



AHEPPP Journal

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About the AHEPPP Journal

The AHEPPP Journal publishes scholarly essays, research-based articles, personal essays, and reviews that address important issues related to parent/family services and that make an original contribution to the knowledge base about parent/family programs and services in higher education. The guiding editorial policy is that articles are of high standard, while including practical information of interest to parent/family professionals.

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This issue of the AHEPPP Journal includes two peer-reviewed articles. The first, by Christine Self of Texas Tech University, is a literature review examining recent studies of the impact of parent/family involvement at the college level. Ms. Self uses Jeffrey Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood as the basis for her review, and she looks at the effect of emerging technology on parent/student communication and relations. She identifies an on-going shift of institutional views of the healthy influence of parental involvement, as a change from the negative terminology of "helicopter parenting."

The second peer-reviewed article is a research project by AHEPPP Board member, Branka Kristic of Hofstra University. Ms. Kristic surveyed AHEPPP members to explore the effect of the 2009 economic downturn on college and university Parent/Family Programs. Her article identifies the services that were reduced or eliminated in times of institutional cutbacks and also highlights programs and services that were retained.

While parent/family programs have developed significantly in the United States over the past 20 years, parental involvement in other countries has been viewed with skepticism. In the third article, Katherine Winters, a recent graduate of the Student Affairs in Higher Education program at Wright State University, reports on an online review she conducted of 25 universities in the United Kingdom, where programs and families are a budding phenomenon. She compares U.K. policies and programs with best practices in the U.S.

The AHEPPP Journal welcomes submissions of scholarly essays, research-based articles, essays, and reviews that address important issues related to parent/family services and that make an original contribution to the knowledge base about parent/family programs and services in higher education. Submission guidelines are posted on the AHEPPP website: www.aheppp.org/guidelines-for-article-preparation-and-submission.

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Parent Involvement in Higher Education: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Higher education professionals have questioned the role of parent involvement in higher education. Media reports and news articles often focus on the negative aspects of increased parental involvement and egregious cases of helicopter parenting. The intention of this review is to help institutions of higher education support healthy parent involvement. A search was conducted to find recent studies on parent involvement in higher education using Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood as the theoretical basis for the review. Results indicate differing findings on how emerging technologies such as social media affect parent-student communication and relationships. Results also demonstrate shifting views on the importance of parent involvement and the concept of helicopter parenting. Literature suggests institutions of higher education should harness technology to foster better parent-student communication and should embrace highly involved parents as constituents as they support their students in the higher education journey.

Introduction

Parent involvement is an important topic in higher education, as parents are becoming more and more involved in their students' higher education experiences. According to Sallie Mae (2012), 37% of students' college expenses were paid for by parents' savings or parent loans, so parents are a significant source of financial support for students. Parents are increasingly involved in college choice as well. Around 50% of students reported advice from parents and family members is an important factor in their decision to enroll and 61% of prospective students conducted college research with assistance from parents (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Parent involvement can be defined as follows:

The phenomenon of parental involvement includes parents' showing interest in the lives of their students in college, gaining more information about college, knowing when and how to appropriately provide encouragement and guidance to their student connecting with the institution, and potentially retaining that institutional connection beyond the college years. (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 5)

Institutions of higher education must consider parents important constituents and support them as they support their sons and daughters in the higher education journey.

Parent involvement in American institutions of higher education has changed over time. From the colonial days up until the 1960s and 1970s, colleges and universities stood *in loco parentis*, or in place of parents. This means parents ceded their parental authority to colleges and universities and expected them to exert control of their students' conduct. In the 1960s and 1970s, the traditional power structure of the family and of the university was crumbling, resulting in the demise of *in loco parentis* and increasing student independence (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Symbolic of this era, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was passed in 1974. This piece of legislation granted students the right to access their educational records, the right to challenge the content of those records, and, most important to parents, the right to consent to the disclosure of those records (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974). The passage of FERPA ushered in an era of lowered communication between institutions of higher education and parents and represented a time when institutions of higher education considered students independent adults.

Today, *in loco parentis* is returning to college campuses. FERPA has been amended to allow notification to parents if students under the age of 21 have been found responsible for violations of university policies concerning alcohol or drugs. The passage of the Campus Security Act of 1990, which requires institutions to publish an annual report about campus crimes, was the direct result of parental action and is increasingly used by parents when considering college choices for their students (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Many universities and colleges have responded to parents' increased need for involvement by providing parent programming on their campuses. A few parent programs started as early as the 1920s, and by 2011, 91.4% of colleges and universities surveyed provided family weekend programs, 96.2% offered parent orientations, and 62.4% operated parents councils (Savage & Petree, 2011). Though colleges and universities increasingly provide parent programming, they do not always consider increased parent involvement to be a positive development. The media and the *Chronicle of Higher*

Education are filled with anecdotes of over-involved parents and writers assert that parents communicate with their students too frequently, call their students' professors, help select their students' courses, and even attend disciplinary hearings (e.g. Galsky & Shotick, 2012; Levine & Dean, 2012; Mangan & Lipka, 2008; McMurtrie, 2007; Merriman, 2007; Potter, 2008; Read, 2007). Most of the articles criticized the invasiveness, overprotectiveness, and over-involvement of parents, whom they often call "helicopter parents." The term "helicopter parents" was popularized by Neil Howe and William Strauss in their book *Millennials go to College* (2003). Other derogatory terms for overinvolved parents have been used, such as "lawnmower parents," referring to their attempts to run over administrators, "snowplow parents," who clear a direct path free of obstacles for their children, and "Blackhawk parents," who, rather than just hovering, are fully armed, ready to swoop down and attack anything that stands in their children's way (Castle, 2012; Gumbel, 2011; Hoover & Lipka, 2006).

What is lacking in the media and in reports about helicopter parenting is a description of healthy parent involvement. The purpose of this literature review is to determine how parent involvement affects college students, in order to help institutions of higher education support healthy parent involvement. The review starts by focusing on parent-student communication, a key component of parent involvement in students' lives, and how it affects the parent-student relationship and students' college experiences. Next, the review covers parent involvement and literature about helicopter parents and concludes with a discussion and suggested implications for higher education professionals.

Theoretical Framework

This literature review is guided by the theory of emerging adulthood, which has been used to study young adult and college student development as well as college students' relationships with their parents. Emerging adulthood theory builds on Erikson's (1968) work in life course theory by adding a new stage, emerging adulthood, between Erikson's stages of adolescence, the period from puberty until the late teens, and adulthood, the period from the late teens until the early 40s (Arnett, 2007). This new stage was necessary, according to Arnett (2000), because of demographic changes in the last half of the twentieth century, such as a delay in starting careers and starting families, two of the major tasks of adulthood. Emerging adulthood is defined as the age range from 18 to 25 and is characterized by change, exploration, and further identity creation, the tasks associated with adolescence. Emerging adults do not see themselves as adolescents, but they also do not see themselves as having fully reached adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This theory is applicable to this literature review because increasing college attendance has been identified as one of the demographic changes leading to the new life stage of emerging adulthood. Additionally, parent involvement in the lives of college students, helicopter parenting in particular, has been called a factor in students' supposed inability to grow from adolescence to adulthood. As discussed above, today's college students increasingly depend on parental financial support for education and parents are increasingly involved in college selection, both phenomena that leave college students feeling they exist somewhere in between the dependence of adolescence and the independence of adulthood. College students also are more connected with their parents than ever, due to increased communication because of changes in technology, as discussed below.

Literature Review

Parent-Student Communication

Changes in technology have made it easier for parents and students to communicate frequently, a phenomenon often lamented by those in higher education who feel this high level of communication interferes with students' independence and emergence into adulthood (Galsky & Shotick, 2012). Hofer (2011) found students communicated an average of 13.5 times per week with their parents and that 75% of students in the study were satisfied with the frequency of parent communication.

Parents are frequently using social media sites such as Facebook to interact with their college students. Stanford University created a "Facebook for Parents" course designed to help parents understand Facebook, understand the privacy pitfalls of using Facebook, and use it to help their families (Facebook for Parents, 2012). The course was primarily designed for parents of children under 18 but parents of college-age students were also welcome to attend (Facebook for Parents, 2012). Karl and Peluchette (2011) found 67.7% of college students would, without reservation, accept a friend request from their mothers. How parents communicate with their students affects their relationships. Gentzler, Oberhauser, Westerman, and Nardorff (2011) found students who communicate frequently with their parents via cell phone exhibited higher levels of satisfaction, intimacy, and support in the parent-child relationship, while frequent communication with parents via social networking was associated with greater detachment and loneliness. Conversely, another study found that having a Facebook "friendship" with parents was not related to higher perceptions of privacy invasion, as expected; rather, having a Facebook connection was related to lower levels of conflict between parents and students (Kanter, Affi, & Robbins, 2012). More extensive research in this area would improve understanding of parent-student communication via social media and its impact on parent-student relationships.

Focusing on cell phone communication between parents and students, Lee, Meszaros, and Colvin (2009) found students who were frequent cell phone users had greater attachment to their female parent or guardian and used their cell phones to stay connected with their parents, which provided a secure base to allow the students to adjust to college and adulthood.

Research has also been conducted on how parents' communications with their students affects their students' college experiences. As mentioned above, students rely on advice from parents and family in researching colleges and decisions to enroll (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Enrollment Management officials at colleges and universities are beginning to recognize parents' involvement in college choice and ensure employees are trained to communicate with parents (Baworowski, 2012). Enrollment management offices are encouraged to build parent communication plans, develop print pieces specifically for parents, and directly engage with parents early in the college choice process (Rhyneer, 2012). Whether students enroll in college at all may be impacted by parent communication. For example, Turley (2006) discovered students whose parents communicated a desire for their students to attend a college closer to home (or to attend a college in the student's home town) were less likely to apply to college their senior year and applied to fewer colleges than students whose parents said they could attend college anywhere.

What parents say to students about college life and their expectations for their student regarding college may also affect students' college satisfaction and success. Discrepancies between parents' and students' expectations for college (i.e., academic achievement, career goals) can result in lower levels of self-worth and college adjustment; this can be mitigated by higher levels of communication between parents and students about college expectations (Aglia & Renk, 2008). Kranstuber, Carr, and Hosek (2012) focused on memorable messages, defined as messages that people hear early in life, remember, and consider influential. They found the contents of the memorable messages to students about college were unimportant, but the students' perceptions of the intent of the message sender were significant predictors of cognitive learning indicators, learner empowerment, college motivation, and college satisfaction.

The intent of parent communications does not always reach students, however. Boyle and Boekeloo (2009) found higher levels of parent communication with students about the negative effects of alcohol consumption were related to higher levels of alcohol abuse by students. This was the exact opposite of what the researchers (and probably the parents) expected. In a similar study, parent communication about alcohol during the weekends was successful in decreasing alcohol consumption and they concluded that colleges and universities should encourage parents to communicate about alcohol with their students (Turrisi, Mallett, Abar, & Jaccard, 2010).

Parent Involvement

As mentioned above, parent involvement in students' higher education has been rising. Two-thirds of students agreed or strongly agreed their parents are interested in their grades, stress good grades (59.7%), are interested in their out-of-class experiences (54%), and influence students' choice of major or courses (15.2%). Parent involvement varied by race, gender, and socioeconomic class, with white, female, and wealthy or upper class students exhibiting the most parent involvement (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009).

Much of the literature on parent involvement suggests it is desired by students and supports their adjustment to college. Taub (2008) asserted that, while student affairs professionals are concerned that helicopter parents inhibit student development, highly involved parents actually support their students in completing psychosocial tasks such as identity creation and developing intimacy, provided they allow their students opportunities to solve problems themselves before offering assistance. Taub (2008) also suggested parents offer needed support during the transition to college.

Chang, Hechhausen, Greenberger, and Chuansheng (2010) found shared agency with parents, defined below, positively impacts students' adjustment to college. They defined shared agency as parental accommodation, support, and collaboration, as opposed to non-shared agency, defined as parental directing or non-involvement. Within the framework of their assertions, both helicopter parents and parents who are uninvolved in their students' lives would exhibit non-shared agency and thus negatively impact their students' adjustment to college.

Another study found students who are "individuated" from parents (showing high levels of separateness and connectedness with parents) exhibited higher measures of psychological well-being after three months of college. These individuated students fared better than their peers who were in the pseudo autonomous (low connectedness and high separateness), dependent (high connectedness and low separateness), and ambiguous (low connectedness and low separateness) groups (Yelle, Kenyon, & Boerner, 2009). This indicates connection to parents, in the form of parental communication and support, plays as important a role as separateness, in the form of student independence, in the college transition.

Despite reports in the media, The Education Advisory Board (2010) found that not all parents are hovering. Freshmen reported too little involvement by parents in the areas of college choice, dealing with college officials, choosing courses, and choosing college activities. These findings varied by race, with Latino/a students reporting higher levels of low parent involvement than Asian, black, and white students (Education Advisory Board, 2010). This study also found involvement in parents associations was negatively correlated with students' academic probation status.

Helicopter Parenting

The term "helicopter parents" was used by Howe and Strauss (2003) and described parents who hover over their students, never letting go, ready to swoop down and intervene when needed. While helicopter parenting is mentioned a great deal in the media and news reporting, there have not been many scholarly studies on helicopter parenting and its effect on students. Some research on helicopter parenting suggests it could be harmful to college students' well-being. Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, and Murphy (2012) related helicopter parenting to Baumrind's (1971, 1978) authoritarian parenting style, which is characterized by rigid parental decision-making without regard to the specific needs of the child or of the situation. Literature has suggested that helicopter parenting and authoritative parenting is related to lower levels of well-being in college students and to higher incidences of anxiety and depression (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Segrin et al., 2012).

Other literature has suggested high levels of parent involvement are not necessarily negative. Simmons' (2008) qualitative study of seventeen students found those students felt their parents' high level of involvement was positive and provided them with helpful guidance in academic and career decision-making rather than intrusive parental mandates. This mirrors the study above, which showed students reporting their parents are not involved enough (Education Advisory Board, 2010). The National Survey of Student Engagement findings illustrated that students who have helicopter parents (defined as parents who intervene on their behalf) were actually more engaged in college and exhibited greater college satisfaction (Lipka, 2007). Fingerman et al. (2012) also found intense parental support of adult children was related to better psychological adjustment and life satisfaction than experienced by children who did not receive intense parental support.

Attitudes about parent involvement and helicopter parents are shifting. Writers assert parent involvement should not be defined by helicopter parenting or other derogatory terms used for involved parents (Rhyneer, 2012). Others state helicopter parenting is a stereotype promulgated through anecdotes and the actual numbers of helicopter parents are greatly exaggerated (Hoover, 2008).

Discussion

The preceding review of the literature reveals there is a great deal of research occurring on parent-student communication, parent involvement, and helicopter parenting. Studies agree that parent involvement supports students' adjustment to college. Not all researchers agree that frequent parent communication and helicopter parenting are positive for the development, success, and well-being of college students. One thing is certain, though: parent communication and involvement are facts of the higher education landscape.

Students are better off if they are connected with their parents and if their parents are involved in their higher education journey, as suggested by some of the studies in this literature review. Even what has been popularly called "helicopter parenting" has been shown in some cases to be correlated to student well-being and adjustment to college. The differing findings regarding helicopter parenting along with the changing attitudes about helicopter parents suggest more research is needed fully to understand the high levels of parent involvement experienced in higher education.

More research should be conducted on parent-student communication on alcohol use to investigate its impact on underage drinking and alcohol abuse by college students. More research should be conducted on parents' use of Facebook to interact with their college students and how that impacts the parent-student relationship and students' college experiences. Social media, since it is becoming a frequently used method for parents to communicate with their students, could be a powerful way for parents to support higher education institutions in disseminating important information to their students.

Implications

Higher education professionals should look at Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood theory as it applies to students and consider the fact that 18-25 year olds may not be adults yet. This may be the result of demographic changes in American society, such as college attendance and delaying careers and families, instead of over-involved parents, as suggested by popular anecdotes and media reports. Institutions of higher education should embrace parent communication and involvement to help support their students as they emerge into adulthood. This could be achieved by having parent programming professionals share information about the best ways for parents to communicate with and appropriately support their college students. Parent orientation programs, emailed newsletters, informative web sites, and printed communications are all good ways to share this information. Parent programming professionals should also use Facebook to share information with parents, since more and more parents are using Facebook to communicate with their students.

Parent programming professionals should also share with their campus communities the pervasiveness and importance of parent involvement. They can do this by hosting seminars for faculty and staff on how effectively to deal with parents. These seminars should share research on parent involvement to make it relevant, demonstrate how to explain FERPA to parents and how to speak generally about situations that may be affecting their students, and show how to refer parents to appropriate offices on campus who can assist them. Parent programming professionals should act as agents of change to encourage their campuses to embrace parent involvement on their campuses. The alternative, continuing to see involved parents as a nuisance to be avoided and mocked with terms such as helicopter parents, lawnmower parents, or snowplow parents, does not serve students, as it inhibits the involvement of students' biggest source of support and guidance—their parents.

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Programming for College Parents on a Tight Budget

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Author's Note

I conducted a survey of college parent/family professionals, *Programming for College Parents on a Tight Budget*, in October 2012, to learn what parent programs and services the institutions of higher education have reduced, cut or added in the previous three years. I also solicited the respondents' lessons-learned in cost-saving strategies. Donna Krivoski, director of parent relations at Lafayette College, and I presented the results of the survey during the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Professionals (AHEPPP) national conference in November 2012.

Abstract

In order to gauge how parent and family programs have been affected by budgetary constraints as a consequence of recent economic downturn, a survey of college parent and family programs professionals, *Programming for College Parents on a Tight Budget*, was conducted in October 2012. The primary goal of the survey was learning what programs and services the institutions of higher education have reduced, cut, or added in the previous three years and why. While college campuses have reduced or cut some parent programs and services, they have also confirmed the importance of parent and family programs on the college level by continuing to add parent/family program professionals, and services in the face of financial constraints.

Introduction

It is impossible to read any recent issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or higher education-related articles in any major newspaper without being reminded of the financial challenges that colleges and universities have been facing in recent years. As federal, state, and campus budgets have become tighter, parent and family programs have not been immune from feeling that impact. In order to gauge how parent programs have been affected by budgetary concerns across the country, a survey was distributed to college parent/family program professionals to learn more about parent programming and cost-saving strategies. The National Survey of College and University Parent Programs (Savage & Petree, 2011) confirmed that the offices administering those programs are frequently housed in different divisions (e.g., student affairs, development/advancement, university relations, alumni or enrollment management). The administrators serving college parents work in one central parent program office or several different offices (e.g. new student orientation, dean's office, university relations, development, alumni). Because of this diversity, the solicitation of this survey was sent to a diverse list of parent/family program professionals in order to get input from different types of institutions.

Literature Review

Even before the economic recession began in late 2008, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities reported that Florida, California, Kentucky, Maryland, and Nevada faced substantial budget deficits early that year and that higher education would bear the brunt of those cuts (Fain, 2008). An independent policy group, the *Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability*, reported that from 2002-2009, the increase in private funding of colleges and universities had not slowed the growth of tuition increases, except for private research institutions (Blumenstyk, 2009). Private institutions have not been spared the cuts in their budgets. The *Stanford News*, for example, reported lay-offs of 11 people and reduction of the work schedules of other employees in student affairs of Stanford University. The Vice Provost of Student Affairs announced that more cuts were expected the following year since the campus-wide mandate was to trim costs by 15% in 2010 (Sullivan, 2009).

More recently, the automatic cuts in federal budget through sequestration have affected higher education. Hunter R. Rawlings III, president of the Association of American Universities, said that the sequestration would have a terrible short- and long-term impact on the nation's investments in scientific research and education (Gardner, 2012). On a local level, *The CT Mirror* reported that from 2011 to 2012, the Connecticut administration and the legislature had cut 10%, or more than \$68 million, from public colleges and universities. The cut, in turn, helped trigger tuition increases at the University of Connecticut by 6% and in the community college and state university networks by more than 3% (Phaneuf, 2012). California's community colleges have suffered \$1.5 billion in state funding cuts since 2007 (Adams, 2013).

Along with the budget cuts, colleges and universities are trying to find sources of new revenue. Many institutions have turned to their development departments and increased their fundraising efforts, including outreach to parents. As the National Survey of College and University Parent Programs showed, the percentage of parent/family program

professionals housed in advancement/foundation/alumni divisions grew from 18% to 24% between 2009 and 2011. In addition, and seemingly contradictory, the authors found that 52% of the institutions reported that their parent/family programs were created in the 2000s, suggesting the trend of a rapid increase in the number of colleges and universities adding parent/family program professionals to their payroll (Savage & Petree, 2011). Despite cuts, institutions recognize the growing importance for a dedicated parent and family programs office, but may be limited by lack of funds.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study *Programming for College Parents on a Tight Budget* was to explore how parent and family programs have been affected by budgetary constraints at their institutions. This article presents the results of this survey, addressing the following research questions:

1. What parent programs and services have higher education institutions reduced, cut or added in the previous three years (2009-2012)?
2. Why were particular programs and services reduced or cut?
3. What cost-saving strategies do parent/family program professionals suggest?

Method

Procedure

In October 2012, parent/family program professionals were recruited to participate in an online survey via SurveyMonkey. Participants were asked to complete the ten-question survey via email; a link to the survey was provided in the email message. Participants were recruited through the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP) member listserv (about 150 members), as well as from email lists of colleagues in peer institutions. In addition, the survey link was posted on the AHEPPP Facebook group member page. The total number of sent emails was 304. Sixty-four parent/family professionals responded (approximately 21% response rate).

Participants

The responding parent/family program professionals worked for the following types of institutions: 51% at public four-year institutions; 48% at private four-year institutions; and 1% at private two-year institutions. Among those, 37% were small-sized institutions (under 5,000 undergraduates), 27% were medium-sized (5,001-15,000 undergraduates), and 37% were large-sized institutions (15,000+ undergraduates).

Most of the parent and family programs were administered from the divisions of student affairs (70%); 35% were from development or alumni affairs; 5% were from admissions; and 2% were from external relations. Participants were allowed to select all options that applied; the total of more than 100% proves that two or more offices/divisions shared the responsibility of serving parents.

Measures

The survey had eight multiple-choice questions and two open-field questions.

Parent programs and services. Parent programs and services currently in place were measured by an item that asked respondents to select the programs and services in place at their institutions of higher education. Respondents chose all available services among 21 options (e.g., family weekend, e-newsletter, parent council, Facebook page, student employees). In addition, respondents could enter their own answer in the “other” open field.

Programs and services reduced in scope were measured by an item that asked respondents to select the programs and services that had been reduced in scope (not entirely eliminated) in the past three years due to budget cuts. Respondents chose all reduced services among 22 options. “All services for parents and families” was added to the previous options. In addition, respondents could enter their own answer in the “other” open field.

Programs and services entirely eliminated were measured by an item that asked respondents to select the programs and services that were entirely eliminated in the past three years due to budget cuts. Respondents chose all reduced services among the previous 22 options. In addition, respondents could enter their own answer in the “other” open field.

Programs and services added were measured by an item that asked respondents to select the programs and services that were added in the past three years. Respondents chose all reduced services among 22 options. In addition, respondents could enter their own answer in the “other” open field.

Respondent opinions about their programs and services were measured by an item that asked respondents to choose five of their most valuable programs and services that they would not want to see eliminated. Respondents chose their top five programs or services among 18 options. Options referring to the parent professional position and the staff’s professional development were removed from this question. In addition, respondents could enter their own answer in the “other” open field.

Lessons learned. An open-field question asked respondents who reported eliminating programs or services to describe reasons why programs were eliminated. A second open-field question asked respondents to share their most effective cost-saving strategies.

Demographics. Demographic questions asked about the home divisions/offices of the parent programs, and the type of respondents’ institutions, and the size of respondents’ institutions.

Results

Parent Programs and Services

Parent programs and services in place. The survey asked about the parent programs and services currently in place on college campuses. Findings revealed that the five programs/services provided by the most institutions are: family weekend (92%); e-newsletter (91%); parent orientation (87%); parent website (87%); and professional development opportunities (79%). In addition to these five, more than half of the reporting institutions reported having: a dedicated parent program professional (73%); “snail mail” publications/invitations (65%); parent council (62%); and parents as volunteers (52%). The remaining programs/services were provided by less than half of the surveyed institutions (Table 1).

Table 1
Parent Programs and Services Currently in Place

Service Provided	Percentage Offered
Fall family weekend	92%
E-newsletter	91%
Parent orientation	87%
Website	87%
Professional development/conference participation for staff	79%
Dedicated parent professional	73%
Mailing/invitations	65%
Parent council	62%
Parent volunteers	52%
Parent handbook (hard copy)	49%
Facebook page	49%
Parents association	48%
Parent handbook (electronic)	46%
Student employees (graduate or undergraduate)	43%
Parent participation in emergency notification	35%
Printed newsletter	29%
Twitter	25%
Spring family day/weekend	22%
Siblings day	13%
Toll-free phone number	13%
Parent blog	11%

Several respondents listed additional programs/services in the “Other” field: an online magazine; a sibling sleepover during family weekend; a program coordinator; a parent calendar and resource guide; a NODA intern for summer Parent Orientation; and full-time staff support.

Top five parent programs and services. Respondents selected their five most valuable parent programs and services that they would not want to see eliminated. The top selections included: family weekend (89%); parent orientation (80%); e-newsletter (73%); parent website (50%); and parent council (45%). The other favorite programs in descending order were: printed version of the parent handbook; parent association; USPS mailings; parent volunteers; electronic copy of the parent handbook; spring family day/weekend; printed newsletter; parent participation in the campus emergency notification system; Facebook page; and toll-free phone number. In the “Other” field, the respondents added a parent calendar and resource guide.

Parent programs reduced in scope. Respondents reported about the parent programs and services reduced in scope, but not entirely eliminated, in the previous three years (Table 2). The five highest selected programs/services that institutions of higher education reduced in scope in the past three years were: mailings via United States Postal Service (USPS; 45%); printed newsletter (39%); staff’s professional development and travel opportunities (32%); printed parent handbook (19%); and fall family weekend (19%). In the “Other” field, the respondents added the following programs/services that were reduced in scope: catering/food for parents; t-shirts; and elimination of free tickets for athletic events.

Table 2
Parent Programs and Services Reduced, Eliminated, and Added

Service Provided	Percentage Reduced	Percentage Eliminated	Percentage Added
Fall family weekend	19%	5%	10%
E-newsletter	0%	0%	46%
Parent orientation	13%	0%	8%
Website	0%	0%	23%
Professional development/ conference participation	32%	5%	23%
Dedicated parent professional	10%	5%	31%
Mailing/invitations	45%	10%	15%
Parent council	7%	5%	15%
Parent volunteers	3%	0%	15%
Parent handbook (hard copy)	19%	20%	10%
Facebook page	0%	0%	44%
Parent association	10%	10%	13%
Parent handbook (electronic)	3%	0%	21%
Student employees (graduate or undergraduate)	16%	15%	17%
Parent participation in emergency notification	0%	0%	13%
Printed newsletter	39%	65%	8%
Twitter	0%	0%	27%
Spring family day/weekend	0%	10%	8%
Siblings day	0%	10%	2%
Toll-free phone number	3%	0%	2%
Parent blog	0%	0%	13%
All programs and services for parents	0%	0%	6%

Parent programs and services entirely eliminated. Respondents selected parent programs and services that were entirely eliminated in the last three years (Table 2). The five most selected were: printed newsletter (65%); printed parent handbook (20%); student employees (15%); spring family weekend/day (10%); and siblings day (10%). The "Other" field collected the following additional programs that were eliminated: summer send-offs; no printed family weekend brochure; winter family weekend. One respondent said that their institution's parent program was new and nothing was cut/reduced.

Parent programs and services added. Respondents were asked to select parent programs and services that their institutions added in the previous three years (Table 2). The five most selected programs/services added were: e-newsletter (46%); Facebook page (44%); dedicated parent program professional (31%); Twitter feed (27%); and dedicated Web site (23%). The additional programs/services noted in the "Other" field were: more staff members dedicated to parent program; technological support; increased connection to campus programs; increase in scope; and welcome receptions for parents.

Why Programs Were Eliminated

While responding to this open-field question, respondents explained why their institutions eliminated the specified parent programs and services (Appendix A). The responses can be grouped into three categories:

Budget cuts (n=7). Example statements included: "Some printed materials were converted to electronic due to cost cutting;" "Full-time parent professional now handles other responsibilities to cut costs;" and "Budget and low attendance numbers."

Electronic ways of communication were preferable (n=6). Example statements included: "I would eliminate printed materials to those with active email addresses;" "Print newsletters were not effective and parents enjoyed the e-newsletters;" and "Decreased the amount of printed material (handbook) which was costly and not able to reflect mid-year changes and updates. Was a good impetus for a more robust and interactive website."

Institutional reasons (n=3). Example statements included: "Winter Parents Weekend was eliminated due in part to the switch from quarters to semesters;" and "Lack of staffing to perform the needed support effort of an Association and/or Council."

Cost-Saving Strategies

Respondents also shared their lessons-learned in cost-saving strategies (Appendix B). The responses can be grouped into eight categories:

Using electronic communication instead of printed publications (n=28). Example statements included: "Eliminating most printed materials and relying more on web, electronic communication;" "From hardcopy to email or online;" and "Eliminating most printed materials and relying more on web, electronic communication."

Partnering with other campus divisions/offices (n=10). Example statements included: "This year Family Weekend joined together with Alumni Reunion in an effort to save money;" "Piggy-backing on existing events like inviting parents to alumni events or having parents go to a student lecture or concert during Parent & Family Weekend;" and "Collaborating with other departments to eliminate duplication of services has been effective."

Using parents as volunteers and regional hosts (n=9). Example statements included: "Parents who host events on behalf of the University;" "Volunteers for event management;" and "Have hosts who cover food/location costs for events we do."

Reducing materials/giveaways and watching costs carefully (n=5). Example statements included: "Cutting back on the number of materials ordered;" "Reduce and eliminate give-a-ways;" and "Work smarter with less."

Using student workers instead of regular employees and using students for programming (n=3). Example statements included: "Student help rather than part-time staff;" "student entertainment instead of hired professional entertainment."

Adding fees to events/programs (n=2). Example statements included: "We have started charging a set amount for Fall Family Weekend."

Using vendors to produce a printed parent handbook for free (n=2). Example statements included: "Parent Handbook, print at no cost (ads are sold by vendor)."

Using social media and parent-to-parent outreach (n=2). Example statements included: "Social media;" "Peer to peer outreach."

Discussion

The results of this survey offer a glimpse into the consequences of budget cutting in higher education, specifically those affecting parent programs and services. As noted, the budget cuts have been in place for both public and private institutions (Fain, 2008; Sullivan, 2009). Almost all parent/family program professionals had used multiple strategies to cut costs to their programs for the three years prior to this survey (approximately 2009-2012). Both multiple-choice and open-field responses confirmed that the top cost-saving strategy is using electronic and online communication methods (e-newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, and the Web) instead of printed and/or mailed publications. Partnering with other campus offices is another strategy frequently mentioned. More and more institutions also use parents as volunteer workers and parent councils as fundraisers. Several respondents recommend watching expenditures, reducing giveaways, and using student workers.

While the above strategies might have been expected, responses regarding programs/services added yielded an important finding. As expected, among the top five programs/services added, four of them concerned electronic communications. The only outlier and the third most-added service was addition of a dedicated parent/family program professional. This finding, as well as the number of additions to parent programs and services, suggests that colleges and universities have considered parent programs as an important part of student services and/or development initiatives. That is in line with Webber & Ehrenberg (2009) research that suggests that reallocating some funding from instruction to student services may enhance persistence and graduation rates, especially at institutions serving students with lower entrance test scores and from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Related to the above finding of adding parent/family program professionals to their services is the institutional dedication to their staff's professional development. While it is true that the third most-frequently reduced parent program/service (more than a third of the responses) is reduction in professional development/conference participation/travel for their parent/family program administrators, 79% of the respondents said that their institutions still maintain professional development/conference participation/travel opportunities for their parent/family program staff. The surveyed institutions of higher education apparently value a dedicated professional administrator educating and serving their parents, budget cuts notwithstanding. The rapid increase in creation of parent programs at the higher education level in the 2000s is confirmed by Savage & Petree (2011).

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers an insight in how parent and family programs are handling the economic downturn as well as confirms the importance of parent and family programs and services on college and university campuses, a few limitations must be noted. Since this research project was originally intended as an informal survey to inform a conference presentation, we did not recruit a representative sample of parent and family programs. The sample was small, and findings are representative primarily of professionals who belong to AHEPPP.

No control for multiple responses from one institution was in place. To get statistically significant results, a controlled national survey about consequences of budget cuts on parent programming is recommended.

Clarification is needed in defining parent councils. This survey did not ask respondents to specify the roles of parent committees (whether their role is primarily advisory or fundraising).

Finally, this survey did not explore whether the cost saving measures employed were the result of reduced budgets, or a goal to make one's resources go further. In future surveys, it would be helpful to gather specific information about whether these offices' budgets were higher, lower, or constant during the last few years, as well as to gather impressions about whether reductions have impacted the quality of the programs and services offered.

Conclusion

Financial concerns have impacted all of higher education in recent years. This survey shows that parent and family programs have not been immune to those effects. However, while parent/family program professionals have found ways to trim their expenses by eliminating print resources and increasing electronic communications and other strategies, we learned that at the same time, new investments are also being made, especially the creation of the parent/family program professional positions on college campuses. Continuing these conversations and sharing strategies will help parent/family program professionals be more creative and effective in managing resources and retaining high quality programs and services for parents.

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Appendix A Programs/Services Eliminations

If your institution eliminated parent programs or services, please share your reasons why you chose to eliminate those particular programs or services.

- Some printed materials were converted to electronic due to cost cutting.
- Lack of staffing to perform the needed support effort of an Association and/or Council.
- With most parents using email/Internet, we felt that a print newsletter could be replaced with an e-newsletter.
- I would eliminate printed materials to those with active email addresses.
- Cost of printing and mailing.
- Winter Parents Weekend was eliminated due in part to the switch from quarters to semesters.
- Print newsletters were not effective and Parents enjoyed the e-Newsletters.
- Printed newsletters are costly and unsure of ROI.
- Print newsletter was too expensive due to increases in the membership numbers.
- We are just beginning our strategic parent fundraising program-not much has been eliminated at this point.
- Those are the best programs/services we offer for families - if those were cut we would significantly struggle to make contact with our family members.
- Full-time parent professional now handles other responsibilities to cut costs.
- Printed newsletter in favor for enews letter - better business decision for budget and personnel reasons.
- We chose to go to more electronic communications to save money, but I believe now that we'll be restoring some of the printed materials. Recently, with Family Weekend ticket sales lower than ever before, we have considered that electronic is not always the best way to make sure that events are seen.
- Decreased the amount of printed material (handbook) which was costly and not able to reflect mid-year changes and updates. Was a good impetus for a more robust and interactive website.
- Budget and low attendance numbers.

Appendix B Cost-Saving Strategies

What are your most effective cost-saving strategies?

- On-line magazine.
- E-mail invitations.
- Parents who host events on behalf of the University.
- E-news in place of printed letters and newsletters, student entertainment instead of hired professional entertainment.
- Parent e-newsletter to get information to parents. They have a high open and click through rate.
- Email because it's immediate and inexpensive.
- Electronic newsletters and notices.
- Volunteers for event management.
- Eliminating most printed materials and relying more on web, electronic communication, increasing/adding fees for program participation, collaborating with other departments for joint programming (alumni).
- This year Family Weekend joined together with Alumni Reunion in an effort to save money. I have not seen the final numbers yet to verify if this actually proved to be cost effective.
- We are new and growing program. So, we are simply trying to establish and develop low-cost, high impact programs that will benefit families.
- Carefully watching expenditures.
- Focus on e-solicitations, e-newsletter, parent council peer to peer outreach.
- Parent Handbook, print at no cost (ads are sold by vendor).
- Electronic communications, eliminating US mailings.
- Email instead of snail mail.
- Electronic/online services and notifications such as newsletters, parent handbook, advertisement of events, etc; social media; student help rather than part-time staff.
- Collaborating with other departments to eliminate duplication of services has been effective.
- Having Parent volunteers in place and switching to e-newsletter.
- Combining/integrating regional parent programming with alumni relations activities.
- University Parent Media parent guide.
- Use of email.
- Transitioning print materials to electronic materials always saves costs. Also partnering with other campus programs and offices on events allows for cost sharing.

- ❑ Electronic dissemination of info and transferring a little cost to parents.
- ❑ Communicating electronically versus printed/mailings.
- ❑ From hardcopy to email or online.
- ❑ Cutting back on the number of material ordered. Producing information on-line rather than hard printed copies.
- ❑ Piggy-backing on existing events like inviting parents to alumni events or having parents go to a student lecture or concert during Parent & Family Weekend.
- ❑ Electronic newsletter.
- ❑ Reduce and eliminate give-a-ways.
- ❑ Partnering with other departments on events and activities.
- ❑ Our Family Leadership Council- a fundraising committee of rated parents.
- ❑ We have gone much more electronic in communication than US mail. Also, we have started charging a set amount for Fall Family Weekend.
- ❑ Partnering with other offices on campus.
- ❑ Work smarter with less.
- ❑ Moving from a printed parents newsletter twice each year to 4 issues (2 each semester) of an e-newsletter.
- ❑ Use of email.
- ❑ Using email rather than US mail for some mailings.
- ❑ 1. use email communications for newsletters/invitations where we can
2. have hosts who cover food/location costs for events we do.
- ❑ Mailing a hard copy newsletter (first class for most) was very expensive (several times per year). I think an electronic newsletter format works well, but for special events, hard copy marketing might be best.
- ❑ Using electronic or web-based services and communications in place of mailing hard copy. Our program is at a large institution (30k students) and to print materials and mail them is cost-prohibitive. We also intend to target materials we send to parents of students age 24 or younger. This decreases the number slightly.
- ❑ Use of electronic messaging. Combining resources with the Alumni Relations office.
- ❑ Moved from full-color brochures about weekends and family orientation to a postcard which drives folks to the website.
- ❑ All invitations are electronic.
- ❑ Volunteers.
- ❑ Using already established contacts and on campus facilities.
- ❑ Ask parents to underwrite events.

Parent Programs “Across the Pond”: A Cross Cultural Review

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Abstract

While parent programming in United States colleges and universities has been steadily on the rise in the last 25 years, this is a relatively new phenomenon in the United Kingdom. With recent changes in government funding and subsequent tuition hikes, U.K. parents are also showing a greater interest in their children's higher education experience. Through a collaborative partnership with Wright State University, a program review examined current practices in place for parents of students at Anglia Ruskin University (Cambridge, U.K). Additionally, an online review of 25 other U.K. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) was conducted, and comparisons drawn with benchmark information previously gathered from 13 U.S. institutions. Best practices from both countries were utilized in making recommendations for future parent programming at Anglia Ruskin University, and are described in this article.

Introduction

Although U.S. media reports about overzealous "helicopter parents" persist, recent research shows that involvement by parents can in fact enhance college student learning and engagement. A qualitative study by Cullaty (2011) found that supportive parental involvement played an important role in autonomy development in college students, and, based on a review of the literature, Taub (2008) similarly concluded that parental involvement may support student development in certain areas. Hofer (2009) reported that appropriate levels of parental academic and behavior regulation and frequency of communication enhanced student autonomy development; these students also had more positive relationships with both parents and professors. Some in the U.S. have also found that as a result of increased engagement, parents will develop a bond with the institution, not only enhancing the student's educational experience but also leading to increased volunteer and financial support (Crabtree, 2011).

With this understanding of the benefits of parental involvement in mind, many U.S. colleges and universities have developed programs for parents of current students. While common in the U.S., such programming is a relatively new phenomenon in the United Kingdom. It is evident that U.K. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are now recognizing the value of involving parents of students in the university experience. A number of institutions currently have online resources available for parents, and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (2013) includes a separate page for parents that goes into great detail about the admissions process. With a recent change to the higher education funding system in the U.K. that resulted in significant tuition increases, it is likely that, just as in the U.S., parents there are more concerned than ever about the value and quality of their students' university education.

As part of a collaborative partnership between Wright State University (WSU; Dayton, OH, USA) and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU; Cambridge, U.K.), the author participated in a 3-week international internship to study parent programs at Anglia Ruskin and other U.K. institutions. This article describes the results of this research; cross-cultural comparisons drawn using information gathered by the author during a previous benchmark study of parent resources at U.S. institutions; and recommendations made to the Student Services staff at Anglia Ruskin University based on current U.S. and U.K. best practices.

Privacy Implications

In both countries, there are legal implications for the ways in which parents can request and receive information about their students who are studying in HEIs. In the United States, this would be the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA; Ed.gov, 2013); in the United Kingdom, the Data Protection Act (DPA; legislation.gov.uk, 2013) applies. While both of these limit the information that can be released to parents, the law is more restrictive in the U.K., where institutions may not even acknowledge whether a student is enrolled at the institution. This differs from the U.S., where under FERPA, institutions may disclose directory information such as the student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance,

unless the student has restricted the release of such information. While in the U.K. a student may grant parental permission for access to the educational record, conversations with various Anglia Ruskin University staff members revealed that this is quite rare, and so the general practice is that no student information is ever released. Thus, parent queries are usually answered in a way that explains general policies and procedures of the institution that would apply for any student or parent (e.g. a typical response to a parent might be “if your child were a student here, and if he were to be in this situation, this [policy or procedure] would apply”).

Online Resources for Parents

Of the 26 U.K. institutions reviewed, only two (8%) were found to have links for parents and/or families on the institution landing page; ARU was among those without one. This type of link is becoming more common in the U.S.; a 2012 benchmark study of 13 U.S. mid- to large-sized institutions by this author found that eight (62%) included a link of this sort for parents and/or families (Winters, 2012). Although lacking this designated link for parents, a search of the ARU site using the word “parents” and conversations with staff revealed that the institution provides a number of online resources for parents. An ARU site intended for new students (the term used to describe prospective enrollees) includes an *Anglia Ruskin for Parents* link; this connects to a page with information about the value of higher education, choosing an institution, the application process, finances, accommodation (the U.K. term for student housing), and various student support services. A prominent link here also leads to an attractive and easy-to-read page highlighting ARU’s best features. The Anglia Ruskin Parents’ Guide, accessed via the university’s Welcome page, provides current parents with comprehensive information about the university experience and the variety of supports available for ARU students. (Note: in the U.K., the term “welcome” is used where “orientation” would apply in the U.S.; thus the ARU Welcome information is directed toward parents of newly enrolled students.)

Based on this review, it was recommended that ARU add links to the current website to increase the visibility of already existing resources and to ease navigation for parents. Syracuse University’s institution website was provided as an example of U.S. best practice where information for both prospective and current parents of students is prominently featured and easily located beginning with the Parents and Families link on the institution landing page. Many U.S. institutions could similarly benefit from this relatively simple modification; in the previously mentioned benchmark study of U.S. universities, the five institutions without landing page links for parents were also found to have extensive parent resources on their sites. Adding this type of link would not only provide easier navigation to the already existing information, but would also send the message that parents are considered important partners with the institution in student success. From a practical standpoint, staff workloads might be relieved from responding to parent phone calls and/or emails for routine questions that could easily be answered using existing online resources, once parents are made aware of and can more readily locate them.

Parent Communications

U.S. institutions typically offer targeted e-mail communication for parents on an opt-in basis. This can range from short weekly updates to a more comprehensive monthly or quarterly e-newsletter. Based on my review, this appears to be quite rare in the U.K. The limitations of the Data Protection Act provides some challenges to U.K. institutions for obtaining contact information in order to establish this form of communication, however there are ways to accomplish this. The University of Winchester gives parents the opportunity to sign up online for the Parent’s Press newsletter by submitting their contact information via email. HEIs might also follow the lead of U.S. institutions who have added requests for parent emails to admissions web pages and at live recruitment events as a way of data gathering. It is recommended that ARU also provide parents with an opt-in opportunity online and at Open Days, the institution’s recruitment events for prospective students. Targeted emails could then be developed to send brief messages every 1-2 months that welcome the parents to the ARU family, address typical questions, and explain the student application process. Once the student enrolls at Anglia Ruskin, these parents could opt to remain in the email database and addresses could also be collected from those not previously opted in. The institution could then keep parents informed about supports available for their students, campus events, and online resources via continuing targeted emails, or could develop and then direct parents to a University First Year parent timeline similar to that of Kingston University. To assist this, a parent timeline specific to Anglia Ruskin was developed to coincide with the institution’s Long Thin/Induction process. The Long/Thin Induction is designed to provide newly enrolled students with critical information gradually over the course of the school term to avoid overwhelming them with information during the Welcome period.

An additional consideration would be to utilize the dedicated “Tell Us” feedback system that Anglia Ruskin Student Services already has in place for students; extending this to parents would provide a way for them to offer suggestions about current resources that are most helpful and additional ones that could assist them in supporting their students.

Events for Parents

In general, U.S. institutions provide more events targeted specifically to parents and families than do those in the U.K. Anglia Ruskin University’s Open Days provide prospective students and their parents with much valuable information about ARU and the application process. At a spring 2013 event, it was observed that in many cases both parents and even a sibling were present with the prospective student. Several of the session presenters made particular reference to information of special interest to parents, including finances, employability, and accommodation (housing). The overall feel for the event was that students and parents were learning jointly about ARU, and it was quite similar to college preview or open house recruitment events held at U.S. institutions.

There is no typical event for parents in the U.K. that compares to the parent orientation offered by most U.S. institutions. New first year students at Anglia Ruskin University (sometimes called “freshers”) participate in Welcome activities just prior to the start of the fall semester; there is no concurrent programming offered for parents at this time as there often would be in the U.S. An ARU Students’ Union representative noted that their

volunteers who assist new students on move-in days often field a variety of questions from parents during the process. As this suggests a need by parents for additional information during this point in their student's enrollment, a small reception or tabling event where parents could congregate would enable Student Services representatives to address parents' imminent concerns. Also absent from parent programming in the U.K. is the Parent/Family Weekend, a popular event held annually on many campuses in the U.S. While these events tend to involve a considerable investment of time and resources, they can also serve to increase the bond of students and parents for the institution, generating many long-term tangible and intangible benefits. It was recommended that Anglia Ruskin begin by inviting parents to participate in already existing programming such as art shows, theatre productions, or events sponsored by the Students' Union or Active Anglia. This would enable the Student Services staff to gauge parental interest in on-campus events and consider additional targeted programming in the future.

Parent Organizations

Many U.S. institutions also have some sort of organization to which parents can belong. There is a great deal of variation in such groups, and include a non-fee based group parents opt into mainly for newsletters and/or e-mail notification; a fee-based organization that may include additional "perks" such as discounts for businesses in the campus area; volunteer opportunities on or near campus, or in the parents' local area (e.g. parents might assist with recruitment events and/or serve as a resource for new students and parents); or an elected or appointed Parents' Council or Advisory Board that governs the parent organization and who might also serve in an advisory role to campus administrators.

This review did not reveal any U.K. institutions where a parent organization is in place, although this is something to keep in mind for the future considering their popularity in the U.S. and the trend in the U.K. toward increased parental engagement. Such a group could begin as a "virtual" one, consisting primarily of online communications and benefits, and grow toward one that holds "live" meetings and engages parents in local and remote volunteer opportunities. Some institutions in the U.S. are beginning to find that parents now prefer online webinar-style meetings as opposed to live ones, and this could be considered in the initial design of any new parent programming in the U.K.

Summary

While parent programming has been trending upward in the U.S. since the 1990s, student affairs professionals in the U.K. have more recently acknowledged its benefits. In both the U.S. and the U.K., many institutions could benefit from providing increased visibility and accessibility of already existing resources for parents of prospective and current students. Communications such as newsletters and regular targeted emails are still relatively rare in the U.K., as are on-campus events specifically designed for parents. Because many U.S. colleges have these systems in place for parents, HEIs in the U.K. could benefit from these existing models when choosing programs to best suit an institution. Just as in the U.S., making and keeping parent relations as a priority will benefit students, parents, and the institution in the long term.

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