

**National Survey of  
College and University Parent Programs**  
*Survey Conducted Spring 2013*

**Marjorie Savage**  
**Parent Program Director**  
**University of Minnesota**

**Chelsea Petree**  
**Parent Program Assistant Director**  
**University of Minnesota**



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>**

# Table of Contents

- Abstract .....2
- Executive Summary .....3
- Introduction.....4
- Method .....6
- Results.....8
  - Organizational Structure.....8
  - Program Demographics .....10
  - Staffing Parent/Family Offices.....11
  - Services and Programming.....14
  - Self-Identified Best/Weakest Practices .....19
  - Program Budget.....24
  - Advice and General Comments.....25
- Discussion .....27
  - Further Research/Additional Questions .....27
- Appendix—Survey Items 2013.....29

## **Abstract**

This report, summarizing the sixth national survey by the University of Minnesota Parent Program, builds on longitudinal information about parent/family services at colleges and universities. The surveys are conducted biennially to track best practices in services and programming, changes and developments in the field, costs for providing parent/family services, and experience levels of the professionals who work with parents and families of college students.

---

## Executive Summary

Since 2003, the University of Minnesota Parent Program has conducted biennial surveys of college and university parent/family programs to track the development of parent/family relations in higher education. The past decade has seen continuing development of programs at higher education institutions and sophistication in the services provided. More than 15 percent of respondents indicated their programs had been formed between 2011 and the first three months of 2013.

In this year's survey, we see significant migration of institutional communication to technology and social media. Facebook is now a tool for nearly three-fourths of programs, and virtually all institutions responding indicated they have a website for parents. In times of crisis, parents are a critical constituency, and programs are notifying parents of emergency situations via email, texting, social media, and web page updates. Print communications are declining; the number of programs producing print newsletters dropped from slightly more than one-third to one-fourth of respondents.

As technology is growing in importance, however, parent/family professionals seem unsure of their skills in providing services through technology. When asked to identify their programs' weakest practice, the program's website, Facebook, and email newsletter comprised three of the top four listings in weakest practices.

Parent/family services are increasingly embedded into the institution, and multiple offices are providing programming for parents and family members. When respondents were asked what parent/family services are offered at their institution, and whether they are provided by the respondent's office or another department on campus, more than 90 percent indicated that other departments provided at least some parent/family services.

It has been noted in previous surveys that parent/family services are most frequently housed in a student affairs office, especially in public institutions. In private institutions, it is relatively common for parent/family services to be housed in a fundraising/advancement office. We see a trend developing for colleges and universities to turn to parents as a source of giving; at the same time, we see this area as a place where multiple offices are being developed. While 82.4 percent of respondents indicated that their institution solicits funds from parents, 35.2 percent said fundraising was done through their own office, and 47.2 percent said it was done through another office on campus.

---

## Introduction

When this survey was first conducted in 2003, the idea of parent/family services in higher education was often viewed as a controversial subject. Concerns were raised that providing communication and services for parents was detrimental to student development and autonomy; institutions were spending resources on family members that should be directed to students; and the beneficiaries of parent/family services were the privileged, to the detriment of lower socioeconomic students and their families.

At the same time, however, higher education professional conferences (NASPA, ACPA, NODA, CASE, NACADA, NACAC) were dedicating time and research to the topic of parents. Admissions offices were tweaking their publications and tours to address parents' questions and concerns, and orientation offices were scheduling parent orientation to supplement student orientation programs. Parent and Family Weekends, which had been standard events in the 1940s, '50s, and into the 1960s, were returning to campus. Despite the concerns of many in higher education, programming and messaging for parents were becoming standard.

There are still a good number of skeptics who believe the only institutional response to parents is a closed door, but much has changed in ten years. Traditional student development theory has been challenged by research into special populations, and it has become increasingly clear that normative student development is affected by a student's gender, ethnicity, social capital, and ability. Family theory has entered the picture, with recognition that what is happening in a student's family has a strong effect on the student's capacity to manage his/her daily affairs. Evidence has emerged that students can be more successful when they have the support of their family, and lack of family support can be a barrier to completing college.

During the past decade, parent/family relations has developed as a professional area in higher education. NASPA features a Parent and Family Relations Knowledge Community; NODA has a Parent and Family Network. CASE offers annual parent fundraising programs. A dedicated professional organization, Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP), was formed and provides a newsletter and a journal, and its membership now includes more than 100 colleges and universities. An independent Parent Fundraising Conference is held each summer. Moreover, Parent/Family Programs is now a functional area within the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS).

The purpose of this survey is to track the development of parent/family services over time, and the first decade of the survey has provided significant change and growth in the field. Our goals remain much the same as in 2003, as we attempt to identify:

- 
- best practices among college parent/family programs
  - emerging trends related to services and program structure
  - the influence of departmental placement within the institution on services provided
  - any discernible trends in the qualifications, experience, and pay scale of parent/family staff

---

## Method

The survey was conducted online, and staff members from college and university parent/family programs across the United States as well as Canada were invited to participate. Invitations were issued through a message sent to members of the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Programs (AHEPPP) and through a message to the Summer Parent Fundraising Conference LinkedIn account. In addition, the University of Minnesota's Parent Program student employees conducted a search of college and university websites to identify contact information for parent/family programs. In total, approximately 500 college and university parent/family programs received invitations to respond to the survey; 182 programs responded to the survey.

Responses have been compared with data from previous national surveys (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011). Several additions and alterations were made to questions this year in order to collect more accurate and useful data:

1. In previous surveys, the item, "What is your title?" was open-ended. In 2013, we identified response options: "director;" "associate director;" "assistant director;" "coordinator;" "program manager;" "dean;" "associate dean;" "assistant dean;" and "other."
2. In all survey items regarding parent services (items 10, 12, and 14; Appendix), adjustments and additions were made to the response options to reflect new services identified in previous surveys.
  - "Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking site for parents/families" was separated into three separate responses: "Facebook;" "Twitter;" and "Pinterest."
  - "Move-In Receptions/Events" was changed to "Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events."
  - "Regional programming" was deleted.
  - "Texting response to parent questions" was added.
  - "Gift/care packages, birthday cake or other deliveries for students" was added.
  - "Webinars or online chats" was added.
  - "Parent/family calendar" was added.
3. The response options for the survey item, "Does your parent program require a membership fee from parents?" were slightly changed from "yes" or "no" to: "no, all services are free;" "yes, for some services;" and "yes, for all services."
4. In previous surveys, the item, "How do you distribute information to parents/families during a campus emergency?" was open-ended. In 2013, we added the response options: "email;" "website;" "social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest);" "text messaging;" "phone calls;" and "other."

- 
5. The response options for the survey item, “Are you currently working toward or planning to obtain a higher education degree?” were slightly changed from “yes” or “no” to: “not currently pursuing a degree;” “yes, associate degree;” “yes, bachelor’s degree;” “yes, master’s degree;” “yes, doctorate or equivalent degree.”
  6. One response option (“stay in my current position”) was added to the survey item, “Please describe your career goals for the next five years.”
  7. The survey item, “What factors influence your decision to join a professional organization?” was added with the response options: “cost of membership;” “institutional support of organization;” “access to journal(s);” “access to professional conferences or other educational opportunities;” “opportunities for involvement of professional development;” “ongoing communication (e.g., e-newsletter);” “access to other professionals or listservs of professionals;” “resources available to members (survey reports, support for research, scholarships or grants);” and “other.”

The survey report does not include tabulations for statistical significance.

---

## Results

A primary goal of conducting longitudinal surveys of parent/family programs is to collect information on the changing scope and developing trends in services that colleges and universities provide to parents of their students. The major areas of focus for this survey continue to be:

- Organizational structure
- Program demographics
- Staffing of Parent/Family Program offices
- Services and programming
- Program budget
- Advice and general comments from the professionals who are working with parents and family members

### Organizational Structure

Slightly more than half (53.2 percent) of the parent/family programs that participated in the 2013 survey were located within a student affairs office. The second largest placement was in an advancement/foundation/alumni office (26.3 percent), followed by academic affairs (6.5 percent), enrollment management (5.9 percent), and university/college relations (3.8 percent; Table 1).

The survey indicates minor shifts in placement since 2011. Placement in a student affairs office has decreased by 5.1 percent, representing a steady decrease since 2009 when placement in student affairs offices peaked at 61.4 percent. On the other hand, placement in an advancement/foundation/alumni office has increased by 2.2 percent, following a steady increase since 2009 when placement in these offices dipped to 17.8 percent. These changes are likely to be—at least in part—the result of increased efforts to survey more private college and university programs and to a greater effort to collect data from fundraising professionals. Despite slight changes, these two offices have consistently been the top placements for parent/family programs since 2003.

**Table 1: Placement of Parent/Family Services: 2003-2013**

Office/Department	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
Student affairs	52.4%	52.2%	54.7%	61.4%	58.3%	53.2%
Advancement/foundation/alumni	37.8%	31.5%	31.8%	17.8%	24.1%	26.3%
Academic affairs	4.9%	2.2%	1.6%	7.3%	5.7%	6.5%
Enrollment management	n/a	3.8%	4.7%	5.4%	4.3%	5.9%
University/college relations	2.4%	5.4%	4.2%	1.5%	2.4%	3.8%
Other	2.4%	4.9%	3.0%	6.6%	5.2%	4.3%

As in previous years, placement is affected by the classification of institutions as public or private. Student affairs offices continued to be the top placement for parent/family programs at public institutions, with 71.6 percent reporting to student affairs. While this has remained steady over the years, there have been some slight shifts since 2011 at public institutions for parent/family programs reporting to academic affairs, university/college relations, and enrollment management offices (Table 2).

For private institutions, placement was divided nearly evenly between advancement/foundation/alumni offices (37.1 percent) and student affairs offices (34.8 percent). While private institutions' program placement has changed significantly from one survey to the next, comparing 2007 with 2013 shows a notable decrease in placement in an advancement or alumni office from a high of 50.5 percent in 2007 to 37.1 percent in 2013 (Table 3).

**Table 2: Placement for Public Institutions: 2007- 2013**

Office/Department	Public 2007	Public 2009	Public 2011	Public 2013
Student affairs	73.6%	71.6%	74.1%	71.6%
Advancement/foundation/alumni	15.4%	3.4%	8.1%	8.4%
Academic affairs	2.2%	8.8%	6.3%	1.1%
University/college relations	2.2%	0.7%	2.7%	8.4%
Enrollment management	5.5%	6.8%	6.3%	1.1%
Other	1.1%	5.4%	2.7%	4.2%

**Table 3: Placement by Private Institutions: 2007-2013**

Office/Department	Private 2007	Private 2009	Private 2011	Private 2013
Student affairs	34.5%	46.8%	42.1%	34.8%
Advancement/foundation/alumni	50.5%	35.1%	43.2%	37.1%
Academic affairs	0.0%	3.2%	5.3%	6.7%
University/college relations	6.9%	3.2%	1.1%	4.5%
Enrollment management	3.5%	3.2%	1.1%	5.6%
Other	4.6%	8.5%	7.4%	7.9%

## Program Demographics

Since the 1970s, there has been an increase each decade in the number of parent/family programs being established. Few institutions (2.2 percent) reported having a parent/family program prior to 1970. A large percentage were developed in the 1990s (17.8 percent) and 2000s (46.3 percent); 15.1 percent have been established in the two years between 2011 and 2013 (Table 4).

**Table 4: When Schools Started Parent/Family Services**

Year	Percent of Respondents
Before 1970	2.2%
1970-1979	6.5%
1980-1989	2.2%
1990-1999	17.8%
2000-2010	46.3%
2011-2013	15.1%

Survey results indicated a slight difference in the percentage of programs from public (52.2 percent) and private (47.9 percent) institutions. Most represented four-year institutions (62.0 percent), with 36.4 percent designated as graduate or professional institutions and only 1.6 representing two-year institutions. Respondents' institutions were also fairly evenly split in self-described size, with 33.7 percent from small schools, 33.7 percent from mid-sized schools, and 32.6 percent from large schools. Self-described small schools were more likely to be private (90.3 percent) while mid-sized and large schools were more likely to be public (59.7 percent and 89.8 percent, respectively).

The survey asked respondents to report their state or province, and we assigned them to one of the seven regions<sup>1</sup> designated by NASPA (Table 5). As in previous surveys, institutions were heavily weighted toward the eastern and middle portions of the nation, which include Regions II, III, and IV-E.

<sup>1</sup> NASPA Regions: **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.

**Table 5: Region**

Region	Percent
Region I	7.6%
Region II	14.6%
Region III	27.0%
Region IV-E	22.7%
Region IV-W	11.9%
Region V	3.8%
Region VI	12.4%

### Staffing Parent/Family Offices

We asked respondents if they were the primary contact person responsible for managing parent/family services at their institution. Most respondents (94.0 percent) indicated that they were the primary contact.

The percentage of respondents who worked full-time in parent/family services has increased to 36.3 percent in 2013; 30.3 percent worked full-time in 2011 and 22.9 percent in 2009. The number of respondents who worked half-time or less on parent/family services has been decreasing steadily in that time. In 2013, 44.5 percent of respondents worked this amount on parent/family services, compared to 53.1 percent in 2011 and 61.8 percent in 2009. The percentage of respondents working more than half-time but less than full-time on parent/family services has remained fairly consistent at 19.2 percent.

The person responsible for parent/family services was addressed by a variety of titles. The most common was director (35.8 percent) followed by associate or assistant director (20.8 percent), and coordinator (16.6 percent). Other titles included associate or assistant dean, program manager, dean, liaison, and vice president.

The level of experience greatly varied among respondents. Nearly half (47.7 percent) reported working with parent/family services for one to five years; 15.1 percent had worked with parent/family services for less than one year; 19.5 percent had worked with parent/family services for six to ten years; and 17.8 percent have worked with parent/family services for eleven or more years.

The educational level of parent/family program staff did not change dramatically since 2011 with 33.5 percent with a bachelor's degree or less and 66.5 percent with an advanced degree (Table 6).

**Table 6: Educational Background**

Highest Degree Earned	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
High school	0.0%	3.6%	1.7%	1.2%	1.4%	1.6%
Associate	0.0%	0.6%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	3.2%
Bachelor's	31.3%	37.1%	36.6%	24.0%	32.5%	28.7%
Master's	60.0%	49.1%	52.0%	59.5%	56.5%	55.3%
Doctorate or equivalent	8.8%	9.6%	8.0%	13.6%	9.6%	11.2%

The number of respondents who were currently working towards or planning to obtain a degree fell slightly in 2013 to 20.1 percent. Half of those were working on a doctorate or equivalent degree. Of those currently working towards or planning to obtain a higher degree, most were earning a degree in higher education or higher education administration, student affairs, or educational leadership.

We asked participants to describe their career goals for the next five years. Two-fifths (41.8 percent) planned to stay in their current position; 16.8 percent have no definite plans; 12.0 percent planned to move to a different position at their current institution; 9.8 percent planned to retire from their current position; 8.2 percent planned to move to a similar position at another institution; and 6.5 percent planned to move to a different position at a different institution. Additionally, 1.1 percent intended to leave higher education and 3.8 percent had “other” plans, including taking on more responsibilities within their current role or shifting roles within their current program. Slight differences in participants’ career goals since 2011 may have been due to the addition of the response option “stay in current position” in 2013.

As in 2011, respondents who were currently working towards a degree or planning to obtain a degree were more likely to expect a change of positions within the next five years (Table 7).

**Table 7: Career Goals by Degree Attainment**

	Currently working towards degree ( <i>n</i> =36)	Not working towards degree ( <i>n</i> =139)
Stay in current position	22.2%	45.3%
Different position; current institution	27.8%	8.6%
Similar position; different institution	11.1%	7.2%
Different position; different institution	5.6%	5.8%
Leave higher education	2.8%	0.7%
Retire from current position	25.0%	12.9%
No definite plans	5.6%	15.8%

In 2013, the salaries of parent/family program staff ranged from less than \$30,000 to \$100,000 or above, with nearly 75 percent earning between \$30,000 and \$69,000. Only 2.2 percent earned

less than \$30,000; 8.3 percent earned \$100,000 or more, which was an increase from 3.9 percent in 2011 (Table 8).

**Table 8: Parent/Family Program Staff Salaries**

Salary Range	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
Less than \$30,000	9.9%	5.2%	3.4%	3.4%	2.2%
\$30,000-\$39,000	21.2%	16.3%	13.6%	20.0%	15.6%
\$40,000-\$49,000	19.3%	24.4%	26.8%	23.9%	28.3%
\$50,000-\$59,000	22.4%	21.5%	17.4%	13.7%	18.9%
\$60,000-\$69,000	11.2%	12.2%	9.4%	12.7%	11.7%
\$70,000-\$79,000	5.0%	9.3%	10.2%	9.8%	8.9%
\$80,000-\$89,000	5.0%	7.6%	7.2%	7.8%	3.9%
\$90,000-\$99,000	2.5%	1.7%	3.4%	4.9%	2.2%
\$100,000 or more	3.7%	1.7%	8.5%	3.9%	8.3%

In 2013, the median income for respondents with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree was \$50,000-\$59,000. Respondents with a doctorate or equivalent degree earned more, with a median income of \$70,000-\$79,000. The median incomes for respondents with bachelor's and master's degrees have increased since 2011, while the median income of those with a doctorate or equivalent degree has decreased, breaking the trend of rising incomes for those with higher degrees (Table 9).

**Table 9: Median Salary by Educational Level**

Highest Degree Earned	2007	2009	2011	2013
Bachelor's	\$40,000-\$49,000	\$40,000-\$49,000	\$40,000-\$49,000 to \$50,000-\$59,000	\$50,000-\$59,000
Master's	\$50,000-\$59,000	\$50,000-\$59,000	\$40,000-\$49,000	\$50,000-\$59,000
Doctorate or equivalent	\$60,000-\$69,000	\$80,000-\$89,000	\$80,000-\$89,000 to \$90,000-\$99,000	\$70,000-\$79,000

In previous surveys, major differences in salaries were found based on reporting structure. In 2011, for example, respondents in advancement/foundation offices reported earning about \$20,000 more than those in student affairs offices. While it still appears that respondents in advancement/foundation offices earn slightly more in 2013, these differences are not as pronounced as in the past. The majority of respondents from student affairs (65.6 percent) reported salaries between \$30,000 and \$59,000. The majority of respondents from advancement/foundation offices (65.8 percent) reported slightly higher salaries—between \$40,000 and \$69,000.

Staff in student affairs offices had higher levels of education; significantly more respondents have a master's degree or higher if they report to a student affairs office (82.9 percent), compared to those that report to an advancement/foundation office (29.3 percent).

Of those who specified their major at the bachelor's degree level, most reported degrees in the fields of psychology, languages/liberal arts, communication, and education. At the master's level, most respondents who specified a major named a degree in education or students affairs, administration, or counseling. Finally, nearly all who specified a major at the doctorate/professional level named a degree in higher education administration.

### Services and Programming

Since 2011, there have been many notable changes in the services provided by colleges and universities. As in previous years, institutions were providing more services than in the past. Decreases were found in the number of institutions that provided print newsletters, educational workshops or classes, parent handbooks, and fundraising. Increases were found in all other services; the largest increases were in phone responses to parent questions, Facebook pages, Parents Associations, and Parent/Family Weekends (Table 10).

**Table 10: Differences in Parent/Family Services: 2011-2013**

Service Provided	2011-2013 differences
Parent/Family Weekend	+5.9%
Parent Orientation	+2.2%
Parent website	+3.8%
Print newsletter	-10.4%
Email newsletter	+5.3%
Facebook	+17.7%
Phone response to parent questions	+23.5%
Email response to parent questions	+2.3%
Parent handbook	-0.2%
Educational workshops or classes	-8.6%
Parent/Family Council	+3.7%
Parent/Family Association	+7.1%
Fundraising	-0.1%

When comparing services over the past decade, we can see notable trends over time. In Table 11, we compared the number of services provided in parent/family offices since 2003. After some dips in previous surveys, the percentages of institutions that provided Parent/Family Weekend, Parent Orientation, and a parent website have increased to the highest amount in the past decade, with more than 97 percent of institutions providing these services. Not surprisingly, the number

of institutions that have provided a print newsletter has been decreasing steadily since 2005. On the other hand, email newsletters have become increasingly common. Although, we've only included Facebook as a service in two surveys, the percentage of institutions that have a Facebook page has increased considerably from 2011 (56.6 percent) to 2013 (74.3 percent; Table 11). As technology advances, and as the generation of parents becomes more comfortable with technology, it is not surprising that electronic services for parents and families are replacing print services.

Institutional websites for parents and family members have become nearly universal during the past decade. In 2003, only 8.5 percent of survey respondents indicated their institution had a website for parents; in 2013, 99 percent said they did. Additionally, there has been a steady increase since 2009 in the number of institutions that had a link for parents on the front page of the college or university website; 75.6 percent of respondents in 2013 indicated that their institution had a front page link.

**Table 11: Parent/Family Services: 2003-2011**

Service Provided	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
Parent/Family Weekend	74.4%	96.0%	94.9%	89.8%	91.4%	97.3%
Parent Orientation	61.0%	97.0%	95.2%	97.1%	96.2%	98.4%
Parent website	8.5%	89.0%	95.8%	94.3%	95.2%	99.0%
Print newsletter	54.9%	56.0%	54.3%	41.1%	35.6%	25.2%
Email newsletter	--	65.0%	73.0%	78.2%	90.3%	95.6%
Facebook	--	--	--	--	56.6%	74.3%
Parent handbook	12.2%	75.0%	78.6%	76.1%	76.0%	75.8%
Educational workshops/classes	--	59.0%	61.2%	60.5%	55.2%	46.6%
Parent/Family Council	36.6%	60.0%	65.4%	52.5%	62.4%	66.1%
Parent/Family Association	--	--	--	57.7%	62.1%	69.2%
Fundraising	43.9%	84.0%	85.2%	74.8%	82.5%	82.4%

As in past surveys, there was evidence that more established parent/family programs have greater capacity to add services than newer programs. Table 12 demonstrates that new programs are more likely to have services that require technology, such as Pinterest, text response to parent questions, and webinars. New programs are also more likely to provide parent calendars. Programs that have been around longer, however, are more likely to provide all other services. As it is less expensive to provide online information, it is possible that newer programs provide resources such as Pinterest and webinars, rather than print materials, in order to conserve funding.

**Table 12: Services by When Parent/Family Programs Were Established**

Service Provided	1990s	2010-2013
Parent/Family Weekend	100%	92.3%
Parent Orientation	100%	96.2%
Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events	69.7%	62.5%
Parent website	100%	96.3%
Print newsletter	46.7%	14.3%
Email newsletter	93.9%	92.0%
Facebook	74.2%	70.8%
Twitter	39.3%	31.8%
Pinterest	11.5%	23.8%
Phone response to parent questions	100%	100%
Email response to parent questions	100%	100%
Text response to parent questions	22.2%	33.3%
Parent handbook	78.8%	66.7%
Educational classes or workshops	50.0%	5.6%
Parent/Family Council	71.0%	66.7%
Parent/Family Association	84.8%	58.3%
Fundraising	75.0%	84.0%
Gift/care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students	80.6%	73.9%
Webinars or online chats	27.6%	30.0%
Parent/family calendar	68.8%	75.0%

Respondents were further asked to specifically indicate which parent services were provided by their own office and which were provided by another office at their institution, which creates a clearer picture of the complexity regarding how institutions provide parent/family services (Table 13).

**Table 13: Services Provided by Your Office; Another Office**

Service Provided	By My Office	By Another Office	Not Provided
Parent/Family Weekend	74.7%	22.6%	2.7%
Parent Orientation	55.7%	42.7%	1.6%
Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events	35.2%	31.3%	33.5%
Parent website	92.0%	7.0%	1.0%
Print newsletter	20.8%	4.4%	74.8%
Email newsletter	85.2%	10.4%	4.4%
Facebook	63.1%	11.2%	25.7%
Twitter	24.4%	11.3%	64.4%
Pinterest	5.3%	7.9%	86.8%
Phone response to questions	94.6%	4.3%	1.1%
Email response to questions	95.2%	4.3%	0.5%
Text response to questions	25.8%	1.3%	72.9%
Parent handbook	58.4%	17.4%	24.2%
Educational workshops or classes	38.4%	8.2%	53.5%
Parent/Family Council (advisory)	55.6%	10.5%	33.9%
Parent/Family Association	60.5%	8.7%	30.8%
Fundraising	35.2%	47.2%	17.6%
Gift/care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students	25.9%	53.5%	20.6%
Webinars or online chats	22.4%	6.2%	71.4%
Parent/family calendar	59.9%	11.3%	28.8%

Along with the services listed above, respondents identified several additional services that were provided by their office. The most common additional services included additional communications (blogs, online portals; mailed brochures, parent guides), events (regional send-off events, commencement activities), and volunteer or mentoring opportunities.

Respondents were asked to report how often, other than in crisis situations or in response to a parent's specific question, they distributed information to parents and families, collaborated with other offices on campus, and provided information to faculty members and staff about parents and families. More than three-quarters reported that they distribute information to parents/families (76.3 percent) and collaborate with other offices (78.5 percent) once a month or more frequently. Only 30.2 percent, however, reported that they provided information to faculty

or staff monthly or more frequently (Table 14). All of these numbers have increased since 2011 by about two to seven percent, indicating that programs are communicating more frequently with parents and colleagues.

**Table 14: Frequency of Material Distribution and Collaboration**

	Daily	Weekly/ 2-3 times a month	Monthly	Every few months/ once a year	Never
Distribute information to parents/families	3.8%	24.9%	47.6%	22.7%	1.1%
Collaborate with other offices	24.9%	35.9%	17.7%	21.0%	0.6%
Provide information to faculty and staff	2.3%	14.8%	13.1%	51.8%	18.2%

When it came to distributing information to parents/families during a campus emergency, most respondents indicated using an electronic format, such as email (77.5 percent), website updates (70.7 percent), or a social networking site (Facebook or Twitter; 50.8 percent). Other respondents reported using phones for either emergency text messaging (38.2 percent) or recorded messages and calls (21.5 percent). All of these numbers have increased since 2011, but this is likely due to the shift in this question from an open-ended response to specific response options.

Respondents were asked what resources they used to guide their work with parents. As in 2011, the three top resources named by parent/family program staff in 2013 were assessments or surveys of parents/families (60.7 percent), a mission statement (58.6 percent), and input from parent board or council (48.7 percent; Table 15).

**Table 15: Methods Used to Guide Work with Parents/Families**

Guide	'Yes' responses
Assessments or survey of parents/families	60.7%
Mission statement	58.6%
Input from parent board or council	48.7%
Parent development/learning outcomes	38.2%
Student development/learning outcomes	33.5%
Vision statement	27.7%
Input from students	20.4%

---

In addition to what respondents used to guide work with parents, we asked what kinds of tracking, assessments, evaluations, or surveys were routinely conducted by the respondent. The majority (71.7 percent) named participant surveys following an event. Other methods included satisfaction surveys, measuring parent/family satisfaction with communications, events, and activities (52.4 percent); logs of email and phone questions (45.0 percent); assessments to determine how parents/families use information provided through communications, events, and activities (27.2 percent); and assessments to determine effect of parental/family involvement on student success, retention, graduation (9.9 percent).

### **Self-Identified Best/Weakest Practices**

Since 2007, the top services that respondents are most proud of have consistently been Parent Orientation (32.1 percent), Parent/Family Weekend (18.5 percent), and email newsletter (15.2 percent; Table 16). There have not been many notable changes since 2011, and the few differences were likely due to changes in response options in 2013. For example, parent/family calendar was added as an option, as it had been a service that respondents were writing in on previous surveys. This likely explains the decrease in respondents who were most proud of an “other” service.

When asked why they were most proud of a service, several indicated that service received positive feedback or a large attendance. Other responses included that the service provided valuable information to parents, there was collaboration with other university departments, it encouraged engagement with and connection to campus and students, and it offered comprehensive activities and events.

**Table 16: What Service Are You the Most Proud Of?**

Service Provided	2007	2009	2011	2013
Parent Orientation	27.4%	31.0%	28.7%	32.1%
Parent/Family Weekend	20.0%	16.3%	14.9%	18.5%
Sibling Weekends; Move-In Receptions; other events	1.1%	1.3%	1.5%	0.5 %
Parent website	6.3%	3.3%	4.5%	3.8%
Print newsletter	1.7%	1.3%	1.0%	0.0%
Email newsletter	8.6%	13.0%	13.9%	15.2%
Facebook	n/a	n/a	1.5%	1.1%
Hotline/parent questions	2.3%	2.5%	1.0%	6.0% (phone) 1.6% (email)
Parent handbook	5.1%	7.9%	5.4%	1.1%
Educational workshops	1.7%	2.1%	0.0%	0.5%
Parent/Family Council	8.0%	7.9%	7.4%	7.6%
Parent/Family Association	5.7%	3.8%	3.0%	2.2%
Fundraising	5.1%	2.1%	5.9%	2.2%
Parent/family calendar	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.3%
Other	6.3%	5.0%	5.9%	2.7%

The services that respondents chose as weakest were more dispersed among all services than the services that were chosen as the best. In 2013, respondents named parent website (18.0 percent), Parent/Family Council (11.0 percent), Parent/Family Weekend (8.7 percent), and Facebook (8.7 percent) as the weakest services. Even though parent website remained the service that was most frequently considered weakest, the percentage of respondents who chose this has decreased since 2007, perhaps indicating an awareness of the importance of online resources for parents and an increase in efforts put into these services (Table 17).

When asked why they considered a service weak, many respondents replied that the service was new and underdeveloped. Further, respondents chose a service as weak because they felt it had unclear goals or was disorganized, it was out of date or difficult to navigate, or there was not enough staff, time, or resources to make it better.

**Table 17: Which Service Do You Feel is Currently Weakest?**

Service Provided	2007	2009	2011	2013
Parent Orientation	4.7%	6.1%	6.2%	4.7%
Parent/Family Weekend	6.5%	7.0%	6.7%	8.7%
Sibling Weekends; Move-In Receptions; other events	1.8%	3.1%	5.2%	1.2%
Parent website	26.0%	24.5%	19.7%	18.0%
Print newsletter	4.7%	1.3%	1.0%	0.6%
Email newsletter	7.1%	6.1%	7.8%	7.0%
Facebook	n/a	n/a	10.9%	8.7%
Twitter	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.7%
Hotline/parent questions	2.4%	1.3%	1.0%	0.6% (phone)
Parent handbook	5.9%	3.1%	2.6%	2.9%
Educational workshops	10.7%	3.9%	8.3%	7.0%
Parent/Family Council	8.3%	5.2%	7.3%	11.0%
Parent/Family Association	6.9%	14.0%	9.3%	7.6%
Fundraising	4.1%	5.2%	2.6%	6.4%
Gift/care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.3%
Webinars or online chats	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.2%
Other	4.1%	1.7%	4.1%	6.4%

In Table 18, the best and weakest services were placed together, allowing a comparison of where parent/family programs in general saw their strengths and weaknesses.

**Table 18: Comparison of Best/Weakest Practices 2013**

Service Provided	Best	Weakest
Parent Orientation	32.1%	4.7%
Parent/Family Weekend	18.5%	8.7%
Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events	0.5%	1.2%
Parent website	3.8%	18.0%
Print newsletter	0.0%	0.6%
Email newsletter	15.2%	7.0%
Facebook	1.1%	8.7%
Twitter	0.0%	1.7%
Pinterest	0.0%	0.0%
Phone response to questions	6.0%	0.6%
Email response to questions	1.6%	0.0%
Text response to questions	0.0%	0.0%
Parent Handbook	1.1%	2.9%
Educational workshops or classes	0.5%	7.0%
Parent/Family Council (advisory)	7.6%	11.0%
Parent/Family Association	2.2%	7.6%
Fundraising	2.2%	6.4%
Gift/care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students	0.0%	2.3%
Webinars or online chats	0.5%	5.2%
Parent/family calendar	4.3%	0.0%
Other	2.7%	6.4%

There were some differences in best and weakest practices between public and private institutions. More respondents at private institutions than public institutions named events as the best practice, including Parent Orientation (34.9 percent vs. 29.2 percent) and Parent/Family Weekend (22.1 percent vs. 15.6 percent). On the other hand, more respondents at public institutions than private institutions named email newsletter (21.9 percent vs. 8.1 percent) as the best service (Table 19). In line with how many respondents chose email newsletter as the best service, more respondents at private institutions than public institutions named this as the weakest service (10.1 percent vs. 4.4 percent). More respondents at public institutions than private institutions named Facebook (11.0 percent vs. 6.3 percent) and Parent/Family Association (11.0 percent vs. 3.8 percent) as the weakest service (Table 20).

**Table 19: Best Practices 2013 for Public and Private Institutions**

Service Provided	Public	Private
Parent Orientation	29.2%	34.9%
Parent/Family Weekend	15.6%	22.1%
Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events	0.0%	1.2%
Parent website	5.2%	2.3%
Print newsletter	0.0%	0.0%
Email newsletter	21.9%	8.1%
Facebook	2.1%	0.0%
Twitter	0.0%	0.0%
Pinterest	0.0%	0.0%
Phone response to questions	4.2%	8.1%
Email response to questions	1.0%	2.3%
Text response to questions	0.0%	0.0%
Parent handbook	1.0%	0.0%
Educational workshops or classes	1.0%	0.0%
Parent/Family Council (advisory)	7.3%	8.1%
Parent/Family Association	2.1%	2.3%
Fundraising	1.0%	3.5%
Gift/care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students	0.0%	0.0%
Webinars or online chats	0.0%	1.2%
Parent/family calendar	5.2%	2.3%
Other	3.1%	2.3%

**Table 20: Weakest Practices 2013 for Public and Private Institutions**

Service Provided	Public	Private
Parent Orientation	5.5%	3.8%
Parent/Family Weekend	7.7%	10.1%
Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events	2.2%	0.0%
Parent website	16.5%	19.0%
Print newsletter	1.1%	0.0%
Email newsletter	4.4%	10.1%
Facebook	11.0%	6.3%
Twitter	2.0%	1.3%
Pinterest	0.0%	0.0%
Phone response to questions	1.1%	0.0%
Email response to questions	0.0%	0.0%
Text response to questions	0.0%	0.0%
Parent handbook	2.2%	3.8%
Educational workshops or classes	7.7%	5.1%
Parent/Family Council (advisory)	12.1%	10.1%
Parent/Family Association	11.0%	3.8%
Fundraising	6.6%	6.3%
Gift/care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students	3.3%	1.3%
Webinars or online chats	3.3%	7.6%
Parent/family calendar	0.0%	0.0%
Other	2.2%	11.4%

### Program Budget

When asked about their annual budget, excluding salary and benefits, the most common response from parent/family program professionals was that their program had no formal budget (28.2 percent). This was a decrease from 2011, when 35.0 percent of programs did not have a formal budget. The percentage of programs that had a budget of more than \$250,000 nearly tripled in 2013 to 5.9 percent (Table 21).

**Table 21: 2013 Annual Budget**

Budget	Percentage
No formal budget	28.2%
Less than \$10,000	17.6%
\$10,001-\$25,000	16.5%
\$25,000-\$50,000	6.5%
\$50,000-\$100,000	10.0%
\$100,000-\$250,000	15.3%
More than \$250,000	5.9%

Nearly three-fourths (74.3 percent) of respondents reported that their funding came from college/university allocation. Other funding sources included donations and gifts (21.5 percent), funds from events (24.6 percent), and parent/family memberships (13.6 percent).

Less than one-quarter of respondents reported that the parent/family program at their institution required a membership fee from parents; 19.3 percent required a fee for some services, while 4.5 percent required a fee for all services. This fee varied greatly by institution. Some charged a one-time fee, which ranged from \$30 to \$250, while others charged an annual fee that ranged from \$25 to \$50. Other institutions reported that most services were free, but parents were charged for certain events.

### **Advice and General Comments**

When asked why they chose the parent/family field as their profession, several said they enjoyed working with parents and saw the value of including parents in the university community. Many others responded that they did not specifically choose this position, but ended up there by chance or as a natural step from a previous position. Finally, some said that they were asked to start a parent/family program or take over the program.

When asked what professional organizations they belonged to and what conferences they have attended, nearly half (44.5 percent) of the respondents named Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP). Another 35.1 percent named National Association of Student Personnel Administrators/Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA). National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) and Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) were each named by 19.4 percent of respondents, and 9.4 percent named American College Personnel Association (ACPA).

In order to learn more about professional organization membership and conference attendance, we asked what factors influenced the decision to join an organization and attend a conference. The most important factor to join a professional organization was access to professional

---

conferences or other educational opportunities (67.0 percent), followed by opportunities for involvement or professional development (62.3 percent), cost of membership (51.3 percent), access to other professionals or listservs of professionals (50.5 percent), institutional support or organization (48.2 percent), resources available to members (43.5 percent), ongoing communication (37.2 percent), and access to a journal (19.9 percent). The most important factor to respondents when choosing to attend a conference was cost (72.3 percent), followed by details about program sessions (66.0 percent), timing of the conference (62.8 percent), location (62.3 percent), and the keynote speaker (13.6 percent). Institutional support, networking opportunities, and direct relevance were additional factors that determined conference attendance. When asked further about the timing of a conference, respondents indicated that they would be most likely to attend a conference in February (38.2 percent), November (37.7 percent), January (30.9 percent), or March (30.4 percent).

---

## Discussion

As the field of parent/family relations matures, we would expect to see consistent themes in where parent/family programs are housed within higher education institutions and what kinds of services are provided. To date, that has not happened. The split between student affairs and fundraising/advancement reporting structures continues, with programs also being assigned to enrollment management, academic affairs, and other offices. While some services are widespread (Parent Orientation, Parent/Family Weekend, parent website, and parent email newsletter), many are provided at some but not all institutions, and many are provided by offices other than the responding office.

The primary concern related to multiple offices at the same institution providing services for parents is consistency of messaging. The topic of consistency has not been addressed in these surveys.

As we have seen for a number of years, technology is taking the place of print formats in parent/family communications. This speeds up the communication cycle, but it may not be reflecting the time commitment or skill set of parent/family professionals. Among the concerns expressed by respondents is that they lack the time and the capacity to update websites or keep up with social media. While many institutions struggle to prioritize web communication, parent/family programs are working specifically with an external audience, and updated web information is inherent to successful work performance.

An ongoing concern is lack of research among program professionals. While the majority of programs are conducting some sort of assessment (61 percent), most are using either satisfaction surveys or participant surveys following an event. In order to document and justify the provision of parent/family services, research must be conducted to determine whether there is an impact on students as a result of working with parents and family members. Only 10 percent of respondents indicated that they conduct assessments to determine the effect of parental/family involvement on student success, retention, or graduation (9.9 percent).

### Further Research/Additional Questions

Future surveys could clarify and define services and programs more specifically in order to determine the usefulness of what is currently being provided. For example, while nearly all institutions have developed a website for parents of students, it is not clear whether a parent website offers comprehensive information targeted specifically to parents or whether websites are simply a directory list of campus resources with links to various pages. While we ask about parent associations and parent councils, it might be valuable to more clearly delineate between

the two. And while we ask about parent/family services and programs, with the implication that institutions are working with families of traditional-aged undergraduates, we might also look for information on programs that serve students who are themselves parents and determine if programs are also providing communication and services for the children, spouses, or partners of these student-parents.

---

## Appendix—Survey Items 2013

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? (director; associate director; assistant director; coordinator; program manager; dean; associate dean; assistant dean; other)
3. What percentage time is your position overall (not just related to parent services)? (half-time or less; more than half-time but less than three-fourths; more than three-fourths but less than full-time; full-time)
4. What percentage of your time is dedicated to parent services? (half-time or less; more than half-time but less than three-fourths; more than three-fourths but less than full-time; full-time)
5. If your position includes duties besides parent/family services, what other responsibilities do you have? (open-ended question)
6. Please describe how parent services are staffed at your institution (number of full-time, part-time, and/or student staff)? (open-ended question)
7. 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)
8. How long have you worked with parent services? (less than six months; six months to one year; one year; two years; three years; four years; five years; six to ten years; eleven to twenty years; more than twenty years)
9. Do you routinely guide your work with parents/families using (check all that apply): (a vision statement for parent/family services; a mission statement for parent/family services; student development or learning outcomes; development or learning outcomes specific to parents/families; assessments or surveys of parents and family members; input from a parent board or council; input from students; other)
10. What parent services do your office/does your institution provide for parents? (Parent Orientation; Parents/Family Weekend; Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events; website for parents/families; print newsletter; email newsletter; Facebook; Twitter; Pinterest; phone response to parent/family questions; email response to parent/family questions; text response to parent/family questions; parent/family handbook; educational workshops for parents/families; Parents/Family Council [advisory group]; Parents/Family Association; fundraising; gift/ care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students; webinars or online chats; parent/family calendar) Note: respondents indicated whether each service was offered by their office, by another office on campus, or not provided.

11. Are there any other parent services or events offered by your office? Please specify.  
(open-ended question)
12. Of the services your institution provides to parents, what service are you the most proud of? (Parent Orientation; Parents/Family Weekend; Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events; website for parents/families; print newsletter; email newsletter; Facebook; Twitter; Pinterest; phone response to parent/family questions; email response to parent/family questions; text response to parent/family questions; parent/family handbook; educational workshops for parents/families; Parents/Family Council [advisory group]; Parents/Family Association; fundraising; gift/ care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students; webinars or online chats; parent/family calendar; other)
13. Please describe why you are proud of this service. (open-ended question)
14. Of the services your institution provides to parents, what service do you feel is currently weakest? (Parent Orientation; Parents/Family Weekend; Sibling Weekends, Move-In Receptions, or other events; website for parents/families; print newsletter; email newsletter; Facebook; Twitter; Pinterest; phone response to parent/family questions; email response to parent/family questions; text response to parent/family questions; parent/family handbook; educational workshops for parents/families; Parents/Family Council [advisory group]; Parents/Family Association; fundraising; gift/ care packages; birthday cake or other deliveries for students; webinars or online chats; parent/family calendar; other)
15. Please describe why you feel this service is weak. (open-ended question)
16. Does your parent program require a membership fee from parents? (no, all services are free; yes, for some services; yes, for all services)
17. If yes, what is the fee? (open-ended question)
18. Other than crisis situations or in response to a parent's specific question, how often does your parent/family program: distribute information to parents and families; collaborate with other offices on campus; provide information to faculty members and staff about parents and families? (daily; weekly; monthly; every few months; once a year; never)
19. How do you distribute information to parents/families during a campus emergency? (email; website; social networking sites (Facebook; Twitter; Pinterest); text messaging; phone calls; other)
20. What kinds of tracking, assessments, evaluations, or surveys do you routinely conduct? (logs of email and phone questions; participant surveys following an event; satisfaction surveys, measuring parent/family satisfaction with communications, events, and activities; assessments to determine how parents/families use information provided through communications, events, and activities; assessments to determine effect of parental/family involvement on student success, retention, graduation; other)
21. 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; 2006-2010; 2011; 2012; 2013)
22. For what type of institution do you work? (public college; private college; public university; private university)
  23. What is the scope of your institution? (two-year; four-year; graduate- or professional-degree granting)
  24. How does your institution describe itself related to size? (small school; mid-sized school; large school)
  25. In what state or province are you located? (open-ended question)
  26. On the front page of your institution's website, is there a link designated for parents? (yes; no)
  27. 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)
  28. 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)
  29. What is your educational background-highest degree received? (high school; associate degree; bachelor degree; master degree; doctorate or equivalent)
  30. What was your educational major? (open-ended question; respondents were asked to indicate major at the associate, bachelor, master, and doctorate/professional levels)
  31. Are you currently working toward or planning to obtain a higher education degree? (not currently pursuing a degree; yes, associate degree; yes, bachelor's degree; yes, master's degree; yes, doctorate or equivalent degree)
  32. If yes, in what field? (open-ended question)
  33. 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)
  34. Why did you choose to work in the parent/family field? (open-ended question)
  35. Please describe your career goals in the next five years (stay in my current position; I plan to move to a different position at my current institution; I plan to move to a similar position at another institution; I plan to move to a different position at a different institution; I plan to leave higher education; I plan to retire from my position; no definite plans; other)
  36. What professional organizations do you belong to, and what conferences/workshops do you attend? (open-ended question)
  37. What factors influence your decision to join a professional organization? (cost of membership; institutional support of organization; access to journal(s); access to professional conferences or other educational opportunities; opportunities for involvement of professional development; ongoing communication (e.g., e-newsletter);

- 
- access to other professionals or listservs of professionals; resources available to members (survey reports; support for research; scholarships or grants); other)
38. What factors influence your decision to attend a conference? (check all that apply)  
(location; keynote speaker; cost; details about program sessions)
39. You indicated that the timing of a conference influences your decision to attend. What month of the year would you most likely attend a professional development conference? (January-December)
40. What conferences, resources, or information would you recommend to someone new to the field of parent/family services? (open-ended question)
41. Please include any other comments you may have. (open-ended question)
42. If you would like to receive a copy of the analysis of this survey, please send a message to [mbsavage@umn.edu](mailto:mbsavage@umn.edu) or include your address here. (open-ended question)