculty member reported that he would not allow the student to hand in assignments late because "everyone staying on

track and in synch is important for me to maintain order; I lose things that I get in an irregular way."

It is also important to note that some faculty members responded with emails of encouragement or gratitude for conducting the survey. Others wrote to discuss how the survey stimulated their own thinking on the topic, regardless of which vignette they had read. Some wrote simply to indicate that they viewed this research as very important and pertinent to their roles as faculty members. One faculty member, presented with a break-up vignette, commented:

> Usually the loss they talk about is of a cousin, friend, aunt, uncle, or grandparent. I have never had a student talk about the loss of a partner that is causing them sadness. I wonder if they think they shouldn't talk about it, or if they think they can't make that connection--that we're all supposed to just tough it out when we experience the loss of a partner.

Comments such as this one act as reminders that some faculty members welcome students discussing personal losses. It also provides encouragement that the end of a romantic relationship will not always be treated as a disenfranchised loss.

This study investigated how faculty manage losses that are disenfranchised. Comments from faculty members, though unsolicited, helped to highlight the diversity in perspectives and responses of faculty members. Highlighting the diversity in responses also helped to illuminate the need for more education and information regarding responding to a student experiencing a loss. It also indicates a need to ensure that the

student's experience immediately following a loss is not ignored by faculty members, particularly those faculty approached by a student.

Suggestions

Results of this study show that the issue of addressing a student experiencing a loss is one that could be valuable to address on both the faculty and university level. Universities need to educate themselves on the possible effects of a loss on a student, the risks for complicated grief, and factors that may help facilitate the student's success while he or she is mourning. Another step universities might consider is instituting a student bereavement leave policy. Though not comprehensive, this would clarify for both students and faculty what can be expected in the immediate aftermath of a loss. A bereavement policy such as Ball State's (2006) would also help to streamline the notification of faculty members when a student has experienced a loss.

On the faculty level, it is also important for faculty members to become more educated regarding the potential impact of losses on students, particularly the academic impact. Many faculty members are unaware of the impact that losses can have on a student's academic performance. Psycho-education is extremely important, not only to inform faculty, but also to try and develop an open dialogue regarding this matter. Issues surrounding loss and bereavement are not often discussed. Keeping an open dialogue between faculty, administrators, and students would help facilitate the process of appropriately managing a student immediately following a loss. These discussions will help faculty take into consideration the unique characteristics and developmental issues of the college student population, who may or may not be facing a serious loss for the first time. It would help faculty acknowledge the individual needs and coping abilities of

bereaved students. Furthermore, it is understandable that faculty members must maintain order and academic integrity, however, it may be helpful to discuss methods for the a bereaved student and faculty member to negotiate class requirements in a way that maintains order for the faculty members but grants some flexibility to the student. Thus, students facing a loss are less likely to feel unrecognized or disenfranchised.

Limitations to the Study

It is important to note several limitations to this study. There were several limitations regarding the population of the study. First, the universities included in this study were limited to universities in Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, limiting the ability to generalize these findings. Furthermore, the universities included in the study were those that allowed the questionnaire to be distributed. Another challenge with this sample is the possibility of selection bias. That is, administrators having a desire to contribute to this research may have been more likely to allow the questionnaire to be distributed. Also those that responded to the survey may have chosen to do so because of a particular interest or experience with this topic. Though this is possible, it should also be noted that results were not uniformly negative or positive.

Demographic data was not collected from respondents. Results may have varied based on the gender of respondents, faculty position, department, or years of experiences; however, this was not explored. Additionally, the demographic and descriptive information of the student experience the loss was the same in all vignettes. Changes in the description of the student could impact the results of the study. The fact that all vignettes included a female student may have had an impact on results. Research has shown that symptoms of grief in any type of loss can vary according to the gender of the

griever or the whether the bereaved is an instrumental or intuitive griever (Martin & Doka, 1998). This would change the presentation of the student when asking for help, possibly impacting the faculty member's response. Also, based on gender alone, faculty members may react differently to a male seeking help. Though all of these demographic variables could provide valuable and more in depth information, they were not included in this study in an attempt to keep data analysis more manageable. Another limitation of the study was in describing the various losses; the term "boyfriend" was used without a more explicit description of the romantic nature of the relationship. Also faculty members were responding to a vignette, as opposed to a real case. Furthermore, the questionnaire asked about general opinions and not concrete behavior, limiting the amount of information gained about how faculty members actually act when responding to a student experiencing a loss.

Other limitations that must be noted are regarding the questionnaire itself. The forced choice response format of the questionnaire limited the options of faculty members. That is, respondents were not able to leave a question blank due to the set-up of the Student Voice program. Also respondents were not given the option to respond not applicable, which may have forced faculty members to respond to questions that were not entirely applicable to his or her class. For example, faculty members who do not give exams in their classes were still forced to answer the question asking about allowing the student to make up an exam later. Additionally, faculty members noted that once they had responded to questions they were unable to go back and reread the vignette without erasing their previous answers. Though not necessarily a limitation, another issue that arose with Student Voice was multiple reminders being sent out, as opposed to the one

reminder requested by the researcher. Finally, the statistics gathered in this study were descriptive in nature. The results provide an overarching picture of how faculty members perceive themselves as responding to a student experiencing a loss. However, one cannot infer the reasons behind the responses provided.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is very little research on college student bereavement and even less research addressing the grief experience of a college student experiencing a loss due to the break-up of a romantic relationship. More research needs to be done regarding all aspects of college student loss. The information gathered in this study provides a good basis for areas of further investigation. Future research could include more qualitative data regarding this subject, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of faculty member's response to various losses. This could include interviewing faculty members about real life experiences they have had regarding student losses, which would include death and non-death losses. It could also provide a better understanding of faculty members' perceptions of student losses. Also future research could investigate variables not explored currently, such as the impact of the gender of the faculty member or student on responses.

Future research should be designed with the goal of providing further information and understanding regarding the prevalence and experience of college student bereavement. Research must also address what university interventions were found to be helpful or unhelpful by bereaved students. Students who have experienced a loss can provide information about how universities as a whole can improve their response to student loss. These students could also help identify specific needs of bereaved students,

for example an on-campus grief support group, that may help facilitate successful resolution of grief in a university setting while taking into account the academic, social, and emotional demands placed on students. One way of approaching this may be to access campus chapters of National Students of Ailing Mothers and Fathers Support Network, a group created by David Fajgenbaum following the loss of his mother to cancer while he was attending Georgetown University. The mission of this organization is "to support all grieving college students, empower all college students to get involved in service, and to raise awareness about the needs of grieving college students" (National Students of AMF Support Network, n.d., Mission and Programs section). Chapters of this organization are developing on campuses nationwide and could be a valuable resource to access when researching helpful interventions and other aspects of the experience of a bereaved college student.

Conclusion

Universities are invested in the academic and personal development of students. Throughout their time in college, students will likely be faced with a number of obstacles to their success. Loss and bereavement are merely one obstacle to overcome, but one that is undeniable. The research regarding the prevalence of college student bereavement and the implications of grief on a student's experience has increased in recent years. This research illustrates a need to develop a better understanding of how student's can best be served when faced with a major loss. Only by exploring what is currently being done, on various levels, to assist student can we begin to improve those services to meet student's needs. The current study indicates a great deal of variability in how student losses are managed by faculty members. Faculty members must be made aware of the impact losses

can have on students so that they can begin to develop policies and practices to provide a

learning environment that encourages student success.

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Appendix A

Four Vignettes

Break-up (3 years)
Rachel is a 19 year old college student in one of your classes. She receives mostly B's on all of her assignments and exams and has missed class only once since the semester began. Approximately half way through the semester, Rachel comes to see you during office hours and tells you that her boyfriend of three years had unexpectedly broken up with her two days ago. Since then she says has been unable to eat or sleep and cries often throughout the day. She has also been unable to concentrate on her schoolwork and is worried she will fall behind. Rachel wants to know what, if any, accommodations you are willing to make for her.

Break-up (3 months)
Rachel is a 19 year old college student in one of your classes. She receives mostly B's on all of her assignments and exams and has missed class only once since the semester began. Approximately half way through the semester, Rachel comes to see you during office hours and tells you that her boyfriend of three months had unexpectedly broken up with her two days ago. Since then she says has been unable to eat or sleep and cries often throughout the day. She has also been unable to concentrate on her schoolwork and is worried she will fall behind. Rachel wants to know what, if any, accommodations you are willing to make for her.

Death (boyfriend)
Rachel is a 19 year old college student in one of your classes. She receives mostly B's on all of her assignments and exams and has missed class only once since the semester began. Approximately half way through the semester, Rachel comes to see you during office hours and tells you that her boyfriend died unexpectedly two days ago. Since then she says has been unable to eat or sleep and cries often throughout the day. She has also been unable to concentrate on her schoolwork and is worried she will fall behind. Rachel wants to know what, if any, accommodations you are willing to make for her.

Death (brother)
Rachel is a 19 year old college student in one of your classes. She receives mostly B's on all of her assignments and exams and has missed class only once since the semester began. Approximately half way through the semester, Rachel comes to see you during office hours and tells you that her brother died unexpectedly two days ago. Since then she says has been unable to eat or sleep and cries often throughout the day. She has also been unable to concentrate on her schoolwork and is worried she will fall behind. Rachel wants to know what, if any, accommodations you are willing to make for her.

Appendix B

Student Voice Survey

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Student in Trouble

Please carefully read the following scenario about a student issue.

Rachel is a 19-year-old college student in one of your classes. She receives mostly Bs on all of her assignments and exams, and has missed class only once since the semester began. Approximately halfway through the semester, Rachel comes to see you during office hours and tells you that her boyfriend of three years had unexpectedly broken up with her two days ago. She says she has been unable to eat or sleep since then and cries often throughout the day. She has also been unable to concentrate on her schoolwork and is worried she will fall behind. Rachel wants to know what, if any, accommodations you are willing to make for her.

Questions 1 - 8
Based on the scenario you have just read, please rate how likely you would be to make the following accommodations for Rachel:

	Not at all likely	Slightly likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Allow her extra time to complete assignments and papers.	☐	☐	☐	☐
If attendance is required, allow her to miss class(es).	☐	☐	☐	☐
Be more lenient in assessing the quality of her work (i.e. grading).	☐	☐	☐	☐
Allow her to miss an exam and make it up later.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Be more lenient about work she was	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Not at all likely	Slightly likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
supposed to contribute to a group project.				
Allow her to drop an assignment.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Allow her to receive a grade of "Incomplete" for the semester.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Allow her to withdraw from the class for the semester.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Questions 9 - 11

Based on the scenario you have just read, please rate how important you feel each of the following items are:

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Very important
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Rachel going home to access additional support	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rachel having time off from school to deal with her emotions regarding the loss	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rachel getting back to normal school responsibilities (e.g. attending class, taking exams, completing assignments)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Question 12
How long do you think it should take Rachel to return to normal academic and psychological
functioning following the loss?

◯   less than 1 month

◯   1-2 months

◯   3-4 months

◯   5-6 months

◯   7-8 months

◯   More than 8 months

Question 13
How likely would you be to refer Rachel to another on-campus office or service?

◯   Not at all likely

◯   Slightly likely

◯   Somewhat likely

◯   Very likely

Question 14
What service(s) would you refer her to?

Question 15
Do you have a pre-established policy regarding student accommodations following a loss?

◯   Yes

◯   No

Question 16
Many places of employment have policies in place to dictate accommodations following a loss. How important do you feel it is for universities to develop such a policy for college students?

☐ Not at all important

☐ Slightly important

☐ Somewhat important

☐ Very important

Appendix C

Letter Requesting University Participation

IRB Office
102 Old Main
Slippery Rock University
Slippery Rock, PA 16057

Dear Dr. Arnhold,

I contacted you previously regarding including Slippery Rock faculty in my research. I am a doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program at IUP. I am currently in the process of completing my dissertation in which I hope to use university faculty as my subject population. I am having participants complete an online survey through the Student Voice website, a university contracted data collection website.

The survey takes about 5 minutes is minimally invasive and involves questions assessing the accommodations faculty members are likely to make for students who have experienced a loss as well as general attitudes regarding the loss. This study will provide valuable information about faculty making adjustments for students suffering from a loss, including the death of a family member, as well as demonstrate a need for university faculty to acknowledge the impact losses can have on students' academic performance. Universities are constantly faced with the issue of retention of students. Information gathered from this study could provide university faculty with a better understanding of one aspect of student life involved in retention and overall provide a more positive learning environment for students.

I am contacting you to request that I be permitted to use Slippery Rock's faculty as part of my subject population. In this packet, I have included a copy of my IRB protocol and the IRB approval form from IUP. If you need any further information from me, please feel free to contact me. Thank you in advance for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dietz, M.A.
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
512 Washington St.
Indiana, PA 15701
(412)977-9346
hkzh@iup.edu

Appendix D

Email Requesting Participation in Research

Your knowledge and experience are needed, as well as about five minutes of your time. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am conducting a research study on faculty's response to a student who has experienced a loss. Information gathered from this study could provide university faculty with a better understanding of one aspect of student life involved in retention and overall provide a more positive learning environment for students.

The survey asks about adjustments to course requirements that you, as a university faculty member, may make for a student who has suffered a loss. Your participation is completely voluntary. There are no known risks associated with this research. The survey will be completed anonymously with no identifying information required. If you choose to take part, all information you provide will be held in strict confidence. Research data will only be reported in pooled form. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept confidential.

Should you choose to participate in this study, simply click the internet link provided below. By clicking on the link below, you will be consenting to your participation in this study. You may withdraw from the study at any time by simply exiting from the survey, once you have begun it. The researchers conducting this study are available to answer any questions you might have, or to receive comments. Please feel free to call or write:

Sarah Dietz, M.A.   Gordon Thornton, Ph.D.
Doctoral Student in Psychology   Professor of Psychology
Indiana University of Pennsylvania   Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Uhler Hall   Uhler Hall
1020 Oakland Ave.   1020 Oakland Ave.
Indiana, PA 15705   Indiana, PA 15705
s.e.dietz@iup.edu   thornton@iup.edu
(412)977-9346   (724)357-2447

Thank you very much for your time and input,

Sarah Dietz, M.A.

Appendix E

Debriefing

Recently you were asked to participate in a study to examine the adjustments to course requirements that university faculty members would make for a student who has suffered a loss. This study provided valuable information about faculty making adjustments for students suffering from a loss. Faculty members of four Pennsylvania State Universities were asked to participate by reading one of four different cases of a student loss. The losses were romantic breakup after 3 months or 3 years, death of a boyfriend or death of a family member (brother). Universities are constantly faced with the issue of retention of students. Information gathered from this study could provide university faculty with a better understanding of one aspect of student life involved in retention and provide general information on faculty reactions to various losses that college students suffer. This information may help faculty provide a more positive learning environment for students.

Faculty were asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale, from not at all likely to very likely, the likelihood that they would give the student specific accommodations. The accommodations included: extra time to complete assignments, allowing her to miss class or classes, lenience in grading, lenience in participation in group work, permission to miss an exam and make it up later, dropping an assignment, allowing the student to receive a grade of Incomplete for the semester, and allowing the student to withdraw from the class. In addition to accommodations, faculty members were asked to rate, on a four-point scale, the likelihood that they would refer the student to another on-campus service. Participants were also asked to rate, on a four-point scale ranging from very

important to not at all important, how important they felt it was for the student to go home to access additional support, have time off from school to deal with her emotions regarding the loss, or getting back to school responsibilities. The participants were also asked how long he or she would expect it to take for the student to return to normal functioning following the loss. Another question addressed the likelihood of the participant referring the student to another on-campus service. Finally, participants were asked if they have a policy in place to handle students' losses and what that policy is, as well as how important the participant felt it was for the university to develop a policy regarding student loss.

As expected the student experiencing the death of her brother received the most academic accommodations, followed by the student who lost her boyfriend by death. The student experiencing the loss of a romantic break-up was less accommodated. These findings indicate that, in general, faculty members are willing to provide support via academic accommodations to some degree in both death and non-death losses. However, the fact that they consistently perceived themselves as less likely to provide academic accommodations to the student experiencing a loss from a romantic break-up could imply that they view the break-up of a student relationship as a non-significant or a less significant loss. The minimization of the significance of the loss may lead the student and his or her grief reaction to become disenfranchised.

Similar to the findings regarding academic accommodations, the faculty viewed the student going home to be with her family or having time off from school to deal with her emotions as most important if the student suffered the death of her brother, as compared to the loss of her boyfriend whether by death or the end of a romantic

relationship. Conversely, faculty perceived returning to school responsibilities as viewed as more important for the student experiencing a break-up than the student grieving a death.

Faculty considered students should return to normal function in 1-2 months. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not have a pre-established policy regarding student loss. Some university professionals (Servaty-Seib & Hamilton, 2006) have proposed a student bereavement policy similar to faculty and staff bereavement policies.

The purpose of this study was to gather normative information on faculty responses to loss in students. One important reason for this information is that student academic performance suffers after a significant loss (American College Health Association, 2004; Servaty-Seib, 2006). It is promising that faculty recognize the difficult students have with a loss because a high percentage of faculty indicated they would refer the student to counseling services.