



# FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND FOSTER ALUMNI IN COLLEGE

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## BACKGROUND

The pilot study was a component of an extended research project for *R is 4 Thursday*, a statewide collaboration focused on former foster youth attending Oklahoma colleges or universities. The purpose of this component of the research was to explore and consider the role of family.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What ties with family—as defined by the student—do foster alumni report that they maintain while in college?
2. How do interactions with family influence college success and experiences? Success was defined by 1) enrollment in college, 2) college persistence, and 3) academic advancement.

## METHODS

The qualitative pilot study explored two cases (experiences of two foster alumni) using multiple data sources including interviews, videos, drawings, and an online questionnaire. Data was derived from both existing and new data and focused on human feelings, perceptions, and experiences. Data analysis focused on themes and a deep understanding of the cases.

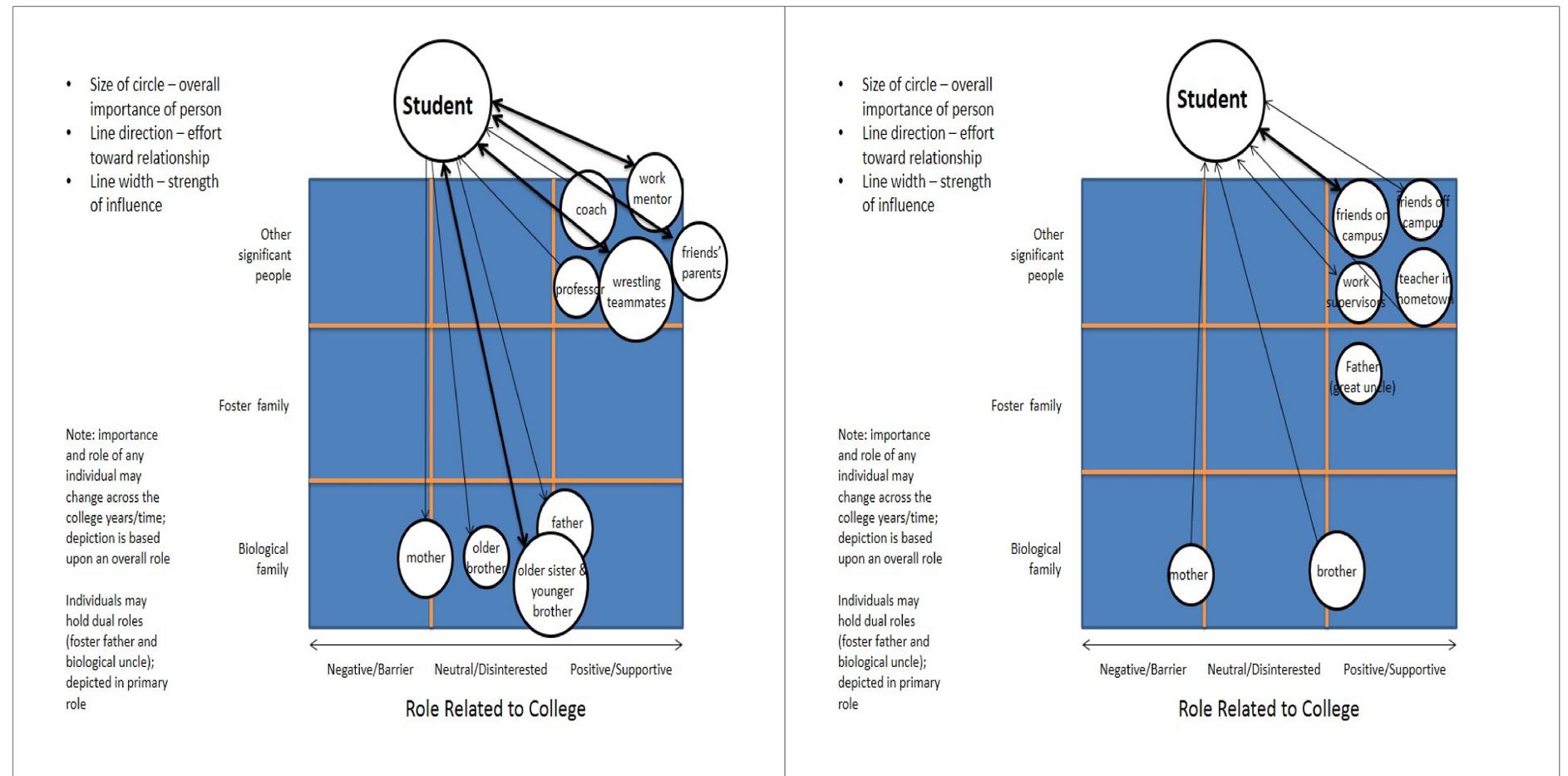
## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

### Research Question 1

- The definition of family was fluid and broader than biology. Inclusion in the students' family was also influenced by geography and season of life.
- Students were maintaining or renewing biological family ties with both parents and siblings. Sibling relationships were more prominently valued and were conveyed to be more positive than parent relationships.
- Maintaining family ties was not a shared responsibility.

### Research Question 2

- Unsupportive family did not have an evident effect on the students' success in college. However, it had negative effects on the students' overall college experiences.
- Students arrived at college with greater independence than students from strong family ties. Foster alumni did not report struggling through a transitional period.
- Once in college, encouragement and support from faculty helped students commit to stay.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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