National Survey of College and University Parent Programs
Survey Conducted Spring 2009

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Abstract

Parent programs and services are becoming increasingly comprehensive at colleges and universities across the United States and Canada. No longer are schools limiting their parent/family programming to an orientation session and family weekend; parents frequently have access to targeted websites and listservs that provide answers to questions and information on campus resources. Parental involvement is acknowledged and addressed during the college admissions process; parents are regarded as key participants in their students' transition to college; and they have become important members of the campus community throughout their students' college career. Moreover, parents have embraced technology as a tool for communicating with their students and with the higher education institutions their students attend.

This report discusses the results of the fourth national survey of parent and family services conducted by the University of Minnesota Parent Program. It provides current and longitudinal information about parent/family offices, tracks best practices in services and programming, and explores the expense and experience for staffing a parent/family program in higher education.

Executive Summary

The 2009 National Survey of College and University Parent Programs shows a continuation of growth of parent and family services at the college and university level. Nearly two-thirds (63.9 percent) of the programs responding to the survey were developed since the year 2000, with 20 percent being started since 2007.

The survey indicates an increasing shift of parent/family services into the broad field of higher education student affairs. While public colleges and universities have typically housed parent and family programs in a student development or student affairs office, until now, private institutions generally focused their parent relations on fundraising or advancement. This survey shows that, for the first time, more parent programs in private institutions are placed in student affairs (46.8 percent of private institution programs) than in advancement/fundraising offices (33 percent).

We also see that the staff who work with parents and families have a higher level of education than in previous surveys, and more aspire to increased education. The most recent survey results show that nearly three-fourths (73.1 percent) of parent/family program staff have a master's degree or higher, compared with three-fifths (60 percent) in 2007. Moreover, nearly 30 percent of parent program professionals now plan to earn a higher degree, compared to about 21 percent two years earlier.

Based on survey results, the most significant area for improvement in this field may lie in assessment. Although some 60 percent of programs say they distribute evaluations following specific events or activities, very few are doing comprehensive assessment to determine how their services are used, general satisfaction with programming and services, or long-term outcomes from events and activities.

Introduction

In the two years that have passed since the previous National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, research on parent/family services has increased, with historical information surfacing from the past, analysis revealing emerging trends in the present, and predictions for what may be next. Growing attention to and conversations about the role of parents in higher education continues. The Parent and Family Relations Knowledge Community of NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) has scheduled its third pre-conference session focusing on parent/family services at its 2010 national conference, and multiple programs related to parents and families will be included among concurrent sessions at that conference. Administrators Promoting Parent Involvement (APPI) is planning its twelfth conference in Boston in spring 2010. A new professional organization dedicated specifically to the field of parent/family services at the college level—the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP)—was chartered January 1, 2009, and will present its first conference in fall 2010. Meanwhile, a Parent Fundraising Conference, for higher education professionals who solicit donations and funds from parents of college students, has been held annually for 25 years, and the summer 2010 conference will be at the College of Charleston in South Carolina.

Among the new literature on the topic are two publications:
- Wartman, K. and Savage, M. (2008). *Parental involvement in higher education: Understanding the relationship among students, parents, and the institution.* ASHE Higher Education Report, Vol. 33, No. 6. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Carney-Hall, K.C. (editor) (2008). *Managing parent partnerships: Maximizing influence, minimizing interference, and focusing on student success.* New Directions for Student Services, No. 122. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

In addition, parent/family relations now are becoming a topic for research and discovery. Graduate students in student affairs and family social science are exploring the college-student-family relationship as topics for their theses and dissertations, and educators are looking at the role of family during the college years. The *AHEPPP Journal* was introduced in early 2010 as a professional publication for the field of parent/family relations.

A review of recent higher education publications and conference schedules provides evidence that parents and college-parent relations have become significant areas of interest among colleges and universities. Today's college parents, the literature confirms, are highly involved with their students and they are in close contact. Evidence continues to emerge about the frequency of parent-student communication, and it is clear that new technology is affecting how and when family members contact one another. Parents are following their students' lead in new technology; while texting was "just for kids" a few years ago, and Facebook was a social network primarily for college students, parents now are proficient in both. In March 2009, at the time this survey was being conducted, "Inside Facebook" reported that the number of users over 35 had doubled in the previous 60 days (www.insidefacebook.com/2009/03/25/number-of-us-facebook-users-over-35-nearly-doubles-in-last-60-days/, accessed November 30, 2009).
As we summarized in previous survey reports, (posted online in pdf format at www.parent.umn.edu/parentsurveys.html), the foundation of current parent/college relations is based

upon federal legislation enacted in 1974, which gave college students the authority to monitor their own educational records (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 [FERPA]). Under this act, college and university students were given ownership of their educational records, including grades, class schedules, attendance, and financial records. If parents wanted access to those records, they were required to obtain permission from their child or provide proof that they claimed their child as a dependent for federal tax purposes.

After FERPA was introduced, the message to parents of an entire generation was that their college-age students were adults, and communication from the institution would be with the students, not with their parents. During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, however, higher education administrators, staff, and faculty began noticing increased involvement from parents of their students. Parents accompanied their students to orientation sessions, often spurring the introduction of separate college orientation programs for family members. FERPA restrictions were questioned and challenged by parents, and some adjustments to the Act were made, most notably the 1998 change that allows, but does not require, schools to notify parents when student violate alcohol and drug policies. Many institutions responded to demands for parent information by making access to records simpler—increasingly with an online system for students to approve their parents' access.

Prior to the first National Survey of College and University Parent Program in 2003, conversations among parent programming staff at student affairs and APPI conferences led to a hypothesis that the emphasis and extent of parent services varies from college to college, and that the direction of the parent program at most campuses is influenced strongly by which department oversees the institution's parent program. The first of these surveys, then, were conducted to determine
- "best practices" among college parent programs
- emerging trends related to services and program structure
- the influence of departmental placement within the institution on services provided to parents
- any discernible trends in the qualifications, experience, and pay scale of parent staff/administrators; in addition, we were interested in career goals of staff/administrators currently working in parent services

In subsequent surveys, we refined questions to determine more accurate and useful information, while continuing to seek insights on events and services, including perceptions of best practices and weakest areas; emerging trends; impact of organizational placement of parent services; and trends in parent staff qualifications, experience, pay scale, and career goals. In the 2009 survey, we included new questions related to professional development. These included a question about what influences respondents to attend a conference and what are their preferred means for accessing professional information.

Method

In March 2009, an invitation to participate in the National Survey of College and University Parent Programs was sent by e-mail to approximately 500 colleges and universities. The schools contacted were identified as institutions likely to be providing services to parents and family members of undergraduate students. The list originated with APPI, a national organization serving collegiate parent programs, housed at Northeastern University. APPI built its mailing list from members of the National Orientation Directors Association; over the years, additional addresses have been added when schools requested information from the University of Minnesota Parent Program. A supplementary list of addresses was obtained by performing a comprehensive search of college and university websites to find institutions that appeared to have parent programming in place. A second invitation was sent to a list of contact names provided by University Parent Media, a private business that develops guides for college and university parent/family programs. This list duplicated a number of addresses and institutions from the original list; the survey program prevented more than one response from any computer, but we do not know if more than one individual from an institution responded.

The survey was posted online and conducted through surveymonkey.com, a web-based survey source that allows for simple tabulation and cross-tabulation. The survey remained open for two months, and reminders were sent to non-respondents of the original list, noting the deadline for completing the survey. A total of 261 institutions completed the survey. When appropriate, results of the 2009 survey have been compared to data from previous national surveys, conducted in 2003, 2005, and 2007. Although direct comparisons of programs and services between the four surveys may not be entirely parallel, we have used the previous surveys to track general changes over time in parent programming. We have not included tabulations for statistical significance.

Survey Results

Taken as a whole, the results provide a sense of the scope of parent services and trends in program structure. The survey questions focused on six primary areas:

- Organizational structure of the program
- Program "demographics"
- Staffing of the office
- Services and programming provided
- Budget
- Advice and general comments from respondents

Organizational Structure

In 2009, more than half (61.4 percent) of the parent/family programs participating in the survey were located within a student affairs office. The second largest placement of parent programs was in foundation/advancement/fund development offices (14.7 percent), followed by 7.3 percent in an academic affairs office. A smaller number of parent programs were in enrollment management (5.4 percent) and institutional relations (1.5 percent).

These numbers represent a significant shift from the first survey conducted in 2003, and a notable change since 2007. Placement in a student affairs office has increased since 2007 by nearly 7 percent, while placement in advancement, fundraising, and alumni offices has decreased by 14 percent. Academic affairs office placement has increased by almost 6 percent since 2007.

Chart 1: Office or Department Where Parent/Family Services Report

Name of Office/Department	2003 Survey	2005 Survey	2007 Survey	2009 Survey
Academic affairs	4.9%	2.2%	1.6%	7.3%
Advancement/fundraising/alumni	37.8%	31.5%	31.8%	17.8%
Enrollment management	n/a	3.8%	4.7%	5.4%
Institutional relations	2.4%	5.4%	4.2%	1.5%
Student affairs	52.4%	52.2%	54.7%	61.4%
Other	2.4%	4.9%	3.0%	6.6%

Organizational placement changed, depending on the classification of institutions as public or private. At public colleges and universities, the majority (71.6 percent) of parent/family programs were in a student affairs office. Other programs were placed in academic affairs (8.8 percent); enrollment management (6.8 percent); advancement/fundraising (3.4 percent); alumni association (3.4 percent); and institutional relations (0.7 percent). The remaining 5.4 percent were located in other offices or departments.

At private institutions, most parent/family programs were in a student affairs office (46.8 percent) or an advancement/fundraising office (33.0 percent), while others were placed in enrollment management (3.2 percent); institutional relations (3.2 percent); academic affairs (3.2 percent); and alumni association (2.1 percent). The remaining 8.5 percent were located in other offices or departments, including admissions

and direct report to the president or chancellor. These numbers reflect a notable decrease in placement in advancement/fundraising office in private institutions (down 11.8 percent), resulting in student affairs placement to become the most prominent location for parent/family programs for the first time among private institutions.

Chart 2: Comparison of Parent/Family Program Placement, 2009

Name of Office/Department	Public	Private
Academic affairs	8.8%	3.2%
Advancement/fundraising	3.4%	33.0%
Alumni association	3.4%	2.1%
Enrollment management	6.8%	3.2%
Institutional relations	0.7%	3.2%
Student affairs	71.6%	46.8%
Other	5.4%	8.5%

Chart 3: Comparison of Parent/Family Program Placement for Private Institutions in 2007 and 2009

| Name of Office/Department	Private 2007	Private 2009
Academic Affairs	0%	3.2%
Advancement/fundraising	44.8%	33.0%
Alumni association	5.7%	2.1%
Enrollment management	3.5%	3.2%
Institutional relations	6.9%	3.2%
Student affairs	34.5%	46.8%
Other	4.6%	8.5%

Chart 4: Comparison of Parent/Family Program Placement for Public Institutions in 2007 and 2009

Name of Office/Department	Public 2007	Public 2009
Academic affairs	2.2%	8.8%
Advancement/fundraising	8.8%	3.4%
Alumni association	6.6%	3.4%
Enrollment management	5.5%	6.8%
Institutional relations	2.2%	0.7%
Student affairs	73.6%	71.6%
Other	1.1%	5.4%

Program Demographics

The introduction of parent/family programs has shown steady growth since the 1970s. Few institutions that responded to the 2009 survey reported having had a parent/family program since before 1970 (3.5 percent); while 6.5 percent added programs in the 1970s, 9.1 percent in the 1980s, 16.9 percent in the 1990s, and 63.9 percent in the 2000s.

Chart 5: When Did Schools Start Parent/Family Services 2009

When Did Schools Start Parent Services?
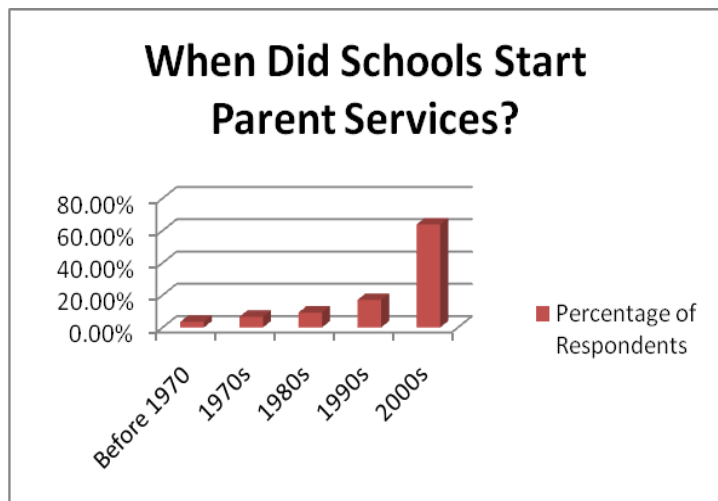
Year	Percent of Respondents
Before 1979	3.5%
1970s	6.5%
1980s	9.1%
1990s	16.9%
2000-2005	32.6%
2006	10.9%
2007	9.1%
2008	8.3%
2009 (Jan-Apr)	3.0%

More survey responses came from public institutions (61.6 percent) than private institutions (38.8 percent). This is almost exactly opposite the public-private ratio of U.S. degree-granting, higher education institutions.[1] The majority of the respondents were from four-year schools (62.4 percent), with another third (33.9 percent) designated as graduate or professional school institutions. Just 3.7 percent of respondents represented two-year institutions.

Responses were fairly evenly split in the self-described size, with 30.5 percent as small schools, 38.3 percent as mid-sized schools, and 31.3 percent as large schools. Self-described small schools were more likely to be private (83.5 percent); mid-sized (72.0 percent) and large (90.8 percent) schools were more likely to be public.

Respondents were heavily weighted toward the eastern and middle portions of the nation. Just as in 2007, the survey asked for the respondents' state, and we assigned them to a region. However, for the first time in 2009, we based the regions on NASPA designations, which included seven regions.[2]

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[1] National Center for Education Statistics. (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_265.asp?referrer=list, referenced December 29, 2009)

[2] **Region I:** Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island. **Region II:** Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands. **Region III:** Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia. **Region IV-E:** Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, Ontario. **Region IV-W:** Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wyoming, Manitoba, Saskatchewan. **Region V:** Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Alberta, British Columbia. **Region VI:** Arizona, California, Hawaii.

Chart 6: What Region of the Country Do You Represent?

Region	Percent
Region I	8.5%
Region II	17.5%
Region III	25.1%
Region IV-E	19.1%
Region IV-W	12.3%
Region V	5.5%
Region VI	11.9%

Staffing Parent/Family Offices

We first asked respondents whether or not they were the primary staff person/administrator responsible for parent/family services. Most respondents (86.3 percent) replied "yes."

At most institutions, the respondent worked half-time or less (61.8 percent) on parent/family services. The number of those whose work was dedicated full-time to parent/family services has remained relatively constant since the 2007 survey (24.5 percent in 2007 to 22.9 percent in 2009), after it rose from 18.6 percent in 2005. Staff that worked more than half-time but less than full-time in parent/family services has also remained somewhat constant at about 15 percent.

The survey also addressed whether or not the parent/family office had any full-time employees, part-time employees, or student staff. Nearly 39 percent reported that the office had at least one full-time employee, with a range of one to 15 other full-time staff working in the parent/family offices. Twenty-nine percent of respondents reported at least one part-time employee, with a range of one to five employees, and 34 percent said they had at least one student staff, with a range of one to 20. Some of these numbers may, however, be deceptive. The survey question may have been understood to reflect an office that included parent and student orientation or an advancement office that works with alumni and friends as well as parents.

The person responsible for parent/family services can be addressed by a variety of different titles. The most common title was "director" (33.5 percent), with the next most common designations being assistant or associate director (18.1 percent) and "coordinator" (16.9 percent). Other titles ranged from assistant or associate dean to vice president, dean, assistant or associate vice president, manager, specialist, academic adviser, graduate assistant, event planner, staff assistant, or liaison.

The level of experience of the staff who worked with parent/family services ranged from 2 months or less to 29 years. More than half of the responding staff (nearly 57 percent) had been in the position for 1–5 years. Almost 12 percent had been in the position more than 10 years. It was not surprising to find that most had been in the position for 1–5 years, considering the number of institutions that added parent/family services within the past five years.

The educational level of the parent/family program staff rose considerably since 2007. While the percentage of staff with a bachelor's degree or less fell from roughly 40 percent in 2007 to 27 percent in 2009, there was an increase in staff who had a master's degree or a doctorate. The number of respondents with a master's degree (59.5 percent) or with a doctorate (13.6 percent) rose 7.5 percent and 5.6 percent respectively.

Chart 7: Educational Background

Highest Degree Earned	2003 Survey	2005 Survey	2007 Survey	2009 Survey
High school	0	3.6%	1.7%	1.2%
Associate	0	0.6%	1.7%	1.7%
Bachelor's	31.3%	37.1%	36.6%	24.0%
Master's	60.0%	49.1%	52.0%	59.5%
Ph.D.	8.8%	9.6%	8.0%	13.6%

The number of respondents working toward or planning to obtain further education also has risen since 2007, when only 20.9 percent were working towards or planning a higher degree; in 2009, 29.3 percent indicated they planned to or were currently enrolled in a higher education program.

Overall, parent/family program staff planned to remain at their institution or in their current position; 43 percent said they plan to retire from their current position or had no plans to change jobs. Another 30 percent indicated that they hoped to move to a different or higher position in the same institution, while 15 percent wanted to continue in higher education at another school. The remaining respondents were unsure of their career path or plan to move on to something else outside of higher education.

Respondents reported a salary range from less than $30,000 to over $100,000. Slightly more than one quarter of respondents (26.8 percent) fell within the range of $40,000 to $49,000. After a drop in 2007, salaries in the $90,000-$100,000 or above range rose again and are the highest in the past 5 years.

Chart 8: Parent/family Staff Salaries

Salary Range	Percentage in Range 2005	Percentage in Range 2007	Percentage in Range 2009
Less than $30,000	9.9%	5.2%	3.4%
$30,000-$39,000	21.2%	16.3%	13.6%
$40,000-$49,000	19.3%	24.4%	26.8%
$50,000-$59,000	22.4%	21.5%	17.4%
$60,000-$69,000	11.2%	12.2%	9.4%
$70,000-$79,000	5.0%	9.3%	10.2%
$80,000-$89,000	5.0%	7.6%	7.2%
$90,000-$99,000	2.5%	1.7%	3.4%
$100,000 or above	3.7%	1.7%	8.5%

Salaries for respondents with a doctorate or equivalent degree increased since 2007, while salaries for respondents with a bachelor's or master's degree were approximately the same. In general, higher levels of education tended to result in a higher salary.

Chart 9: Median Salary Based on Educational Level

Highest Degree Earned	Median Salary 2007	Median Salary 2009
Bachelor's	$40,000-$49,000	$40,000-$49,000
Master's	$50,000-$59,000	$50,000-$59,000*
Doctorate	$60,000-$69,000	$80,000-$89,000 **

*most responses in $40,000-$49,000 range

**most responses in $100,000 or above

In 2007, a staff member reporting to a student affairs office was more likely to have a lower salary than one who reported to an advancement/foundation office. In 2009, no difference was found in salaries of student affairs or advancement/foundation professionals. However, there was a difference in educational level when comparing where the parent/family program staff member reported. When the staff member reported to a student affairs office, he or she was much more likely to have a higher level of education than a staff member who reported to an advancement or foundation office. This remained constant since 2007, although the percentage of staff members with a master's or higher degree in an advancement or foundation office increased by 16.9 percent.

Chart 10: Median Salary Based on Reporting Structure

Reporting Structure	Median Salary 2007	Median Salary 2009
Student affairs	$40,000-$49,000	$50,000-$59,000*
Advancement/foundation	$50,000-$59,000	$50,000-$59,000*

*most responses in $40,000-$49,000 range

Chart 11: Educational Level Based on Reporting Structure

Reporting Structure	Percentage with Master's or Higher 2007	Percentage with Master's or Higher 2009
Student affairs	78.7%	80.2%
Advancement/foundation	30.2%	47.1%

None of the respondents who reported to an advancement/foundation office had a doctorate or equivalent degree.

Parent/family program staff tended to have an undergraduate education background in liberal arts or education/human development. Of those who specified their undergraduate major, 61 percent indicated a major that falls within a liberal arts category (most notably psychology, sociology, communications/journalism, English/literature, languages, political science, history, and the arts). Another 15 percent identified their undergraduate degree was in education/human development. At the graduate degree level, education/human development was the leading category, with more than two-thirds (69 percent) holding master's degrees in a field related to these topics. Of those with a doctorate-level degree, 85 percent had a degree in education or counseling.

Most respondents had a work history that falls in the general field of higher education, with 39.5 percent of respondents having had experience in student affairs. Job histories cited positions in admissions, event planning, orientation, housing, and alumni services.

Services and Programming

When comparing parent/family services to the 2007 survey, some considerable decreases in services should be noted. While most services remained relatively stable between 2005 and 2007, all services except parent orientation have decreased in 2009.

Chart 12: Parent/Family Services Compared By Year

Service Provided	2003 Survey	2005 Survey	2007 Survey	2009 Survey
Parents/family weekend	74.4%	96.0%	94.9%	89.8%
Parent orientation	61.0%	97.0%	95.2%	97.1%
Newsletter	54.9%	56.0%	54.3%	41.1%
Parents council	36.6%	60.0%	65.4%	52.5%
Fundraising	43.9%	84.0%	85.2%	74.8%
Welcome week/move-in	7.3%	75.0%	73.8%	73.0%
Handbook	12.2%	75.0%	78.6%	76.1%

The most significant changes from the 2007 survey include a drop in the numbers providing print newsletters, working with a parents council, and doing fundraising from parents.

Chart 13: Differences in Parent/Family Services from 2007 to 2009

Service Provided	2007-2009 differences
Parents/family weekend	-5.1%
Parent orientation	+1.9
Newsletter	-13.2%
Parents council	-12.9%
Fundraising	-10.4%
Welcome week/move-in	-0.8%
Handbook	-2.5%

Although we cannot know for sure why the percentage of schools offering these services decreased in 2009, one interpretation could be that newer programs are not yet established enough to be offering as many distinct services as programs that have been operating parent/family programs for many years. In order to examine this, services provided were compared between programs that were established in the 1990s and those that were established in the past three years (2007 to 2009). Parent/family programs that were established in the 1990s overall offered more programs than those established in the past three years. The services that were provided most frequently by institutions established between 2007 and 2009 were parent orientation and education workshops.

Chart 14: Services for Programs Established in the 1990s and in the Past Three Years

Service Provided	1990s	2007-2009
Parent orientation	97.4%	97.9%
Parents/family weekend	97.5%	86.9%
Parent website	97.4%	93.5%
Print newsletter	50.0%	35.7%
Email newsletter	82.1%	71.7%
Parent chat room	45.9%	13.3%
Hotline/parent questions	71.8%	57.7%
Email/parent questions	97.5%	88.9%
Parent handbook	76.9%	65.9%
Move-in events	76.3%	61.3%
Educational workshops	57.9%	62.2%
Parents council	66.7%	46.7%
Parents association	69.2%	43.2%
Regional programming	55.3%	47.8%
Fundraising	92.3%	57.8%

Respondents were asked to identify services more specifically by indicating which services were offered by their own office and which were offered by another office at the institution. In some cases, services have changed offices since 2007. While more institutions in general were providing a parent chat room, three services were more likely to be offered by parent/family programs specifically: parent orientation, email newsletter, and parent handbook.

Chart 15: Services Provided by Your Office/By Another Office on Your Campus

Service Provided	By My Office	By Another Office	Not Provided
Parent orientation	59.4%	37.7%	2.9%
Parents/family weekend	60.4%	29.4%	10.2%
Parent website	82.5%	11.8%	5.7%
Print newsletter	30.3%	10.8%	58.9%
Email newsletter	67.5%	10.7%	21.8%
Parent chat room	21.3%	4.3%	74.5%
Hotline/parent questions	55.0%	6.2%	38.8%
Email/parent questions	89.7%	5.8%	4.5%
Parent handbook	60.9%	15.2%	23.9%
Move-in events	44.4%	28.6%	27.0%
Educational workshops	42.9%	17.6%	39.5%
Parents council	40.3%	12.2%	47.5%

Parents association	47.7%	10.0%	42.3%
Regional programming	28.9%	24.3%	46.9%
Fundraising	28.6%	43.8%	25.2

Aside from the services listed above, respondents noted that new services are now being provided by their office. Several indicated that their office offers gift packages for students; workshops, webinars, and conferences for parents; parent mentoring; annual parent/family tributes and awards; and send-off events. Some institutions also provided a Facebook page for parents.

More than half of the respondents had a parent council at their institution. Institutions selected their parent council members is a variety of ways; most selected their members through application or election, followed closely by selection by the parent office staff and nominations by the current committee. Council members were also selected based on donations given to the institution and on a volunteer/self-selection basis.

Web Pages

The percentage of institutions that had a link for parents on the front page of the college or university website dropped from 81.3 percent in 2007 to 66.5 percent in 2009. Additionally, fewer programs even offered a website for parents in 2009 than in 2007. Given the importance of the internet today, these decreases were quite surprising. In order to investigate this further, we looked at which programs have a link for parents on the institution's front page based on when the program was established. Programs that were established in the 1990s were much more likely to have a parent link on the front page, which indicates that programs that have been around longer are developed enough to have this service. As a quarter of respondents felt the parent web page is their weakest service (see below) there is clearly a need for better web page development in parent/family offices.

Chart 16: Institutions That Have Link for Parents on Institution Website Front Page Based on When Parent/Family Program Was Established

1980-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2005	2006-2009
52.4%	80.0%	75.0%	64.4%	64.3%

Self-Identified Best/Weakest Practices

Just as in 2007, nearly half of the respondents reported that they are most proud of either their parent orientation or parents/family weekend. Parent orientation continued to be the most successful practice (31.1 percent) followed by parents/family weekend (16.0 percent) and email newsletter (13.0 percent). There have been few changes since 2007. There was an increase in respondents who named an email newsletter (+ 4.4 percent) and a parent handbook (+ 2.9 percent) as the best practice. Although parents/family weekend was one of the most commonly named best practices, it has decreased by 4 percent since 2007.

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Chart 17: What Service Are You the Most Proud Of?

Service Provided	2007	2009
Parent orientation	27.4%	31.0%
Parents/family weekend	20.0%	16.3%
Parent website	6.3%	3.3%
Print newsletter	1.7%	1.3%
Email newsletter	8.6%	13.0%
Parent chat room	0.6%	1.3%
Hotline/parent questions	2.3%	2.5%
Parent handbook	5.1%	7.9%
Move-in events	1.1%	1.3%
Educational workshops	1.7%	2.1%
Parents council	8.0%	7.9%
Parents association	5.7%	3.8%
Regional programming	NA	1.3%
Fundraising	5.1%	2.1%
Other	6.3%	5.0%

When asked why they selected a service as their most successful, several indicated that they based their choice on "feedback," particularly from parents. Other popular responses included "large attendance" or "reaches most parents, "comprehensive activities and events," and "it provides interactions between the campus and parents."

As noted above, the biggest area of concern was websites. Nearly a quarter of respondents (24.1 percent) named their website as the weakest service. This has remained constant since 2007. Respondents named websites as the weakest area largely because their site was not updated consistently or did not provide useful information. Respondents also indicated that their parent websites were not user-friendly. Other responses concerning the weakest area were spread across all options. The most significant change since 2007 was in education workshops, which decreased by 6.8 percent in 2009.

Several respondents (15.3 percent) selected a weakest practice that they do not currently provide. Other common themes among the weakest practice included
- The selected service is not kept up to date or is not user-friendly
- There is not enough time, money, or staff to adequately provide the service
- The service is provided by another office or several offices, so the respondent has no control over it

Chart 18: Which Service Do You Feel Is Currently Weakest?

Service Provided	2007	2009
Parent orientation	4.7%	6.1%
Parents/family weekend	6.5%	7.0%

Parent website	26.0%	24.5%
Print newsletter	4.7%	1.3%
Email newsletter	7.1%	6.1%
Parent chat room	7.1%	7.9%
Hotline/parent questions	2.4%	1.3%
Parent handbook	5.9%	3.1%
Move-in events	1.8%	3.1%
Educational workshops	10.7%	3.9%
Parents council	8.3%	5.2%
Parents association	6.9%	14.0%
Regional programming	NA	9.6%
Fundraising	4.1%	5.2%
Other	4.1%	1.7%

Putting the best and weakest services into a single chart allows a comparison of where parent programs in general see their strengths and weaknesses.

Chart 19: Comparison of Best/Weakest Practices 2009

Service Provided	Best	Weakest
Parent orientation	31.1%	6.1%
Parents/family weekend	16.0%	7.0%
Parent website	3.4%	24.1%
Print newsletter	1.3%	1.3%
Email newsletter	13.0%	6.1%
Chat room	1.3%	7.9%
Hotline/parent questions	2.5%	1.3%
Parent handbook	8.0%	3.1%
Move-in events	1.3%	3.1%
Educational workshops	2.1%	3.9%
Parents council	8.0%	5.3%
Parents association	3.8%	14.0%
Regional programming	1.3%	9.6%
Fundraising	2.1%	5.3%
Other	5.0%	1.8%

When comparing best and weakest practices between public and private institutions, there were some major differences. Considerably more public institutions (40.6 percent) listed parent orientation as their best service than private institutions (16.7 percent). However, only 1 percent more private institutions listed parent orientation as the weakest service than public institutions. While 20 percent of private institutions listed parents/family weekend as the best service, 13.3 percent of public institutions did. Only 4.3 percent more public institutions listed this as their weakest service than private institutions. More public institutions (16.1 percent) listed email newsletter as the best service than private institutions (8.9

percent). There was a 4.7 percent difference between public and private institutions, with more private institutions naming email newsletter as the weakest service.

Our interpretation of why there are differences in best and weakest practices between public and private institutions is that these practices reflect the skills of the department. As we found out earlier, placement of the department varied based on whether the institution is public or private. Therefore, these differences will also reflect departmental placement. For example, of those who reported to fundraising (more private institutions) none listed orientation as the best service, which explains the large discrepancy between public and private institutions in this area.

Chart 20: Comparison of Best Practices 2009 for Public and Private Institutions

Service Provided	Public	Private
Parent orientation	40.6%	16.7%
Parents/family weekend	13.3%	20.0%
Parent website	2.8%	4.4%
Print newsletter	1.4%	1.1%
Email newsletter	16.1%	8.9%
Chat room	0.7%	2.2%
Hotline/parent questions	2.1%	2.2%
Parent handbook	7.7%	8.9%
Move-in events	0.0%	3.3%
Educational workshops	2.1%	2.2%
Parents council	5.6%	12.2%
Parents association	3.5%	2.2%
Regional programming	0.7%	2.2%
Fundraising	0.0%	5.6%

Chart 21: Comparison of Weakest Practices 2009 for Public and Private Institutions

Service Provided	Public	Private
Parents orientation	5.8%	6.8%
Parents/family weekend	8.8%	4.5%
Parent website	21.2%	28.4%
Print newsletter	1.5%	0.0%
Email newsletter	4.4%	9.1%
Chat room	7.3%	8.0%
Hotline/parent questions	0.0%	3.4%
Parent handbook	2.2%	4.5%
Move-in events	4.4%	1.1%
Educational workshops	2.9%	5.7%
Parents council	4.4%	6.8%
Parents association	19.0%	6.8%

Regional programming	11.7%	6.8%
Fundraising	4.4%	6.8%

Similar to 2007, 59.8 percent of respondents indicated that they routinely performed some kind of assessment of their parent/family program. This assessment happened in a variety of ways. Most (43.4 percent) parent/family programs provided a survey to parents following an event or activity. Others (22 percent) assessed through surveys in general; some indicated the use of an annual survey. Programs could also be assessed internally (15.4 percent) or by the parent's council (7 percent). Few programs indicated they used Student Voice or had a comprehensive evaluation process in place.

Program Budget

We asked respondents for information about their annual budget, excluding salary and benefits. We found that most institutions had no formal budget (38.7 percent), yet some had a budget over $250,000 (2.5 percent). Budgets have remained relatively stable since 2007.

Chart 22: What is Your Annual Budget (Excluding Salary/Benefits)

Budget	Percentage
No formal budget	38.7%
Less than $10,000	13.9%
$10,001-$25,000	16.0%
$25,000-$50,000	12.2%
$50,000-$100,000	11.8%
$100,000-$250,000	5.0%
Over -$250,000	2.5%

Two-thirds of the respondents (67.0 percent) indicated that their funding came from a college/university allocation. Funding also came from donations and gifts (21.5 percent), events (18.9 percent) and parent memberships (11.6 percent).

Advice and General Comments

When asked why they chose this field as their profession, nearly 23 percent indicated that they did not choose the job. Rather, the job chose them, it was part of their position, or it evolved to what it is now. A large number of respondents chose the job as a way to work with people in general (13.2 percent), to work with and support students (18.3 percent), or because they enjoy working with parents (12.7 percent). Others chose the field because the job fit their interests and skills (14.2 percent) or to work in higher education or in a college setting (10.2 percent).

When asked the question, "what professional organizations do you belong to and what conferences/workshops do you attend," nearly half of the respondents named National Association of Student Personnel Administrators/Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA). Nearly

a third named the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA; 30.7 percent), Administrators Promoting Parent Involvement (APPI; 21.7 percent), American College Personnel Association (ACPA; 15.8 percent), and Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE; 12.2 percent). Involvement remained relatively the same when considered separately by public or private institution with few exceptions. Involvement in NODA dropped to 19 percent and involvement in CASE rose to 26.1 percent for private institutions. Although these findings remained similar for mid-sized and large institutions, there were minor changes for small institutions. Involvement rose to 28.6 percent in CASE and dropped to 16.3 percent for NODA in small colleges and universities.

For the first time, we added a question about how participants decide whether to attend a conference. Several factors influenced the decision: The keynote speaker (19.2 percent) did not have as much influence as cost (78.6 percent), details about program sessions (74.1 percent), or location (72.8 percent). Other reasons included timing and networking. These results remained the same for public and private institutions individually and for small, mid-sized, and large institutions. There were, however, differences based on how long the respondent has worked in the profession.

Chart 23: Influences on Conference Attendance Based on Time Working in Profession*

Influences on Conference Attendance	Time Working in Profession			
	Less than 1 yr (n=28)	1-2 years (n=65)	3-5 years (n=69)	More than 5 yrs (n=62)
Location	67.9%	67.7%	72.5%	72.6%
Keynote Speaker	7.1%	20.0%	23.2%	17.7%
Cost	78.6%	72.3%	81.2%	77.4%
Program sessions	64.3%	76.9%	72.5%	71.0%
Other	3.6%	9.2%	14.5%	14.5%

* Based on those responding to the question

We also added a question about the most effective ways to disseminate information to them. Nearly three-fourths (73.4 percent) of respondents named e-news as the most effective method for receiving professional information. Other important methods included websites (65.1 percent), professional conferences (51.5 percent), listserv for questions/responses (47.6 percent). These results remained the same for public and private institutions individually, but changed based on the size of the institution. For small institutions, more respondents preferred e-news (82.4 percent) and fewer preferred websites (58.8 percent) and professional conferences (41.2 percent). For large institutions, most respondents (70.7 percent) named professional conferences as the most effective method for receiving professional information. This was followed by website (69.3 percent), e-news (65.3 percent), and listserv for questions/responses (50.7 percent).

Chart 24: Most Effective Methods to Deliver Information Based on Time Working in Profession*

Most Effective Methods to Deliver Information	Time Working in Profession			
	Less than 1 yr (n=28)	1-2 years (n=64)	3-5 years (n=70)	More than 5 yrs (n=63)
Website	71.4%	64.1%	57.1%	68.3%
Journal	17.9%	14.1%	10.0%	19.0%
E-news	89.3%	64.1%	80.0%	66.7%
Print newsletter	17.9%	20.3%	17.1%	23.8%
Professional conference	39.3%	56.3%	41.4%	61.9%
Listserv for questions	50.0%	42.2%	44.3%	54.0%
Consultant services	0.0%	3.1%	0.0%	3.2%

*Based on those responding to the question

When asked what advice they would give someone considering working in parent/family services, respondents focused on a handful of general topics. Included below are personal characteristics, professional skills, campus relations, suggestions specific to working with parents, and some warnings about the job:

Personal characteristics
- Listening skills
- Patience
- Open-mindedness
- Ability to not take parent criticisms personally or get defensive
- Flexibility

Professional skills
- Communication skills
- Event planning experience
- Networking
- Organizational skills
- Background in student development
- People skills
- Problem solving
- Multitasking
- Use assessments

Campus relations
- Knowledge of campus, offices and departments, resources, and policies
- Collaboration with other offices

Specific to parents
- Parents want to be understood

- Get to know students and their relationship with parents and family
- Remember that parents only want the best for their children
- Communicate with parents on a regular basis and respond quickly
- Put yourself in their shoes
- Recognize diversity in parents and families
- "Parents need instruction on how involved to be, how to support your student as a mentor and not as a controller"
- "Parents are valuable"
- Treat parents as partners

Warnings
- Don't waste your time or theirs if you don't care or if you are not adamant about providing good service
- Encourage family members and parents to support their child, but don't always do the work for them
- Can be rewarding, but generally is very challenging
- Parents don't know what they don't know. The more information you are forthcoming with, the more they will appreciate your advice and help

A list of all comments is included in [Appendix III](#) of this report.

Discussion

The purpose of this survey is to record the changes in parent services at colleges and universities, both in scope and in content, over time. The questions asked are not intended to evaluate the climate or demand for parent services at colleges and universities or to explore the changing relationship between higher education institutions and the parents of their students. They also do not seek to evaluate changing relationships between family members or a change in levels of independence among college students. Those issues are topics to be considered among higher education administrators and educators nationally. The positive and negative viewpoints on these questions are frequently published in the popular press as well as in education journals, periodicals, blogs, and websites.

Using benchmarks established through the 2003 National Parent Program Survey, along with a preliminary survey in 1999 conducted by a University of Minnesota master's degree student, we can see that there are emerging trends in parent/family services over time. By all indications, the number of institutions offering parent services is increasing, and parent-related services have become more diverse. As the survey reveals, about 60 percent of the respondents represent schools that developed a parent/family program since the year 2000, and the list of services offered by these programs has grown and continues to evolve. Parent orientation programs and parent/family weekends are almost ubiquitous, and the majority of schools are now soliciting donations from the parents of their current students. Technology has rapidly changed the ways institutions communicate with all their constituents, including parents.

Perhaps most significantly, the mission of parent and family services seems to be gaining clarity. It is increasingly folded into student affairs, which would appear to indicate that a student development/student services focus is likely to emerge as the primary purpose of parent and family relations. As would be expected, we seem to see an increase in parent/family program professionals emerging from the broad field of student affairs.

This shift to student affairs and away from a fundraising/advancement office has been a pattern over time; the 2003 survey categorized fundraising and advancement with alumni relations, and 37.8 percent of programs fell within these categories. By 2009, the percentage dropped to 17.8 percent.

Staffing for parent services continues to be an add-on to other duties with responsibilities shared with offices across campus. The majority of respondents indicated that at least some parent/family services were being provided by offices other than their own. As noted in previous survey reports, this practice of dividing responsibilities may allow for good program delivery by experts in such areas as communications, event planning, and fundraising, but it could signal concerns in delivering a consistent message or providing a single contact point for parents.

Further Research/Additional Questions

It will be interesting to watch how technology continues to affect not only program delivery, but also the skill set needed by the professionals who run parent and family programs. A recurring complaint in survey responses has been frustration about updating websites and mastering other technology.

We continue to struggle to determine exactly how parent offices are staffed. Although we know that the individuals responding to the survey are frequently not working with parents full-time, we do not have good data on the number of full-time and part-time staff in parent offices. Questions about the number of staff who work in the parent office continue to fail to elicit the information we're seeking. Although our purpose is to determine how many staff members work full time with parents and families, we have not come up with wording to reflect the complexity of the offices serving parents. It may helpful to ask a question in future surveys about respondents' job responsibilities *other than* parent and family services, and to further seek information about the multiple offices on campus that work with parents.

An area to watch in subsequent surveys is whether institutions may shift away from direct parent involvement through parents councils and toward educational programs to help parents understand student development and the student experience. The 2009 survey shows a decline in the number of institutions working with a parents council. In 2007, two-thirds of the respondents (65.4 percent) said they had a parents council; by 2009, that rate had dropped to 52.2 percent.

As noted in past survey reports, parent services staff and their supervisors continue to seek information on the actual impact of parental involvement and parent services on student success and retention. Since these issues are affected by multiple factors, it may be impossible to determine with any degree of certainty what the effect of parent programming is, but statistically significant information on the correlation between parent involvement and student success would be welcome.

The questions asked about best and weakest practices seem to indicate that evaluation of programs and services may not be routinely determined by formal assessment practices. As parent programs attempt to find their place in higher education, assessment tools will be valuable in justifying the work of the program. Future surveys should inquire about assessment efforts, and it would be helpful to seek examples of assessment tools. In addition, future questions about the services provided by a parent office should include summer sendoff/welcome events, as these seem to be an increasing responsibility of the parent program.

A question in the 2005 survey invited respondents to submit their mission/vision statements. That question was omitted from the 2007 and 2009 surveys but should be included again in an upcoming study. Schools that are developing new parent services have mentioned that the mission/vision statements from other institutions are helpful as they plan their own programs.

Appendix I

Survey Questions

1. Are you the primary staff person/administrator to work with parents or most closely manage the parent services at your college? (yes; no)
2. What is your title? (open-ended question)
3. What percentage of your time is dedicated to parent services? (half-time of less; more than half-time but less than three-fourths; more than three-fourths but less than full-time; full-time)
4. What area or department do you report to at your institution? (Student Affairs/Student Life or equivalent; Foundation/Advancement/Fund development; Alumni Association; Academic Affairs; University/College Relations; Enrollment Management; Other [please specify])
5. How long have you worked with parent services? (open-ended question)
6. What parent services does your office/does your institution provide for parents? (parent orientation; parents/family weekend; website for parents; print newsletter; e-mail newsletter; chat room or interactive listserv; hotline/phone response to parent questions; e-mail response to parent questions; parent handbook; move-in receptions/events [when students first move into residence halls]; educational workshops for parents; parents council [advisory group]; parents association/organization; regional programming [meetings/programs/student send-off events away from campus]; fundraising; other. *Note: respondents indicated whether each service was offered by their office, by another office on campus, or not provided.*
7. Are there any other parent services or events offered by your office? Please specify. (open-ended question)
8. Besides you, how many parent services staff members in your office work primarily with parents or parent services? (__full-time; __part-time; __student staff)
9. Of the services your institution provides to parents, what service are you the most proud of? (Parent orientation; Parents/family weekend; Website for parents; Print newsletter; E-mail newsletter; Chat room or interactive listserv; Hotline/phone information; Parent handbook; Move-in receptions/events; Educational workshops for parents; Parents council [advisory group]; Parents association; Regional programming [meetings/programs/student send-off events away from campus]; Fundraising; other)
10. Please describe why you are proud of this service. (open-ended question)
11. Of the services your institution provides to parents, what service do you feel is currently weakest? (Parent orientation; Parents/family weekend; Website for parents; Print newsletter; E-mail newsletter; Chat room or interactive listserv; Hotline/phone information; Parent handbook; Move-in receptions/events; Educational workshops for parents; Parents council [advisory group]; Parents association; Regional programming [meetings/programs/student send-off events away from campus]; Fundraising; other)
12. Please describe why you feel this service is weak. (open-ended question)
13. Do you routinely assess/evaluate your parent program? (yes; no) If yes, please describe your methods. (open-ended)
14. When was your parent program established? Some institutions had a parent program historically, but discontinued it for a period time. Please answer based on your current parent program.

(Before 1970; 1970-1979; 1980-1989; 1990-1995; 1995-1999; 2000-2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009)

15. If you have a parent's council or parent's governing board, how do you select its members? (open-ended question)

16. Does your parent program require a membership fee from parents? (yes; no)

17. Institutional characteristics: For what type of institution do you work? (Public college; Private college; Public university; Private university)

18. What is the scope of your institution? (Two-year; Four-year; Graduate- or professional-degree granting)

19. How does your institution describe itself related to size? (Small school; Mid-sized school; Large school)

20. In what state or province are you located? (open-ended question)

21. On the front page of your institution's Website, is there a link designated for parents? (yes; no)

22. Excluding salary and benefits, what is your annual budget for providing parent services? (No formal budget; less than $10,000; $10,001-$25,000; $25,000-$50,000; $50,001-$100,000; $100,000-$250,000; Over $250,000)

23. Where does your funding come from? (Check all that apply) (College/university allocation; Generate funds from donations and gifts; Generate funds from parent memberships; Generate funds from events; Other)

24. If you checked multiple funding sources, please estimate the percentage that comes from each source. (open-ended question)

25. What is your educational background - highest degree received? (High school; Associate degree; Bachelor degree; Master degree; Doctorate or equivalent)

26. What was your educational major? (open-ended question; respondents were asked to indicate major at the associate, bachelor, master, and doctorate/professional levels)

27. What percentage time is your position overall (not just related to parent services)? (10%; 25%; 50%; 75%; 100%)

28. If your position includes duties besides parent services, what other responsibilities do you have? (open-ended question)

29. What is your salary range? (Less than $30,000; $30,000 to $39,000; $40,000 to $49,000; $50,000 to $59,000; $60,000 to $69,000; $70,000 to $79,000; $80,000 to $89,000; $90,000 to $99,000; $100,000 or above)

30. Are you currently working toward or planning to obtain a higher education degree? (yes; no)

31. If you are planning to obtain a higher education degree, in what field do you expect it to be, and what degree will it be (B.A., M.A., Ph.D., etc) (open-ended question)

32. What work experience did you have before obtaining a job in parent services? (open-ended question)

33. What prior work experience has proved most useful in your job in parent services? (open-ended question)

34. Why did you choose to work in this field? (open-ended question)

35. Please describe your career goals. In other words, do you plan to retire from this position? Do you plan to move from your current position to a different one at your institution? A job at a different institution? What is your ultimate career goal? (open-ended question)

36. What kinds of jobs do you feel you would qualify for, based on the experience you've gained from your current job? (open-ended question)
37. What advice do you have for someone who is considering working in parent services? (open-ended question)
38. What professional organizations do you belong to, and what conferences/workshops do you attend? (open-ended question)
39. What factors influence your decision to attend a conference? (Check all that apply) (Location; Keynote speaker; Cost; Details about program sessions)
40. What are the most effective media for delivering professional information to you? (check all that apply) (Website; Journal; E-news; Print newsletter; Professional conference; Listserv for questions/responses; consultant services; other)
41. What other resources or information have been helpful for you in your work with parents? (open-ended question)
42. Please include any other comments you may have. (open-ended question)
43. If you would like to receive a copy of the analysis of this survey, please send a message to mbsavage@umn.edu or include your address here. (open-ended question)

Appendix II

Recommended Resources

What other resources or information have been helpful for you in your work with parents?

Conferences and Organizations

- Generic conferences/workshops (8)
- NASPA (7)
- NODA (5)
- CASE (3)
- APPI (4)
- PaperClip (2)
- Student Affairs Today, University Parent Media resources, A professional organization for Parent Programs, College Parents of America, Student affairs counterparts, Annual Parent fundraising conferences (1 each)

Publications

- Books—general (9)
- Books specific (college parenting, college student development; advising in higher education) (3)
- General literature/publications (3)
- Journals/magazines (3)

Online Sources

- Listservs/emails (8)
- Webinars (6)
- Web—general (2)

Research/Reports

- Research—general (4)
- University of Minnesota's National Parent Program Survey (2)

Informal Sources

- Networking with colleagues (35)
- Websites and materials from other institutions (16)
- Individual institutional contacts (15)
- Parents (11)

Appendix III

Advice and Comments

What advice do you have for someone who is considering working in parent services?

- To understand the importance of listening skills; parents want to make sure they feel they are being understood.
- Learn about communication strategies and stay current on ways to keep in touch with parents. Event planning experience is a must if you're planning a Parents or Family Weekend.
- You must be very patient, understanding and have an open mind. Also, you must admire change and diversity because every year, new challenges arise and generations are ever-changing.
- Listen!! Most parents only want someone to listen to their problems, and not to solve them.
- Must know college well, and be able to work with diverse group of parents. Must be creative and able to "sell" the program to faculty and administrators as well as parents.
- Network with other Parent Services professionals-it's a really cohesive group with great ideas!
- Internal marketing is so important. Inter-office collaboration is the largest hurdle and key to program success.
- Know the institution's philosophy towards working with parents and families-what role does the institution want them to have and how do the services that you offer accomplish that goal?
- It's important to partner with other offices on campus so as not to reinvent the wheel and the university needs to provide value to parents in order to get their participation in the partnership.
- Do not personalize complaints from parents.
- Gain a comprehensive knowledge of campus offices and departments.
- Good communication skills, empathy, organizational skills to produce publications.
- Be well versed in student development theory.
- Spend time in event planning.
- Please make sure that you can devote adequate time to work on parent services, programs, etc.
- I don't have enough experience yet to provide this type of advice.
- Know your campus/state demographics.
- Enhance your knowledge of higher education issues, know your college community well, practice patience and good communication skills AND come with an open mind.
- Spend time getting to know the students and the relationships they have with their family and parents. Understanding that dynamic can play a large role in your programming and communication with the parents.
- Get a doctorate and then teach.
- Patience is key. Parents only want the best for their children, so you have to remember this when they call upset about something. They really need someone to listen to and to advise them. I think it is also very difficult for parents to heed what a professional says when that professional is 50 or younger. You have to remember to be sensitive to that. Pulling in professionals or parents of older students who has or has had a child in college to help talk to parents really helps. Just like

students would rather listen to other students who have been through their freshman year. Parents like to hear from parents who have also been there.

- Recognize that their experience is VERY different than those of their daughters' and alumnae/i, so they need more reassurance than others, in some ways.
- I would say that communicating with the parents on a regular basis is key.
- Get involved with kids programs, camps, etc. to get a feel for the minds of parents.
- 1.) Understand that all parents think they are doing what's best for their student, even if we don't think it's what is best. They all have noble intentions. 2.) Appreciate the positive interactions with the parents; they will outweigh the bad ones (even if the bad ones are more memorable).
- Must have patience, be customer friendly, determined and must love dealing with problems. Must be prepared to work long hours because there is always too much work for too few people.
- Be understanding and respectful of parents' concerns and emotions, have a good understanding of your school's positions and policies and be able to explain them in different ways, respond to a parent's concern within 24 hours, provide means for parents to be involved appropriately, and develop strategies to teach parents to now be mentors/coaches for their students.
- Go for it!
- Do your research, know the parents, understand that they have one-on-one interaction with their students and can be our partners, help them know how to do that developmentally/educationally, realize they are part of our campus community and embrace serving them.
- Listen closely, be open and communicate FERPA laws. Allow parents to assist with recruitment.
- You absolutely need caring and patience. Don't waste your time or theirs if you don't care or if you are not adamant on providing good services. Satisfaction in this field comes from helping people out and making a difference in their day.
- It is a valuable experience, but is part of multiple roles you play within an office. Multi-tasking and prioritizing are a common need.
- Learn all of the facets of the college experience by working in them including admissions, financial aid, academics, campus life, student transition issues and especially the support services available. It is also very helpful to have a counseling background to do this work.
- Its great-parents can be very enjoyable to work with.
- Need to have the appropriate resources to make is successful.
- To be flexible with your time; have a servant's heart; enjoy people; like challenges.
- Learn student development.
- It would really depend on what aspect of parent services.
- Patience and flexibility is key and remember it's all relative. Every question or concern is of importance to the person calling/emailing.
- Be warm and engaging, willing to listen to a variety of perspectives on what is helpful to parents, and then provide specific ideas for ways in which parents can be supportive of their students and of the college.
- Patience. Put yourself in their shoes, it can be very overwhelming (emotionally and financially) to send your child away to college. Encourage family members and parents to support their child, but don't always do the work for them. We see this a lot.
- Know the theory and research being done. Be collaborative! This job cannot be done alone!!!!

- Remember to always keep your constituency in mind when designing programs and services to assist them in their role as parents of college students.
- Be sure you "buy in" to the idea of parents being involved at some level in their college students' educational experience.
- Reach out to others in the field for support, resources and ideas. Attend conferences to learn more about parent services at other institutions. Get your upper administration on board with parent services at your institution.
- Love students, plan on working hard, remember you are in a serving position.
- Counseling skills are helpful (i.e. listening, empathy, etc.) If you are a younger professional (i.e. without college age children), confidence and clarity in public speaking, presentation and information will help you gain credibility with parents.
- Be up-to-speed on the trends within higher education related to parent programs and services; network with other parent program professionals; reach out to as many faculty/staff members on your campus; be creative in your approaches; understand your campus culture-what works for you at one institution may not work at another; be positive, happy, energetic, and excited about what you're doing; understand transition theories research Millennials and their parents/families; recognize that each student comes from a different family structure/recognize diversity in the term 'parent/family/guest' and use inclusive language (spouse/partner instead of husband/wife; guest instead of parent; etc)
- It may be a small field as of right now, but it is growing. Every day, universities are realizing the need to include parents as partners in their student's collegiate experience; that being said, parents need instruction on how involved to be, how to support their student as a mentor and not as a controller.
- Don't be scared, as I was, and enjoy it. Parents are great to work with and appreciate the hard work.
- You need to be able to put yourself in their shoes, allay their anxieties, and help them recover their sense of humor.
- It's wonderful. Be service minded.
- Remember that patience is a virtue. Sometimes parents may call because they are frustrated or are confused. Having someone listen to them and actually trying to help them is very important.
- Be compassionate and comfortable having difficult and sad conversations.
- Have patience.
- Be open to working with all campus constituents, including Development, Career Services, and Student Activities. It's also important to develop liaisons with major stakeholders in your community.
- Be patient and understanding.
- Research what other schools are doing and figure out how to apply it to your university.
- Can be rewarding, but generally is very challenging.
- Be a good listener. When they are angry, let them vent. Don't take statements personally. Don't be defensive. Don't automatically discount what they say because you think they are wrong.
- I believe it is rare to find a full-time job in parent services, so it would be best to consider other jobs in higher education that might be linked with parent services, such as student development, student activities, or alumni relations. Probably the best way to prepare would be to try to get a

job in one of those offices while still a student, to see if you are well-suited for this kind of work, attend a parents program conference to learn more about the job and begin networking. As far as I know, there's no degree in this- no coursework you can take to prepare.

- Be a good listener, observe, be a team player, learn from others and share what you have learned, network, be flexible and make sure to have a life outside of your job as it can be all consuming.
- Only apply if you can:
    o be calm, patient and empathetic with people in crisis
    o love people and love interacting with them
    o tolerate the ebb and flow of a cyclical workplace (not someone who thrives on daily routine)
    o be energized by interaction with college age students, rather than drained by it.
- Be consistent and be patient.
- Develop great listening skills and have incredible follow through.
- Get involved because you value the field and the role parents play in a university community.
- They must enjoy working with people, have good customer service skills, have the ability to listen and be calm as well as be organized and have good follow through.
- Remember that parents are very interested in their students' lives. They want them to be successful. VALUE parents as an important constituency on your campus. Provide valuable ways for them to be involved while allowing their students time to grow.
- Must have an interest in forming partnerships across the institution, as well as with parents. Have a mission statement, goals and firm plan of action before starting conversations with colleagues. Patience and listening are a requirement when taking parent phone calls and emails. Strive to be the central point of contact on campus, utilizing a referral system when an issue should be directed to another department.
- Know your audience, understand family dynamics, listen, listen.
- Be good at collaboration, university politics.
- Be professional, retain as much information as possible about your campus, be understanding, and have fun with them. It's important to develop excellent programs for parents and deliver them in a professional way.
- Get a feel for the demographic and region you work in.
- To have lots of patience and to have answers for many questions.
- Translate all the college terms and processes into simpler and more direct language. Include parents as partners in their student's success.
- Parents don't know what they don't know. The more information you are forthcoming with, the more they will appreciate your advice and help. You are most likely the most direct link they have with their students' institution!
- I have found that so much of what is said about parents of college students is negative. They are always over-stepping boundaries, they are helicopters, they are snow plows (pushing everything out of the way for their students). It's important to remember that parents are valuable! I believe that if we teach them how to participate appropriately, they will do so. There will always be a few that overstep, but respect them, support them, and make them feel included.
- Be prepared to listen.

- Patience. A parents' association doesn't just happen overnight. You need to get buy-in from the university first and then make sure that your orientation program is promoting it to parents from day 1. Make sure to have an updated website, handbook, etc. before starting to promote it so it appears that the family services being offered are comprehensive and worth the parents' time so they will choose to be involved.
- Be patient.
- Be ready to shrug things off and juggle many events/jobs at the same time. I consistently am working on about 10 projects and always play FAR in advance!
- It's such a narrow field in higher ed, I recommend a broad background that will allow you to move into other kinds of student support work.
- Get a Master's degree in counseling and student personnel.
- Must enjoy working with both students and parents to understand their needs.
- Since this job entails dealing with distraught parents it requires a great deal of patience and understanding.
- Come with the attitude that parental involvement is a good thing for college students. Have thick skin since not everyone else will feel that way.
- Enjoy!
- Enjoy the parents-do not look at them as problems you have to deal with. Try to view things from their perspective…Believe in your mission.
- I would recommend a person who is patient, well-spoken, a good writer/general communications, and who pays attention to the smallest detail.
- Volunteer across campus to gain experience and contacts in a variety of areas-knowledge of the campus and how it operates is critical to your success.
- It always offers a unique learning experience.
- Have a clear cut mission and a determination of the type of services you want to provide. Don't try to provide too much. Focus on things you can do well. Have a strong customer service/satisfaction orientation. Resist the efforts of some parents to make this like the PTA-this isn't the 13th grade.
- Be kind and understanding. Don't rush to judgment.
- You need to be available to parents who may be needy and manage them effectively.
- It is a very specific population that, even more than the financial investment, has sent you their most prized possession. They may be considered primary stock holders in the institution that, first and foremost, want to know that their child is safe and well served academically. They want to know their children will be able to find jobs and get into grad school. Every family is unique and so must be your approach. It is very personal work and the better you can get to know who the child is and what they are doing, the more effective you will be at bringing their parents into the fold.
- Assessment is key!
- Learn a lot about student life and advancement-you'll need the information and experience.
- Be sure that the program is supported and believed in by the highest level of the institution.
- Be ready to wear many hats.

- There has to be a desire to serve others and help others. Many of the basic questions are repetitious and require much patience. Also a deep appreciation for the diversity of students and families in every aspect.
- Be open minded and learn how to be an outstanding listener. Communication is vital in this field, both oral and written. Know how to reach out and collaborate with other offices across your campus and network like crazy!
- Try to understand the anxiety and stresses that parents are feeling.
- Know thyself! Truly get in touch with your own feelings about your own parents/family of origin…it will play out when you are working with students' families. Also, get some education in the area of counseling! And finally, know your institution and the key players around campus.
- Connect with Alumni, Development, University Relations, residence life, Athletics, NSP, know the campus, assess the needs of students and parent/family before diving in, create a marketing plan and 5 year strategic plan, get support from the university by kicking off and announcing the program, get IT support…
- Its' about the people. You have to like the parents. You have to be able to put yourself in their shoes. Parents need help to learn how to let their kids grow up and be on their own. Patience is a virtue.
- Treat parents as partners in our goal of building student success (as opposed to adversaries).
- Be patient, have passion for the parent experience, be committed to education.
- Ask what the parents want every year. It is always changing.
- Be service-oriented as well as strategic in your work. Build relationships with individuals in as many other campus departments as possible. They all prove helpful someday.
- Customer service is key.
- Start small, pick one or two components to add to your program and with higher up approval so you aren't fighting an uphill battle.
- It helps to be a college parent to really get it.
- Be prepared for a non-traditional work schedule.
- Familiarize yourself with the laws and guidelines to which the university must adhere (i.e. FERPA), while providing programming and services to parents as a bridge between families and the university, and a connection to their student.
- Manage expectations! Follow up!
- Make them partners, not persons you have to developmentally extract students from.
- Be able to relate to parents and be there for them. Sometimes they just want to talk with someone who has traveled the same road they have and understands what they are going through.
- If you are patient and have strong communication skills, go for it.
- This is just a portion of my job, but working with parents as partners rather than enemies is the best advice I can give. Be proactive.
- Know as much as you can about their children. Develop a partnership with them.
- Stay creative, enjoy parents' energy and enthusiasm.
- Know students- or be very closely connected to those who do.
- They mean well and are only doing what educators have told them to do since their child entered pre-school. Develop a thick skin.

- It's important to listen closely for "the real question" when parents call or send questions. Keep in mind that parents call because they care.
- Need to have a passion for parents and students and a willingness to help-which may include disagreeing with administration.
- Keep up with the current trends and literature related to parent services. Learn from the Universities who have well established parent offices and programs.
- Adequate funding and support, creativity, technological skills.
- Must be diplomatic, organized, a good planner and creative.
- Wonderful field, expanding and becoming more respected within institutions.
- It is helpful to be able to put yourself in the parents' shoes.
- Be prepared to not have much support from campus. We have struggled most in gaining allies who still believe parents are in the way.
- Be ready to always be learning about new student trends, transition to university issues, parent issues. Stay on top of issues and reading.
- Learn from peer organizations.
- Patience.
- Have to have patience and a passion for helping others.
- It's a wonderful feeling to know that you are helping family member get their questions answered! I thoroughly enjoy talking to family members—listening to their stories, helping to calm their fears, etc. brings joy to my day! Many times a family member simply needs someone to talk to and I am lucky enough to be that person!
- Have lots of patience, be understanding and empathetic.
- Try to put yourself in the parents' shoes, and be patient,
- Have a customer service attitude and care about people and their feelings. Work hard to inform and assure parents. Have lots of patience and don't get offended easily.
- Be prepared for those parents who can't let go; who treat you as though you work for them.
- For us, it's about building relationships. Even if we cannot help someone directly, we know people who can. When parents/families trust that you are a good resource to turn to (for themselves and their child,) and you will listen and respond, they feel better about having their child at our institution.
- Don't always jump to conclusions that a parent is a "helicopter parent." Try to hear out their concerns and address them appropriately.
- Be patient; listen carefully; be welcoming.
- Practice listening skills; understand the resources at your institution so you can properly refer parents to other offices when appropriate; be clear with parents and institutional colleagues about the expectations for your position as defined by your position description. If this is a new program, understand and be patient with the fact that you will touch many offices and that the demands of a parent program will require that they do some things in a new way. Be prepared to problem solve in a positive way.
- Embrace it and build a collaborative team across the entire campus.
- Don't try to do too much too soon. Do what you can and do it in an excellent manner.
- Be open and honest with parents. Truly be a resource for them in need.

- Have thick skin. Get to know all of the departments on campus really well. Know everything you can about your institution.
- You must have some patience, especially if you work at a big school. It is easy for parents to feel lost when trying to help their student in a new environment that may not have on easy answer (sometimes one question may actually involve several different policies or offices).
- Have good customer service and research skills. Develop relationships with staff campus-wide. Be flexible. Find meaningful contributions for volunteers. Be organized. Have a plan-think things through. Have very good oral and written communication skills.
- Be patient and calm, remember that the emails or phone calls are not personal and are trying to help their son/daughter. Try to keep the student at the forefront of the conversation, making them the responsible party for following up.
- Listen, encourage, support, redirect.
- Have patience and be able to follow through with parents/students on various subjects.
- It is a wonderful field! You must be patient and not apt to make fun of people. It is a delicate business-lots of counseling on the phone and on e-mail. Must be able to stay calm even when parents are very, very panicked and upset. I've noticed that pay is relevant to the department where parent services is located within the University. I would recommend- if you are interested in higher wages- that you find a university that houses parent services in Development or Alumni Services. They seem to make more money in those departments.
- Be patient and listen-often that's all a parent needs to become a rational partner in assisting with student success.
- Develop a thorough understanding of parents of today's college students, students and knowledge of resources provided by your institution along with institutional policies and procedures.
- Be a parent of a college student yourself (preferably at the institution you are employed at); I find this to be the best tool and resource in communication to the parent audience.
- Know your institution very, very well; you must be able to serve your parents as resource.
- Have relevant experience as a parent.
- Patience and a desire to understand the myriad of concerns assaulting today's parents.
- Keep up with the literature, engage in conversation with parents at various campus functions.
- Grow your portfolio to include experience in many different areas- the more generalist you can be the better to serve parents/families. Also, pay attention to how diverse families are becoming and that not everyone is a "parent."
- Anticipate the odd; keep smiling.
- This can be a very rewarding group to work with.
- Be ready for a wonderful, challenging job.
- Try to find a position at a college where they actually have a parent relations department, where parent relations is all you're doing.
- Develop good listening skills; patience; network within your university.