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Best Practices in Parent and Family Engagement: Implications for Student Success

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BEST PRACTICES IN PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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Presented to
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Western Kentucky University
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Education

By
Christy L. Spurlock

December 2017
BEST PRACTICES IN PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:
IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Date Recommended: October 17, 2017

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Dedicated to John and Sue Spurlock, and Morgan
Acknowledgments

Many individuals have played a supportive role in my doctoral journey, and I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude.

My parents, John and Sue Spurlock, have generously supported my academic career through word and deed my entire life. From my first day of kindergarten until now, they have been my most constant champions. Ever ready to help support in any way needed, I cannot imagine what my life would have been like without their unconditional love and support.

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BEST PRACTICES IN PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:
IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Christy Spurlock December 2017 216 Pages

Directed by: Barbara Burch, Sharon Hunter, Andrew McMichael, and Pamela Petty
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program Western Kentucky University

This exploratory study aims to answer questions related to highly recognized parent/family engagement programs and the ways in which they are organized, operated, and resourced; undertake innovative events and services; use and learn from assessment; and face challenges. Directors of 34 specifically selected highly recognized parent/family engagement programs were given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire concerning their programs. Twenty-seven directors completed the questionnaire. Ten were interviewed to gain further insight into the specific workings of and challenges for highly recognized parent/family programs. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative means, the researcher provides an initial exploratory look into how these specifically selected programs are implementing best practices in the field of parent and family engagement, and how those practices are contributing to student success. The findings from this study offer insight for university stakeholders into best practices in the field, as currently implemented by the highly recognized parent/family engagement programs’ participants, as well as specific implications for practice.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Parent and family engagement has been a “hot” topic in education over the past 15 years (Savage & Petree, 2015). Across American higher education, many admissions offices, development officers, and student affairs personnel have been reassessing parents as potential resources in terms of both supporting student persistence and as an untapped fundraising source.

The proper role for and the expectations of parents and families in higher education has been debated by departments within universities. Over the past decade and a half, some in higher education have been concerned with what they interpret as resources directed away from students and toward families, while at the same time others were actively tweaking their publications, tours, programs, etc., to address parents and their concerns. For some universities, the debate continues as to the extent of family involvement in higher education; however, as Savage and Petree (2015) asserted in their recent National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, “despite the concerns of many in higher education, programming and messaging for parents was becoming standard” (p. 4). While programing and messaging for parents/families may have become “standard” in higher education, there is still a great deal of disparity in the quality and inclusiveness of messaging and programming.

Background and Need for Study

Many early professionals in the field, recognizing the potential for effective parent/family engagement contributing positively to student success, began to collaborate. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, parent program professionals from a
number of colleges and universities came together around two concepts: (1) that the parent/child dynamic and needs of current college students were different than previous generations, and (2) these “new” parents were not “the enemy” and could be embraced by their universities as “partners” in student success.

Toward that end of changing the way universities interacted with parents, nine institutions met in 2007 to develop “The Denver Manifesto.” Those early universities were the “pioneers” in the field of modern effective parent/family engagement:

Nine parent and family program professionals gathered in Denver, Colorado, in the fall of 2007 to discuss among colleagues the principles behind providing services to parents and family members of college students. Over the course of a long weekend, the Manifesto was outlined as a way to define the theory and context for college-parent/family relations. As a complement to the Manifesto, a comprehensive set of best practices for parent and family services was developed, and a clear need identified for the establishment of a professional organization representing parent/family professionals. (Beaman et al., 2010, p.1)

The Denver Manifesto was a document defining the “principles and policies for working with parents of college students” (Beaman et al., 2010, p. 3). The participating universities that drafted the Manifesto believed that research was illuminating the vital impact of parents/families on both individual student success and the overall success of their institutions:

Increasingly, higher education administrators are recognizing that many parents are influential, not just as supporters of their students, but also as local, state, and national opinion leaders who discuss with friends, prospective students, donors,
voters and taxpayers the effectiveness and quality of the institution. When an institution commits to involving parents in appropriate and effective ways, it produces an outcome of parental support for student success and a group of lifelong advocates eager to promote and support its vision and mission. (Beaman et al., 2010, p. 3)

While still a young field in higher education, best practices for PFPs has quickly evolved from a more simplified list (Appendix A) to a more comprehensive set of standards. Current parent/family professionals look to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education’s (CAS) *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs* as the field’s current best practices (Appendix B). The document covers over 12 parts including mission, program, organization and leadership, human resources, ethics, law, policy and governance, diversity, equity and access, internal and external relations, financial resources, technology, facilities and equipment, and assessment (CAS, 2015). Highly recognized programs exceed the minimum requirements for each standard.

Many of the “pioneer” universities not only practice best practices today, but also were the institutions and individuals that actually worked to create and define those now accepted best practices. Those early adopters of robust PFPs, along with other current recognized innovative leaders in the field, may provide valuable expertise to other higher education leaders.

Because it has been a hot topic in higher education, and research has demonstrated the value of positive family engagement in education, most universities currently seem to offer some form of parent and family engagement. Savage and Petree
(2015), through the University of Minnesota, have been surveying parent/family professionals since 2003. After conducting their most recent survey (2015), the researchers reflected upon the rapid growth of the field:

Just as the environment of higher education has changed in recent years, the portfolio of services for parents and families is also changing. Technology has influenced the methods and frequency of parent/family communication, with more reliance on online media and a decrease in print. At the same time, in-person contact for family members has increased as parent/family orientation, parent/family weekend, and other events have become popular. (p. 26)

At the same time as parent/family programming continues to be a growing field in American higher education, the field in many respects has begun to mature. Many of these professionally highly recognized programs may offer tremendous insight for current university leaders at large. As universities are continually looking for ways to create networks and support systems to help students be successful, an exploratory study focused on highly recognized PFPs could be of benefit to leaders looking to either develop new parent programs or improve upon existing programs.

**Theoretical Framework**

Best Practice Research (BPR) combined with purposeful sampling provided the theoretical framework for this exploratory qualitative study. BPR is the “selective observation of a set of exemplars across different context in order to derive more generalizable principles and theories of management” (Overman & Boyd, 1994, p. 69). Specifically, with parent and family programs, best practices should be employed and
evaluated regularly for benefit to the families as well as to the institution (Wartman & Savage, 2008):

\[ \ldots \text{with the purpose of student development is designed to provide advice on parenting a college student relieve parents’ common fears, proactively address issues and expect preemptive phone calls and emails, promote campus events and activities and open dialogue between parents and students. The benefit of parental involvement should be two way, with some positive impact directed back to the institution in the form of parents’ goodwill, advocacy, and potential funding. (p. 80) } \]

In addition to best practice research, this study utilized purposeful sampling for the “identification and selection of information-rich cases related to a phenomenon of interest,” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 2), which for this study is the phenomenon of how these specifically selected programs are implementing best practices in the field of parent and family engagement, and how those practices are contributing to student success.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study is to systematically explore highly recognized parent family programs (PFPs) in colleges and universities to determine some of their most successful initiatives, their major challenges, anticipated future challenges for the field, their current assessments, and what they are learning from their assessments.

Surveys of PFPs at large have been conducted; however, no study has focused specifically on a selected group of PFPs. While still a relatively new field, many universities have professionally recognized PFPs. By studying these, others may be able to collaborate more effectively with parents/families as well. A systematic exploration of
several of these highly PFPs in higher education may illuminate their ability to maximize and adapt best practices in the field to their individual institutions, and to convert their parents into student success partners. Such leading programs are adding value to their universities by contributing to student success through exceptional parent/family engagement.

**Research Questions**

By exploring the ways in which highly recognized PFPs both maximize and adapt best practices in the field, other institutions may gain insight into their own PFPs.

1. What are the organizational and operational structures of highly recognized PFPs?
2. What are the most innovative events/programming/services that highly recognized PFPs offer?
3. What assessments are being used with PFP: what is being measured, what outcomes are being measured, and what is being learned?
4. What are the greatest challenges faced in meeting parent/family needs?
5. To what extent and how are highly recognized PFPs being resourced?

**The Role of Student Development Theory in Parent/Family Engagement**

Several cultural and economic forces influenced the evolving relationship between higher education institutions, the student, and the student’s family. The *in loco parentis* model of college supervision of students, impact of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and many other influencers of university/family interaction are discussed in the following chapter.
The field of both human development theory and the narrower field of student development theory played critical roles not only in how universities viewed their own students, but also shaped their institutional philosophies toward engaging (or actively choosing not to engage) their parents/families. Many researchers within the field began their works by referencing one or more developmental theories, so much so that a basic overview of some of the more influential theories may provide insight into the philosophical underpinnings of higher education’s collective attitude toward families since the 1960s.

The cultural and societal changes of the 1960s and 1970s impacted the way in which colleges supervised their students and communicated with their students’ families. It is also during this time that student development theory arose (Taub, 2008). As Taub (2008) observed:

The student affairs profession embraced student development theory as a new foundation for the profession at the same time that it embraced the new concept of the college student as adult. This progression seemed to leave little room for a role for parents when students were to be viewed as adults. (p. 15)

There have been numerous influential student development theories which contributed to how a given university’s student services departments formed their philosophy and subsequent approach to interaction with students’ parents/families. For the purposes of this study, the researcher focuses upon five: Erikson, Chickering, Schlossberg, Bowlby, and Arnett. There are numerous theories and a thorough discussion of each, or even most of them, is beyond the scope of this work. The four selected are theories that researchers within the field referenced frequently.
Development of Identity

Others who followed in the field of development theory often would reference or build upon the work of Erikson, a psychologist who had been a student of Freud (Ramkumar, 2002). Erikson believed the primary development task during the college years was the establishment of one’s identity (Taub, 2008). He proposed that this was done by each person throughout his/her life passing through distinct phases or stages, which were relatively universal (Ramkumar, 2002). Erikson’s model included eight stages of identity development from stage one--infancy, through stage eight--mature age (Erickson, 1959). As Erikson (1968) posited, “For, indeed, in the social jungle of human existence these is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity” (p. 130).

Separation-Individuation

Building upon the work of Erickson, Chickering first wrote Education and Identity in 1969 and later published a revised version with coauthor Reisser in 1993. Based up their review of research, Chickering and Reisser updated the original “seven vectors” or tasks from 1969, which were the seven tasks individuals had to accomplish or move through toward adulthood. Vectors/tasks included: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser asserted that an important development was for students to function without parental affirmation or approval, and that began with separation from parents (Wartman & Savage, 2008). It is interesting to reflect that 1993 was prior to Americans’ pervasive cell phone usage as well as wholesale internet usage. So, while parent and children could be physically
separate, the rapid changes in technological usage across America in the following years changed the very concept of \textit{separation}.

\textbf{Transition Theory}

Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory took into account the type of human change or transition (was the transition expected, unexpected, chronic); the context of the transition (the transition may involve self or self and others); and the impact of the transition on relationships and roles. Like Chickering, Schlossberg followed up her original \textit{Counseling Adults in Transition} with a 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition in 1995.

Schlossberg (1984) discussed the value of social support in all its multiple forms as a key to handling the stress that often accompanies a major life transition—such as an adolescent leaving home and attending college. In reflecting about the types of social support, Schlossberg identified them from “intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, institutions and/or communities” (p. 99). Citing various studies, Schlossberg discussed the evidence of the family unit as an important support system during transitions. According to the precepts of transition theory, parents may be an important source of support for a student transitioning to college life (Taub, 2008).

\textbf{Attachment Theory}

In higher education, attachment theory emerged during the 1990s and, as it is applicable to college students, challenged the separation individualization theory that some colleges advocated at the time (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The pioneer of attachment theory was London psychiatrist Bowlby (McLeod, 2009). Bowlby discussed attachment as one individual reaching out to or remaining physically close to someone they are convinced was better able to cope with the world (Wartman & Savage, 2008).
In reflecting upon attachment theory, Wartman and Savage (2008) posited that, according to Bowlby, it is at its height during childhood and evolves over time and the lifecycle, particularly in adolescence where more autonomy is sought; however, attachment theory is applicable throughout one’s life partially during times of extreme stress or crisis. Later researchers would build upon his work to use the model which “suggests that calling home to talk with family or discuss a concern with parents may actually be examples of healthy behavior rather than acts that are cause for concern” (Wartman & Savage, p. 25).

**Emerging Adulthood**

A popular current theory developed by Jeffrey Arnett, emerging adulthood refers to the period of the late teens through the mid-20s, or approximate ages 18-25. Arnett first proposed the term *emerging adult* in 2000, and later proposed it as a full theory in his 2004 work, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens to the Early Twenties* (Arnett, 2007). Arnett reflected upon the rapid spread and embracing of his theory across many disciplines as proof that “among scholars interested in this age period that previous ways of thinking no longer worked and there was a hunger for a new conceptualization” (p. 68). Arnett discussed the various societal changes and reasons that young people spent the period of 18-25 no longer settling into adult roles such as starting careers or having children but, instead, “trying out different experiences and gradually making their way toward enduring choices in love and work” (p. 69).

For many currently in student services in higher education, Arnett’s theory resonates with their lived experience. Today’s undergraduates are more dependent on parent financial support, as well as their parents being active participants in their college
selection, both of which may result in many students feeling as if they are between adolescence and full adulthood (Self, 2013).

Most universities may not operate from one singular theory of student psychological development, nor would it necessarily be desirable to do so. As Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated in their work, “We do not argue for any single model or grand design. On the contrary, the strength of higher education lies in its wide ranging institutional diversity” (p. xvii). Like Chickering, others advocated for a more open or expanded view of development, with some questioning the need for rigid distinctions.

Wartman and Savage (2008) reflected upon the role of developmental theories in developing effective parent/family engagement programs:

Colleges and universities are most successful in working with parents when they define, explain, and support an appropriate role for parents during the college years. That role should be based on developmental theory, but it should take into account more than traditional student development theory and research. It should also include human development theory and a broad view in looking out for all students—women, nonresidential students, students of color, and nontraditional students . . . They (parents) need to be educated about the developmental states their student will undergo during the college years. (p. 99)

Wartman and Savage (2008) questioned distinctions between categories such as child, adult, young adult, etc., and asked, “Do college students need to fit into a developmental category at all?” (p. 43). By seeing the development of student autonomy and independence as a fluid process rather than something that occurs the moment an 18-
year-old steps on campus, institutions also could change their view toward parental engagement (Wartman & Savage).

If we stop seeing college as a time when students make a sudden transition from children to adults and view this construct as a false dichotomy, perhaps we would be better able to understand the phenomenon of parental involvement. It too could be viewed more fluidly. Because even though administrators as well as parents expect their students to develop independence at some point, that attainment of autonomy is a process that takes time and usually includes not only steps forward but also back. Moreover, these students to some extent will always be children of their parents, even when they have children of their own. (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 43)

**Expanding Family**

As notions of distinctions between categorical distinctions of *child* and *adult* (or other terminology) change, so are there changes in the notion of *family*. When one reviews the commentaries by both researchers and observers within and without higher education discussing student *families* what they were referring to was *parents*—primarily biological parents—not a student’s larger family which could include step parents, grandparents, siblings, and others operating in an infinite variety of roles or support capacities.

Kiyama et al (2015) affirmed that research on parent engagement has been framed through “the lens of traditional student development theories” (p. 5) but went on to question these models and their limits in “understanding the varied ways in which *families* can be engaged and in the role that institutions must play in connecting with
students’ families” (p. 5). According to Kiyama et al. the widespread use of the terminology of *mother, father, and parent* in the research on the role of families for college student, “does not explore the diverse contributions of families of color, first-generation, or low-income families; and does not include varied ways to measure the full engagement of families” (p. 6).

Woodard and Komives (2003) challenged the “traditional” family model used by many campuses that does not take into consideration the distinct needs of a more modern, diverse, and perhaps extended family structure. For example, “Too many campuses still only allow for one data ‘field’ in the student’s official record for a parent or guardian, so the student with two primary families (including stepparents) cannot get official materials regularly mailed or emailed to both” (p. 640). This need for higher education to avoid a “cookie-cutter approach to building community with parents and families of today’s college students,” (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008, p. 392) is an acknowledgment of both varied family and support structures and “racially and ethnically diverse populations” (p. 392).

A desire to be more inclusive led many schools to change their orientation programs from *parent* to *family* orientation (Coburn & Woodward, 2001). There also is an increased sensitivity to language with family programs to acknowledge diverse family structures beyond the traditional nuclear family, and furthermore not to be automatically heteronormative (Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Kiyama et al., 2015).

**Methodology**

This exploratory study used a mixed-methods approach. There was limited quantifiable data from the questionnaire, but by and large the study was based upon
qualitative data. Qualtrics software was used with the questionnaire and its analysis.
NVivo 11 software was used with the interview question gathering, coding, and analysis.
NVivo 11 software also was used with the open-ended questionnaire responses, which were migrated from Qualtrics into NVivo.

**Population**

The population for this exploratory study began with 34 specifically selected PFPss (see Appendix C). These programs were selected as highly recognized in the field. Selected programs were either founding members of the Association of Higher Education PFP Professionals (AHEPPP), award winning programs, or recommended by a national parent family engagement expert, Marjorie Savage.

**Research Strategy**

This exploratory study began with a questionnaire designed by the researcher and distributed to the directors of the 34 specifically selected programs previously discussed. The last question asked for volunteers who were willing to be interviewed by the researcher. Twenty-one directors volunteered to be interviewed, and 11 were randomly selected. Ultimately, 10 were reached and interviewed.

**Analysis of Terms**

Terms used frequently in this exploratory study include:

*Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP)* - the premiere professional organization for parent/family engagement professionals.
Best Practices - the field considers the standards and guidelines outlined by the CAS (2015) in *CAS Professional Standards for Parent and Family Programs* to be best practices for parent/family engagement (see Appendix B).

*Parent/Family Engagement Program (PFP)* - The researcher is using this to refer to a higher education institution’s parent and family engagement efforts. It could be a program consisting of one part-time individual, or a larger program with layered staffing.

**Limitations**

This exploratory study consisted of data gathered from 27 directors of highly recognized parent/family engagement programs and is therefore limited in its scope and in its applicability. The study relied upon self-evaluation and self-reporting without a means to validate the accuracy of the information provided.

**Significance of the Study**

The information collected with this study will assist university leaders in assessing the current state of their own PFPs and resources. This study will help retention stakeholders across universities understand how highly recognized PFPs are sharing information effectively with parents and, therefore, sharing it with the students themselves. Information from this study can help to identify and correct weak areas within an institution’s parent/family program based upon examples of best practices in action by some of highly recognized PFPs.

Many on the front lines of the first-year college experience know that parents can be a great asset, rather than an intrusive force, and by being knowledgeable about the many resources the university has to offer to students (Coburn & Woodward, 2001). To
fulfill that role as mentor and to be knowledgeable concerning the “resources of the university,” those resources must be organized and presented to parents in ways as modeled by highly recognized PFPss.

Finally, perhaps one overarching goal of the study could be to sway any remaining reluctant university leaders into adopting the philosophy of parents as partners in student success. As Kiyama et al. (2015) concluded:

Engaging families offers new opportunities for supporting the needs of students who draw upon multiple forms of support throughout their educational trajectories. . . The parent and family programs that have emerged and flourished across the nation have developed a wide range of programming that better serves the needs of college students and their supporters. (p. 72)
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

It’s a lot for them to navigate, and it wouldn’t be fair to tell them to navigate it on their own, she said. It’s not called helicopter parenting. It’s called Parenting 2017 -- parent of college student, *The Atlantic*, May 18, 2017

Introduction

The literature in the field of parent/family engagement is simultaneously rich and yet in some ways sparse. As a “hot” topic in recent years within higher education, parent/family engagement has been the subject of numerous journal articles, conference sessions, monographs, etc. Over the past couple of decades, many organizations within higher education have been devoting time, energy, and research to the topic of parents (Savage & Petree, 2015). Yet in exploring the literature of the field, there still appears to be a lack of broad, large scale comprehensive research and significant gaps within the literature. This could be due to the fact that American undergraduate students and their respective families are a difficult population on which to conduct wide scale comprehensive research. Another reason for gaps could be that the field is still relatively “young.”

Still, this need and desire for more studies, as well as larger studies, has been echoed repeatedly by researchers in the field (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012; Kiyama et al., 2015; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Melendez & Melendez, 2010; Parade, Leerkes & Blankson, 2008; Savage & Petree, 2012; Savage & Petree, 2015; Self, 2013; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth & Ward-Roof, 2000). At the same time, many also championed the need for more specialized research into specific populations such as parents/families of first-generation students, and parents/families of historically underserved populations (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001; Donovan &
McKelfresh, 2008; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Melendez & Melendez, 2010; Parade et al., 2010; Savage & Petree, 2012; Turrentine et al., 2000). As Carney-Hall (2008) reflected upon the lack of research in certain areas of the field, “Unfortunately, anecdotal advice and opinions about parent relations dominate the higher education literature; research on the impact of parent involvement on college students is limited” (p. 5). This is not to say that good research on specific populations has not been done. It had, however, many researchers of such studies often warned of extrapolating their results due to uniqueness of their population, or university, or both.

Because parent and family engagement is such a relatively new field, when reviewing the literature one often notices a shift in philosophy from works written in the 1990s and early 2000s to work produced roughly from 2008 onward. In generalized broad strokes, much of the early scholarship focused on student development and often advocated for parents “letting go.” The prior dominant philosophy seemed to have been for students to simply figure out and negotiate all aspects of college (academically and socially) on their own. Later work acknowledged the increasing complexity of not just the selecting and entering college phase (selecting a school, securing financial support, etc.), but also the potential benefits of healthy family engagement as the student (hopefully) persisted to degree. Later work also acknowledged differences among family/student interaction and support regarding gender, first-generation, and historically underserved students (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Harper et al., 2012; Kiyama et al., 2015; Macias, 2014; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; New, 2014; Melendez & Melendez, 2010; Parade et al., 2008; Price, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008.)
Psychological theories regarding both student and human development play an extensive role in how universities choose to both view and interact with their students’ parents (Wartman & Savage, 2008). A sampling of some of the major development theories and how they influenced the university/student/parent dynamic was discussed in Chapter I.

Self (2013) reflected upon current literature in the field and concluded that certainly not all researchers agree as to the desirability of frequent parental communication, and some particularly lamented various versions of helicopter parenting. However, what was apparent from the literature was that parent/family engagement is a fact in modern higher education. Most scholars conducting research within the past decade appear overwhelmingly united in their belief that “parental involvement supports students’ adjustment to college” (Self, p. 8). Furthermore, they also appeared united in their assertion that parent/family engagement has become fact on college campuses. Therefore, a resulting question for many became not only how to best utilize currently engaged parents, but how to effectively engage more diverse parents/families. The focus of the research lens seemed to be changing to exploring how best to partner with parents, as well as how to engage historically underserved populations through creative and specialized programming (Strand, 2013).

With the issue of student success at the forefront of higher education today, current scholars within the field are concerned with the impact (and the ability to measure the impact) of parent/family engagement upon student success (Budny & Paul, 2003; Carney-Hall, 2008; Cutright, 2008; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Harper et al., 2012;
Kiyama et al., 2015; Savage & Petree, 2015; Scott & Daniel, 2001; Turrentine et al., 2000).

One might ask is what exactly is meant by the term *parental/family engagement*. Individuals within higher education conjure up their mental image of what the term even means based upon their individual demographics and experiences. It could simply refer to a parent who utilizes the university parent webpage for information about upcoming parents’ weekend. It could refer to a parent who calls a professor at midnight demanding to know why their student received a given grade on a paper. For the purposes of this paper, the focus remains upon healthy family engagement: parents/family members seeking resources and information to assist their student with academic, financial, residential, or other collegiate challenges.

Before exploring the rapid rise of parental and family engagement within higher education and the issues within the field, a look back to previous generations’ policies and practices regarding students’ families and the university’s past role as “parent” provides needed context. The relationship between the institution, students, and parents has evolved centered on the question, “Are college students children or adults?” (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 33).

**In Loco Parentis**

Donovan and McKelfresh (2008) reflected upon the impact of historical events and societal norms in changing the ways in which universities view and interact with parents. In the earliest days of American higher education, universities adopted the same practice as British schools of *in loco parentis*--a Latin term referring to the practice of the
school acting in place of the parents. The school assumed the role and responsibilities of surrogate parent to the student. Hoekema (1994) elaborated upon the concept:

To place a college or university *in loco parentis*, then, is to grant it the powers of a parent to supervise the life of students as well as the responsibilities of a parent for their welfare. The two complementary elements of the relationship are of equal importance, and each serves to justify and ground the other. Because the college has a special duty to ensure students' welfare, it is granted extensive permission to enact and enforce policies directing and restricting their behavior. Conversely, because the college presumes in the place of the parent to set guidelines for behavior, it also assumes the responsibility of a parent to use this power in a benevolent manner (p.24).

**Who Were the First *In Loco Parentis* Students?**

As Thelin (2011) noted, during the colonial era when American higher education assumed this role as surrogate parent, the collective college student body consisted primarily of white male sons of wealthy merchants or landowners or, if not wealthy, certainly from prosperous families. Thelin (2011) further asserted that there are no records of a woman, or an African American, receiving a degree during the colonial era. The earliest women’s colleges began in the 1840s and 1850s. Some Native Americans graduated from colonial colleges but, regardless of their degree status, they did not have access to white society (Patterson, 2015). The first known African American to receive a degree occurred in 1823; however, only approximately 40 African Americans had graduated from northern colleges prior to 1865 (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2017).
With the growth of more specialized colleges for oppressed populations (women, African Americans, and Native Americans), more individuals besides prosperous white males earned degrees. However, for the majority of America’s citizenry prior to the later 20th century, a college education was an unrealistic dream whether due to wholesale gender and racial discrimination or, if white and male, the financial inability of a family to pay for their son to matriculate. Not until the 20th century and the GI Bill, along with the college boon of the 1960s and 1970s, did America see a substantive opening of the college gates to larger portions of the American populace (Thelin, 2011).

As American society changed and more Americans attended college, so too the role of higher education changed in its relationship with its students and their families (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008). Nuss (2003) highlighted during the 19th and early 20th centuries that institutions continued to enforce the *in loco parentis* role through a variety of rules and regulations including dress codes, curfews, mandatory attendance, and others for controlling student behavior, very much in sync with the parental norms of a given era. Throughout the reign of *in loco parentis* as a guiding principle for higher education, colleges implemented a system of disciple that was “paternalistic, strict and authoritarian” (Nuss, p. 66).

**Retreat from In Loco Parentis**

Hoekema (1994) observed the retreat from the *in loco parentis* role for colleges and universities began in the 1960s and continued through the 1970s. Various court cases challenged a college’s authority to enforce behavioral standards, while an American campus culture was demanding more student independence in both their political activities and protests as well as in practical day-to-day campus life. In reflecting upon
the 1986 decision by the Indiana Court of Appeals that dealt the final death blow to the *in loco parentis* model, Hoekema (1994) asserted:

The model of the university or college as fictive parent, clearly, no longer operates in the legal context. Some of the elements of the college’s special legal status remain, all the same. The institution is still permitted a broad range of discretion in the regulation of student conduct and procedures for adjudication of disciplinary violations. But its realm of legitimate control is strictly bounded by the rights of students to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and due process. In the eyes of the law, students are adults, not minors subject to the supervision of an institutional guardian. The university has no special duty of parental care toward them, and it can expect no exemption from the law’s scrutiny if its concern for their welfare leads it to infringe their constitutional freedom. (p. 40)

As universities moved away from their previous role as surrogate and often authoritative “parent” to their students, they began to collectively adopt a view of their arriving freshmen as independent adults (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Apart from top schools that appear to always have had and continue to have an exceptional rate of affluent parent engagement (Golden, 2003), some schools seemed in a sense to cut ties as it were to a large part with the non-affluent parents of their students.

**1960s-1990s Changing Roles and Relationships**

Thelin (2003) maintained that the years of student unrest of the 1960s and early 1970s contributed to higher education experiencing “declining confidence on the part of state governments and other traditional sources of support” (p. 16). Thelin asserted the
federal government created large scale financial aid entitlement programs in an effort to increase educational opportunity. These programs, combined with loan opportunities, work study programs, and increased scholarship funding, resulted in increased access to higher education from 1972-1980. Thelin further observed, “The traditional image of the student as ‘Joe College’ was supplemented by women, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics” (p. 17).

Despite the diversification somewhat of the American collective student body, by 1990 colleges and universities in virtually every state were experiencing shortfalls in state revenue while, as Thelin (2003) attested, being expected as institutions “to do more with less” (p. 18). Thelin asserted:

Parents worried that their children might not have access to the same quality of higher education and that they enjoyed in the prosperous decades after World War II. By 1990, changing financial and demographic circumstances prompted educational leaders and critics to consider the need for a fundamental shift in attitudes toward higher education and the collegiate structure of the United States. The optimism of the early 1960s had waned. Higher education no longer necessarily aimed for unlimited diversity and choice. (p. 18)

As both parents and universities were concerned with issues of quality and access to education, universities had to learn to navigate a continuously evolving way of interacting with students’ parents and families. One early issue, and one that universities still deal with, revolves around student confidentiality and some parents’ desire for information.
Impact of FERPA

In addition to several legislative laws and policies enacted from the 1970s through the 1990s which significantly impacted and changed higher education, such as Title IX, Vocational Rehabilitation Act, and others (Thelin, 2003), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA/ Buckley Amendment) of 1974 impacted student confidentiality. Among its various provisions, FERPA allowed college students to restrict both parental and other external agencies’ ability to access their educational records (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008).

During the modern era, parents often asked colleges and universities for access to grades and other confidential information. Perhaps this should not be surprising as to ease in accessing information during their child’s elementary and secondary school years (Dunkle & Presley, 2009). For some parents, it is an eye-opening experience that once a student turns 18, or is enrolled in a postsecondary institution, the “school” no longer provided automatic access to their student’s grade, health, medical, etc. information. Dunkle and Presley (2009) observed that some parents continue to “mistakenly” believe that because they were the ones paying tuition, they are entitled to confidential information. However, if one delves into the actual language and history of FERPA, one questions whether the institutions mistakenly interpreted federal policy. The financial dependency status from which parents argued can impact potential information sharing.

Access Based Upon Dependent Status

While “paying the bill” so to speak does not grant automatic entitlement to educational records, according to the legislation a student’s dependent tax status on their parents’ tax form could grant parents access. It is on this point of dependent status that
Weeks (2001) challenged the blanket “no access” policies implemented for years by many universities and how such policies are in direct opposition to amendments to FERPA, and perhaps most interestingly to the wishes of the chief sponsor of the bill, former New York Senator Buckley. According to Weeks:

FERPA was amended immediately to provide substantial parental rights, although this process, until recently, has not been supported by many colleges. The law provides that parents may have access, if the institution chooses to provide it, to their student’s records when the student is a dependent as determined by the Internal Revenue Service—in other words, a dependent on the parent’s income tax return. (p. 45)

Many universities have had a history of denying parents access to information about their student not based upon the actual FERPA legislation itself, but upon the institution’s own philosophy or adopted policy (Weeks, 2001). This is ironic given that Senator Buckley viewed the legislation he sponsored as one which should support parental communication as opposed to thwarting or prohibiting the sharing of information. In 1974 Senator Buckley stated in the *Congressional Record*:

One concern that has been expressed about the working of existing law pertains to the transfer of all parental rights to information to the student about the latter’s attaining the age of 18 or enrolling in post-secondary education. Colleges have been reluctant to send bills or grades of their students to the students’ parents, for fear of violating the students’ rights. The amendment proposed would make it clear that the parent of a dependent student, as defined for income tax purpose,
would have a right to information about his child without the institution having to seek the students’ consent. (as cited in Weeks, 2001, p. 45)

One overall consequence of FERPA was a lower rate of communication between colleges and universities and parents than experienced in the past as colleges began viewing their students as independent, mature adults (Self, 2013). However, FERPA has been amended several times, with “almost all the FERPA amendments have been in the direction of providing more disclosure to inform the public, victims, and parents about the activities and behavior of students on American campuses” (Weeks, 2001, p. 41). For example, colleges and universities can disclose to parents of students under 21 years any violation of a law or institutional policy involving alcohol or other controlled substances (Barr, 2003).

The literature illuminates that, since FERPA’s passage, institutions have been implementing various practices, as well as scholars in the field taking diverse philosophical stands upon FERPA and sharing information with parents (Baker, 2008; Carney-Hall, 2008; Cutright, 2008; Kiyama et al., 2015; Wartman & Savage, 2008; Weeks, 2001). Wartman and Savage (2008) asserted that one reason FERPA remains a barrier between institutions and parent/family communication “is often misunderstood by not only students and their families, but the campus staff who are charged in upholding its tenets” (p. 52).

As Weeks (2001) observed, many institutions have never made parents aware of their potential access to information based upon IRS dependent status of their offspring. Some universities, however, in what seems to be a growing trend, give students the option of waiving their FERPA rights so that parents have access to student information
(Wartman & Savage, 2008). For example, the University of Arizona has a parental/guest portal and if a student grants FERPA access, family members could then have online access to grades, online tuition bill paying and other student information (Wartman & Savage, 2008). As Wartman and Savage (2008) observed, “The philosophy behind creating these tools is for parents is that they enable families to be a source resource in supporting their student’s success” (p. 55).

In addition to the University of Arizona, many institutions are offering FERPA waivers for students to allow their parents or other family members to access confidential information during orientation, registration, or the summer prior to fall term. A simple Google search of “FERPA waivers from university” resulted in numerous “hits” from American universities directing students/parents to their institution’s waiver forms. One could theorize that this type of easier online FERPA waiver parent/family access to student information may become the norm in the near future.

Since its initial passage in 1974 and throughout its amendments and court challenges, FERPA has changed significantly (Baker, 2008). The U. S. Department of Education also has issued many statements concerning FERPA and its implementation. As Baker (2008) highlighted:

Many of the latest rulings and new laws are designed to facilitate communication with parents of college students with or without the consents of the students. The tragic murders at Virginia Tech in 2007 precipitated a flurry of public statements clarifying the boundaries of FERPA as well as a nationwide exploration of the value of parent involvement in the lives of college-age children. Currently, notice to parents is neither prohibited nor mandated by law. On those campuses that
view parental notice as an educationally sound practice, FERPA provides administrators with several means to disclose education record information to parents . . . As long as state laws governing education records also permit parental notice, university administrators have considerable discretion to communicate with parents by using the federal privacy law exceptions. (pp. 81-82)

As Baker (2008) maintained, “In short, there are a number of practical ways within FERPA to ensure that semester grades and other basic record information are made available to parents” (p. 100). Also in support of not using FERPA as a de facto wall between universities and parents, Weeks (2001) asserted:

Too many colleges hide behind the Buckley Amendment to escape their responsibility to parents. Professors and others will state that they cannot provide information. That is not true, however, if the student is a dependent and the college agrees to permit such disclosure, or if the parents pursue their “right” to such information. Too few colleges take advantage of the provisions of Buckley to facilitate access to information on the parents’ son or daughter. (p.49)

**Return of In Loco Parentis?**

In describing the changes to FERPA and the allowed notification to parents of students under 21 of alcohol or drug violations, Self (2013) proclaimed, “Today, in loco parentis is returning to college campuses” (p. 3). She made that assertion based on the parental concern regarding health and safety issues. It was in fact parental pressure that forced colleges and universities to begin publishing their annual crime reports. Wartman and Savage (2008) argued that, while some believe in loco parentis has returned, in
reality it is difficult to define or provide a singular phrase to describe the exact relationship today between the university, student, and parents.

The “wall” that universities insisted FERPA provided in the recent past between student information and their family’s access to that information is rapidly evolving. The impetus for the change seemed to be multidimensional and included parental activism, the desire of some students themselves for familial access, and by some a return to the original intent of the legislation by its principal sponsor.

**Changes in Parent/Family Engagement**

Today’s college student is different from the college student of the past, and the role and influence and dynamic of his or her family in young adulthood is different as well. Overall, many parents are more engaged in their student’s entire educational experience than in previous generations. The K-12 environment in which students and parents operate prior to college actively encouraged them to be engaged (Carney-Hall, 2008).

**Transition to College**

It is unrealistic to expect parents to simply switch off that engagement as the student makes the transition to college. Furthermore, “research supports the idea that parental support and engagement can be helpful to student development. In messages to parents, it is important to recognize and honor them for this role” (Taub, 2008, p. 25). As their student transitions to college, parents have been on college tours, read the literature, and completed financial aid applications (Carney-Hall, 2008). Parents are emotionally invested in the college experience of their young adult offspring. In addition to the emotional investment, parental engagement is being further fueled with the ever-rising
cost of college and their increased financial investment. As Carney-Hall (2008) observed, “With expectations that parents contribute financially to rising college costs, it is no surprise that parent are interested consumers of education by being involved in the college experience” (p. 4).

Helicopter Parents

The term *helicopter parent* was a negative term when applied to a parent to describe what some viewed as excessive hoovering (like a helicopter) or intrusion into a student’s life. The term first appeared in *Parents & Teenagers* written by Dr. Haim Ginott in 1969. The term did not become mainstream until the 1990s when used by Cline and Fay, child development researchers (Lythcott-Haims, 2015).

Regardless of the many negative portrayals in the media of overly aggressive, overly intrusive so-called *helicopter parents*, it is important to realize that such extreme negative parents represent only a small subset of the entire parent population (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Most parents of college students are not extremists or overly intrusive in the lives of their student and genuinely want only to support their student in persisting until graduation (Cutright, 2008).

Despite the anecdotal evidence of overzealous parents circulating in higher education, Hoover (2008) challenged the stereotype of hordes of *helicopter parents* storming higher education offices. Hoover interviewed several long-time parent program professionals who, while acknowledging their existence, felt the behaviors and their frequency had been exaggerated. As one parent program professional stated, “For the most part, parents just want good information” (Hoover, 2008, para.18). It is unfortunate that for some administrators, faculty, and staff the extreme *helicopter parent* has become
a convenient if false narrative for their reluctance to engage with parents and family. The notion of the dreaded *helicopters* is so strong that some in higher education find it hard to conceive of other forms of desirable student support that many universities are providing by effectively partnering with parents.

In reflecting upon the term *helicopter parents*, Taub (2008) astutely pointed out, “the term focuses attention solely on the parents, distracting the speaker and the listener from the fact that today’s students are equal partners in the phenomenon, frequently initiating contact and calling upon their parents for assistance” (p. 16). Still others have reflected upon the socioeconomic status of a typical *helicopter parent* as being one from more educated and affluent families and “many first-generation college students have the opposite problem: parents who may as well be watching their children from a space station” (New, 2014 n.p.)

In advocating for parental support, Hamilton (2016) asserted: “Parental support of all kinds is a strong predicator of how youth fare during the young adult state—which is crucial for the subsequent class placement” (p. 200). She pronounced the “media hysteria surrounding college helicopter parents is dead wrong. Today’s youth need assistance in order to engage in and increasingly essential period of self-development” (pp. 200-201)

**Impact of Technology**

Perhaps the singular greatest driver to the change in parental engagement has been the changes in technology within the recent past. College students today communicate different and far more frequently with their parents than generations of previous college students. According to a 2016 online survey conducted by College Parents of America
(2016), 36% of parents reported daily or multiple contacts with their son or daughter (College Parents of America, 2017).

Harnessing the pervasiveness of technology can be an effective and cost-efficient way to reach parents and to enable them to familiarize themselves with resources and in turn familiarize their students. More universities are taking advantage of the technological opportunities that are available and going beyond a parent webpage or email listserv sign up and offering campus webcams, online parent surveys, and registration for parent family events (Ward-Roof, Heaton, & Coburn, 2008).

According to Scott and Daniel (2001), “Parents of today’s undergraduates do matter to higher education because of changing family dynamics and the fact that parents expect to be involved, costs continue to increase, and student issues today can sometimes be life threatening” (p. 89).

**Reasons for Increased Parent/Family Engagement**

Increased involvement by parents/families in the life of their college student has been driven by societal changes and changing parental goals. Perhaps not so substantively different from past generations, research of parental goals has reflected the desire by parents for their children to grow to full independence and to grow to thrive on their own. Perhaps what has changed is the parental confidence in either the institution’s or their student’s ability (or both) to achieve those goals.

Turrentine et al., (2000) conducted research at two public universities asking parents to identify their top three goals for their student’s college experience. They found the parental goals to be “remarkably consistent across cohorts, genders, residency status, and institutions of this type” (p. 38). These parental goals across demographics for
incoming students included “quality education, job preparation, maturity, fun, graduation, friendships, and academic success” (p. 39). It is in pursuit of these goals that more parents and families are wishing to engage with universities. Beyond the pursuit of such goals, the reasons given within the literature for increased parental engagement in their child’s college experience are varied. Increased communication based upon changes to technology, which was discussed previously, has changed both the type and frequency of parent/student communication than in previous generations. Other fundamental changes to the foundations of higher education (increased cost, depressed job market for graduates, etc.) have changed the way parents approach their student’s institution.

**Rising Cost of Education/Consumer Mindset**

One primary reason often cited is the continuously rising cost of an education. As one parent was quoted as to why she called a school after the school stalled for four weeks in arranging a critical internship interview for her daughter, “For $65,000 (in full attendance costs) you can bet your sweet ass that I’m calling that school . . . It’s my money. It’s a lot of money. We did try to let her handle it on her own, but when it didn’t work out, I called them” (McKenna, 2017, n.p.).

As public funding of higher education shrinks and parents are more partners in the financing of their child’s education than in past decades, some parents have developed a consumer mindset (Carney-Hall, 2008). As Carney-Hall (2008) asserted, “Because parents are paying more, they expect better service and higher quality programs and facilities” (p. 4).
**Job After Graduation**

Another reason propelling increased parent/family engagement is the economy and the shrinking job market. According to McKenna (2017), many parents have the real fear that their son/daughter will not be able to find a job upon graduation. Navigating through the myriad of majors and specializations that large public colleges offer can be complicated. McKenna asserted that “Mistakes, such as choosing a major that doesn’t correspond to locally available careers, can be very expensive if they lead to additional time in school” (n.p.).

The ability to successfully complete college and to find a job as a result of involved parents was a central theme of Hamilton’s 2016 book, *Parenting to a Degree: How Family Matters for College Women’s Success*. Hamilton conducted in-depth interviews with 59 mothers and fathers from varied social classes. The daughters of the parent interviewees began college in 2004 and lived on the same floor of a dorm at a large Midwestern university. Hamilton was surprised by the candor of many parents as they reflected back upon their parenting over four years of college, and she attributed that candor to the fact that she also was close to their daughters. Hamilton had lived with a team of researchers in a dorm room on their floor for a year in order to conduct research on and interview the daughters as well.

**Involved Parenting Produces Results**

Hamilton (2016) named different parenting styles she observed into five categories: professional helicopter, pink helicopter, paramedic, supportive bystander, and total bystander. The difference between the professional helicopters (focus on academics) and the pink helicopters (focus on social experiences--a “best years of your life” mindset)
was the latter’s focus resulting in more overall traditional gendered expectations. The paramedics were parents who promoted a “hybridized vision of college emphasized independence, but under relatively low-risk conditions—essentially a trial run at adulthood with a safety net” (p. 76). Both the supportive bystander and the total bystander parents were limited both by their lack of resources and their lack of familiarity with how college works.

Hamilton (2016) provided the indicators of parenting success divided by the various parenting approaches—looking at both the women’s outcomes during college and their outcomes after college, as well as the parents’ outcomes. By all traditional measures of success, the professional helicopters’ and the paramedics’ daughters did the best, with higher percentages graduating within four years and high satisfaction levels reported by the parents. The pink helicopters’ and both supportive bystanders’ and total bystanders’ daughters had reduced four-year completion rates, and many had post-graduation jobs that did not require a college degree. All three groups reported low satisfaction with the university and/or their daughters.

Hamilton (2016) advocated for universities providing the types of support systems that first-generation, less affluent students would need in order to compete with multi-generational educated more affluent families: “If the goal is to narrow the gap in education opportunity, universities need to provide disadvantaged youth with the same tailored guidance and financial support that affluent, highly educated parents provide for their offspring” (p. 197).
Parental Expectations—What is Important to Parents?

This was a challenging question, as Carney-Hall (2008) revealed: “Although much advice is given about working with parents, very little research has been done about parent expectations” (p. 8). Universities could study their parent/family expectations through the use of surveys and assessments. Use of such instruments, however, by PFPss dropped from 60% in 2013 to 42% in 2015 (Savage & Petree, 2015). Therefore, one may assume that most universities do not attempt to survey their parents in any large-scale endeavor.

One exception is the University of Minnesota, which has been surveying at least a portion of their parents since 1995. The last survey was conducted in 2012 and was distributed electronically to approximately 9,000 parents. Savage and Petree (2012) discussed the limitations of their survey and warned against any type of generalization to college parents at large. Furthermore, the population who responded did so because they had either read the *University Parent* newsletter or had signed up for the email listserv, which would seem to indicate that such parents “are likely to be the most involved and engaged in their students’ experiences” (p. 30).

Still, it is interesting to look at the results of the parents who responded, particularly regarding what is most important to them. The university received 1522 responses and, of that number, it is interesting that 80% were mothers, 18% were fathers, with remaining responses from a combination of other family members. When parents were asked about their greatest concern, results were “Health and safety (20.9 percent), career planning (15.8 percent), and finances (15.7 percent)” (Savage & Petree, 2012, p. 13). Parents reported the categories in which students had requested the most parental
assistance or advice were “finances (28 percent), career planning (19.3 percent), and living situations (13.4 percent)” (Savage & Petree, 2012 p. 13). It is not surprising perhaps that more parents (10.4 p%) were more concerned than students (2.7 %) about the issue of time management (Savage & Petree, 2012). It also is interesting to note that parental concerns may change based upon what year the student is in his/her college experience. For example, for freshmen parents the number one concern was health and safety, but for parents of seniors career planning was their number one priority.

Another category the survey explored was parental feelings regarding their satisfaction with the university and their feelings of connectedness. Attendance to parent events, such as parent orientation or the parent weekend, increased the likelihood of parents engaging more with email newsletters and discussing or relaying information from those newsletters to the son or daughter (Savage & Petree, 2012). As referenced earlier, Turrentine et al., (2000) found parents in their study of parental expectations of the college experience “quality education, job preparation, maturity, fun, graduation, friendships and academic success are the primary goals among parents of incoming students” (p. 39).

Some of those same themes were present in results of the 2011 Noel Levitz “Parent Satisfaction Inventory.” The data were from 6,200 parents from 19 institutions; of the 19 institutions, 16 were four-year private schools and three were four-year public schools. Parents ranked the following in order of importance: concern for the individual, instructional effectiveness, academic advising effectiveness, campus climate, recruitment and financial aid effectiveness, service excellence, safety and security, student centeredness, registration effectiveness, campus support services, and campus life (Noel
Levitz, 2011). After analysis, Noel Levitz determined and listed in order of importance several of the challenge areas according to parents. These were areas parents felt the institutions were not meeting their expectations:

- Security staff responded quickly in emergencies
- The instruction in my child’s major is excellent
- Academic advisors are concerned about my child’s success as an individual
- Academic advisors are knowledgeable about requirements for majors within their areas
- Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment
- Adequate financial aid is available for my child
- My child is able to register for classes he/she needs with few conflicts
- Academic advisors help my child set goals to work toward
- Parking lots are well-lighted and secure. (Noel-Levitz, 2011, p.8)

No doubt parent expectations will continue to change and evolve. Institutions should endeavor to survey and assess as many of their parent/families as possible. In addition, it would benefit institutions to be aware of any research of parental expectations involving populations similar to their own, as well as trends revealed by broader studies such as the Noel Levitz Parent Satisfaction Inventory.

**Role of Parents in Student Retention**

Traditional student development theory that emphasized independence and separation from parents has been challenged by research into underserved populations (Savage & Petree, 2015). Research has shown that precollege characteristics such as
gender, race, social capital, and academic ability impact development. In addition to student development theory, family theory has contended that the family has a strong impact on a student’s capacity to successfully negotiate both a successful transition and their persistence to degree. Research has supported “that students can be more successful when they have the support of their parents, and lack of family support can be a barrier to college completion” (Savage & Petree, 2015, p. 4).

When harnessed constructively, the influence of parents upon student persistence can be significant. The University of Pittsburg has seen a decline in the attrition rate of first-year engineering students from 30% to 17% that the first-year program director attributed in part to increasing family engagement (Budny & Paul, 2003). By including parents as well as students in the student’s first-year educational experience, University of Pittsburg theorized they were establishing “proactive, empathetic family interaction that is designed to ease transition stress and encourage first year student persistence” (Budny & Paul, 2003, p. 1).

The higher education consulting company Noel-Levitz (2011) upheld the valuable role parents could play in student retention:

Campus leaders are realizing that parents can be another advocate for the college when it comes to retention. If students seek guidance from their parents with deciding to stay or leave the college, campuses want parents to advocate staying rather than coming home. The right information from the college throughout the academic year can assist with reinforcing this message. Many campuses already form relationships with parents during the recruitment process. Now it is a matter
of extending those relationships after the student has initially enrolled and during each year they return. (p. 2)

Scott and Daniel (2001) argued, that while focusing on undergraduate parents might not seem a priority for some administrators and faculty, parents “represent either a positive or negative support system for students” (p. 88). The demographics of America’s undergraduate population are changing and, therefore, the “traditional cookie-cutter approach to programming and policy formation that caters to the majority student” (p. 88) is simply not going to be sufficient to meet retention challenges across populations. Parents and families can help with the transition to college as well as help to decrease the “likelihood of academic difficulties” (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007, p. 272).

Friedlander et al. (2007) echoed what many in the field stated: when undergraduates are stressed and turn to their parents for support, if parents are aware of the key people and key resources that universities have available to assist students with problems, they can be a positive force in the adjustment process. Parents can encourage and support them while at the same time helping their children move toward adult independence (Friedlander et al.). This duality of support and encouragement, while at the same time as working toward independence, was a vital concept repeated throughout the literature and a type of pushback against the false dichotomy of some advocating for a hands-off, sink-or-swim mentality. Sink or swim may result in lowered retention rates.

**How are Campuses Responding to Parents/Families?**

The literature conveyed that not only are certain populations of parents metaphorically at the schoolhouse door, in the past two decades they stormed the gate so
to speak. The literature spoke to effectively serving the needs of these parents/families who are more assertive and already present and seeking resources, but also the need to provide more outreach and resources to the parents/families of historically underserved populations. Such parent populations may or may not be present in their child’s higher education experience, and many such parents/families may feel marginalized or unaware of the active supportive role they could play in their student’s success. To offset “the adversarial relationship that can emerge in the absence of an effort to shape interactions,” Cutright (2008) advocated institutions adopting a philosophy of parents as partners.

Creation of Parent and Family Engagement Programs

Many universities have found that, by viewing parents as partners in the endeavor of successfully guiding their students to graduation, parents can help reinforce messages from the institution and help the student effectively connect with the institution, and perhaps for themselves to maintain a connection to the university after their students have graduated (Wartman & Savage, 2008). “Parents readily embrace their role as teachers, advocates, and information sources. Programs for parents should arm them with information to assist their children in accessing resources for success” (Carney-Hall, 2008, p. 11). Regardless whether a university has one simple parent webpage or an innovative parent app, the online resources for parents must be effectively organized with relevant information. The goal should be for the online resources to harness the ability of the parent to assist their student in locating and accessing available resources. Although students often are informed about the many resources campuses have available, they may not have retained or paid as careful attention as their parents and, therefore, the parents can act as a sort of referral agent, reminding their student of available resources (Price,
Parents/families can help students in figuring out the often overwhelming complex process of effectively transitioning to and subsequently succeeding in college (Kiyama et al., 2015).

The University of Southern California (USC) prides itself on its parents’ webpage, which can be accessed via a prominent “parents” tab from the university’s homepage (University Business, 2004). Unlike some parent webpages which feature a few generic paragraphs about Parent Weekend and very little depth, the USC page is representative of the trend of increasingly more dynamic parent webpages some universities are using that are well organized, graphically pleasing, and provide opportunity for feedback from the university to the parent concerning a direct inquiry (USC, 2017).

Many universities provide their parents either physical or online copies (or both) of resources such as parental handbooks and/or parental calendars. For example, Murray State University (Murray State), a small public college in western Kentucky with an undergraduate enrollment of 8,886 offers A Guide to Parents. The 16-page downloadable PDF begins with a message from the university president telling Murray State parents “You Matter.” The bulk of the handbook is a well-organized listing for parents of various entities (writing center, health services, counseling, etc.) with brief explanations and contact information for “Supporting Your Student.” Murray set the tone within the publication of the parent as a partner in support and retention efforts:

There are many options available for students who may be struggling with classes as they begin their college career at Murray State. The following information will
help you to determine what services are available for your student to make the
most of their college career. (Murry State, 2015, p. 8)

Murray’s Parent Guide was produced by University Parent, a private company
that produces many parent guides as well as guides specifically for parent/family
weekends, working with over 200 schools (Ohikuare, 2012). The company’s
“Downloads” webpage contains guides produced for universities of varying sizes
nationwide and offers an intriguing snapshot simply by clicking and scanning the
documents into the increasing importance of materials for families highlighting campus
resources and information (University Parent, 2017). The company, formed in 2004,
fulfilled a need first identified by its founder, Sarah Schupp, while she was an
undergraduate—the need for informative materials for parents from universities that often
lacked the funds to independently produce. Relying upon advertising revenue for the
expense of production, University Parent works with the university to produce the
content within the guides.

Despite the varied resources utilized by many colleges and universities, many
others have not provided parent/families with the most effective forms of communication
in order to assist their student in their goal of persisting to degree. This could be due to
numerous factors including lack of financial resources, available workforce, and lack of
institutional will or belief in the value of a robust family/parent program to student
success.

By capitalizing on these trends and patterns of modern parent student
communication, institutions can educate and inform the parent, who can then help to
effectively refer the students to available resources (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008). As
our society becomes more technologically dependent, universities should ensure they are in fact effectively utilizing all available online communication to share relevant information with parents/families. Parents/families can be a powerful ally for the university in reinforcing the university’s messages to students if they are aware of and understand the messages and why they are important (Frederickson & Savage, 2016). Highly recognized PFPs appear to have enjoyed success in assisting parents in becoming allies for the university, as those same programs keep evolving to meet the continuing challenges of effective engagement.

**Community Building**

Scott and Daniel (2001) asserted that parents are influential in the matriculation of their student, and they are going to be either a positive influence or a negative one. Unlike parents of the past, they do not readily cede their control to institutions. In light of this influence, it is important that parent and family programs in higher education remember they are attempting to build a community of parents. As part of that community building, parent and family programs should continuously assess what they are doing to determine the effectiveness of their offerings and to identify unmet needs (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008). Programs should conduct assessment that will provide “information to strengthen and reinforce community between the institution and students’ families” (Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008, p. 398).

While parents do seem to share many overarching goals concerning their students’ college experience, many within the field caution against universities approaching family and parent programs from a one size fits all mindset. Donovan and McKelfresh (2008) warned against parent and family programs focusing primarily upon
“white, middle and upper class, 18 to 22-year-old students with college-educated parents” (p. 390), and challenged programs to address the growing population of ethnically diverse students to be inclusive of these parents and families as well. Scott and Daniel (2001) also warned against universities approaching parents from “a traditional cookie-cutter approach to programming and policy information that caters to the majority student” (p. 88). By focusing on a broader more inclusive idea of parent population, they contended that universities would experience higher retention rates and the students themselves would be better served. The program/services/communications should reflect the demographic makeup of that institution’s parents and families. A broader concept of a university’s parent population should be reflected in communications and platforms, and should reflect the online platforms parent populations are using.

Some research has focused on the relationship of students of color with their family and the role of that relationship within their college experience. Within their study of white, black, and Hispanic women and their adjustment to college, Melendez and Melendez (2010) maintained that college officials need to consider how their practices and policies affect students and their relationships with their families. Considering the impact upon retention, they cautioned, “providing opportunities for the family of origin to be more present in the lives of students of color through expanded outreach programs may help to ease the adjustment to college for these and other at-risk student populations” (p. 432).

**Developing a Parent Plan**

Many scholars in the field have spoken of the need for consistency in parent/family messaging and interaction across the institution. Daniel et al. (2001)
emphasized the need for consistency across both campuses within an institution, as well as consistency among offices, and warned against murky guidelines with family engagement. Coburn and Woodward (2001) echoed the need for consistency in both expectations and messaging to parents across an institution. Cultures and priorities in the various departments on campus are wildly divergent when it comes to parental communication, “so administrators who interact with parents need to recognize the differences in their polices or they may unwittingly frustrate parents by raising unrealistic expectations” (p. 33)

Parents/Families Are Not a Monolith

What is the current state of parental engagement in higher education? Despite the previous discussion of parent and family engagement in general terms, the truer picture depends upon which population of parents one is considering. Early writers in the field were focused on parents of undergraduates who were behaving different than parents of prior decades. Some of that early writing when significant parent engagement was emerging as a new trend across public universities referred to “parents” as if they were a homogenous group of overzealous boundary crossers or “a problem to be monitored like a communicable disease, something which we can share funny stories and stages for containment” (Cutright, 2008, p. 40).

An important caveat when considering the subject of parent engagement as a “new” phenomenon, one was referring to it as a “new” in how middle-class parents were engaging. As McKenna (2017) reported, there is no doubt that nationally collegiate parent engagement has intensified; however, more than one parent program professional has proposed that modern parents are simply doing what “wealthy families, with long
college-going traditions, have been doing for generations: keeping an eye on their investment” (Hoover, 2008, n.p.).

What many of the early writers in the field were referring to at the time was primarily behaviors and observations of white middle and upper middle-class parents. These parents were behaving different than previous generations of parents for a variety of reasons discussed later. As noted earlier, as the field continued to grow and evolve, researchers would express the need for future studies to not consider parents as a singular group, but to look at the engagement of parents based upon educational background, race, and socioeconomic status.

**Diverse Students Diverse Parents/Families**

When discussing parental engagement, it is important to look at differences and trends in engagement regarding parents’ educational levels. Such differences include frequency of communication between parents and their students, the primary subject of those communications, and the desire for more communication from the university about their students (Reed, 2017). While campuses are increasingly becoming more diverse, this diversity is not necessarily reflected as well as it should be in the research. Kiyama et al. (2015) held, “A limitation to the data on current undergraduates, and subsequently the involvement level of their parents, is that little focus has been placed on students of color and first-generation students and their parents” (p. 49).

Scholars and practitioners in the field know that parental engagement has the potential to be impactful to many aspects of a student’s college experience, such as college choice, academic achievement, and more; however, “research on the impact of parent involvement on college students is limited” (Carney-Hall, 2008, p. 5).
Practitioners would very much like to know how student success is being influenced by varying levels and types of parental engagement (Coburn, 2006; Donovan & McKelfresh, 2008; Kiyama et al., 2015; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Practitioners are interested in both parental engagement in terms of engagement/communication between the parent and their student, and the parents’ knowledge of and subsequent promotion of university resources to their student (Price, 2008). Moreover, many practitioners are continuously seeking ways in which universities could more effectively engage more parents and families (AHEPPP, 2017).

In looking at specific populations and the impact of parental attachment and college transition, Parade et al., (2010) found in their study of female freshmen that students who reported stronger attachments to their parents also reported less social anxiety and better collegiate friendships at the end of their first semester. For minority students, the impact of strong parental attachment as helping mitigate social anxiety was even more pronounced. The researchers noted that the university used for the study was approximately 74% white, and minority students may have been experiencing more stress during the transition period of first semester than their white peers.

When considering student success, one could begin by looking at the demographics of the six-year graduation rates. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), the graduation rates of entering 2005 first-time, full-time bachelor’s degree seeking students at a four-year postsecondary institution at the six-year mark (2011) are 59% of the total number of students who began in 2005. Breaking the six-year graduation rate down by race: 62% White, 40% Black, 51% Hispanic, 70% Asian, 49% Pacific Islander, 40% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 64% two or more
races, and 63% nonresident alien. Most practitioners in the field would like to know what impact healthy parent/family engagement has upon student success to degree. And specifically, what impact does it have upon different populations? As Kiyama et al. (2015) reflected:

. . . there is a lack of understanding about the role that institutions play in engaging families. Thus, research must begin to examine specific policies and practices at organizational and institutional levels. We must begin to question what the balance between familial and institutional support looks like. . . we have discussed research that links parent and family involvement with successful college choice, transition, student development and emotional well-being; however, we know less about how retention and academic success is influenced when families are engaged. Unfortunately, we also know very little about how intentional engagement between families and institutions influences students’ retention and academic success. This is especially salient when considering the diverse forms of engagement for low-income, first-generation, and families of color. (pp. 69-70)

First-Generation Students and Parental Communication

Campus ESP sponsored a 2015-2016 exploratory study using parent surveys from 7,622 parents who had students enrolled at 11 institutions including private, public, and community colleges (Reed, 2017). Eighty-four percent of the parent responders identified as White, 6% as Hispanic or Latino, 4% as African American, 4% as bi or multi-racial, 2% as Asian, .3% as American Indian or other Alaska Native, and .3% as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. According to the survey (Reed, 2017), 68% of the
responding parents held a bachelor’s degree or higher. One pattern that emerged in the study was that, as parent’s level of education increased, their parental engagement decreased in terms of frequency of communication with their student. However, parents with bachelor’s and above had the highest levels of present engagement at the university. Other key findings from the survey included:

- Minority parents have higher levels of student engagement (frequent communication with student) and a desire for additional engagement from their students’ college;
- Parents of first-generation college students have higher levels of student engagement and a desire for additional engagement from their students’ college;
- White parents tend to be more actively engaged with their students’ college, which may be linked to higher levels of experience in the collegiate system given achieved education levels (Reed, 2017 p. 2).

As Reed (2017) asserted in her analysis of the results, first-generation students have a distinct disadvantage in that their parents are unable to provide specific information about choosing classes, selecting a major, etc., whereas non-first-generation students “receive tangible and specific aid from their parents that may further support their academic success” (p. 3).

Macias (2014) discussed the impact of not understanding how college “works” by parents of first-generation students. He contended that this may show up in the family’s limited acceptance of career paths (doctor, lawyer, etc.) and a discouragement of their student being involved on campus—instead focusing on primarily employment and
academic success. As Macias argued, “Classrooms and jobs are something everyone has done, including the parents. The benefits are clear . . . First-generation students and their families all too often do not get what we (college) do” (p. 60).

Strand (2013) cautioned universities to involve families of first-generation students but warned institutions at the same time to keep their expectations realistic:

First-generation students are more likely than their peers to live at home or to attend college near their family’s home. Parents may be accustomed to depending on their college-age son or daughter for a variety of responsibilities—contributing to family income, providing rides to work and doctors’ appointments, babysitting younger siblings, helping to care for older family members, attending family functions, or just providing emotional support and company. . . Cultural differences also may come into play, such as in cases where parents are simply uncomfortable giving their formerly protected offspring the autonomy that they need to succeed in college. While some parents are delighted to have their children be the first in the family to pursue higher education, others may be ambivalent or even unsupportive in ways that create barriers to students’ success. . . Because of these challenges, many colleges and universities include families in their first-generation student programming, make special efforts to provide information to families, and in some cases, work to make communication with families a priority throughout the students’ time in college. (p. 34)

Despite the efforts of almost every college or university selected as one of the 50 recipients of a Council of Independent Colleges/Walmart College Success Award to include programing for parents of first-generation students, Strand (2013) lamented that
most institutions “expressed some disappointment in the low response and lack of participation” (p. 36). Regardless of rates of participation in collegiate programming or services aimed at parents/families, Rhyneer (2012) warned collegiate administrators and staff against the dangers of stereotyping parental engagement:

I encourage you to challenge conventional thinking about parents and their ‘appropriate role’ in the process. Look beyond stereotypes based upon such things as race and socioeconomic status. Don’t make assumptions about how parents will behave or what kind of support they may need if they have high, middle or low SES.” (n.p.)

McCarron and Inkelas (2006), in discussing their research on parental involvement with first-generation students, were quite clear of the impact in educational attainment and advised educational practitioners:

... must better understand the role of parents and the struggle students may face in negotiating the dynamics of parental involvement. The constructive inclusion of parents in the educational process may serve to not only boost students’ aspirations but also to diminish the negative effects of college culture shock. (pp. 545-546)

**Proponents Against Parent/Family Engagement**

Depending on one’s age, a hurdle often encountered in advocating for robust parental and family engagement in higher education can be a bias as to the exclusion of parents from the college experience in the past. For individuals who matriculated in the 1960s through the early 1990s, and who negotiated their entire undergraduate experience themselves with little to no input from their parents, the need for parental engagement is
often not immediately understood. Due to generational differences, some may not initially support colleges and universities devoting resources to parent and family engagement.

While the overwhelming response by researchers in the field was the belief that parents are in higher education to stay, and that institutions should seek ways to involve and engage parents as partners in their student’s successful progress to degree, there are some administrators and others who have advocated for a return to removing parents and families from higher education. Levine and Dean (2012) held this view of involved parent as interloper as evident by the chapter title, “Parents Helicopters, Lawnmowers and Stealth Bombers,” in their work Generation on a Tightrope: A Portrait of Today’s College Student. The authors’ frequent refrain in the chapter was that today’s generation of college students is coddled and their parents are out of control. Levin and Dean provided many anecdotal stories from “student affairs officers” to provide examples of excessive and outlandish parental engagement as a broad brush to paint all parents with questions or concerns as intruders into higher education. The authors discussed reasons for the different role of parents today, while casting each cause or motivator in a negative light.

Levin and Dean (2012) blamed cell phones, email, and texting as well as the higher esteem in which students held their parents than previous generations as all contributing to overzealous parenting. The authors went on to blame an extended adolescence as well as lack of experience with failure, and finally consumerism, for what they clearly saw as a pervasive and outrageous engagement of parents. Discussing survey results reflecting an unhappiness by half of students in the ways in which their
universities treated them, Levine and Dean reflected, “To some extent students and their parents are responding to institutions of higher education the same way they would to other businesses that had not served them well” (p. 92).

After Levin and Dean (2012) provide a lengthy list of all the ways in which modern parents have not done a good job in raising their kids, and they asserted that parents need to do a better job of making children more independent; “It means not answering all of an adolescent’s questions, but directing them increasingly as they age to the resources to find the answers themselves” (p. 191). One might argue that in order to do as Levin and Dean propose, for parents to “direct them to the resources . . . ,” parents need to be effectively oriented themselves as to what those campus resources are and how to access; i.e., parent/family engagement.

In her work, How to Raise an Adult, and her popular TED talk on the same subject, former Stanford freshman dean Julie Lythcott-Haims (2015) decried the helicopter parent and their arrival on Sandford’s campus in the late 1990s. Lythcott-Haims described how parents began to make their growing presence felt both virtually and physically and how with each passing year there were more parents who “did things like seek opportunities, make decisions, and problem solve for their sons and daughters—things that college-aged students used to be able to do for themselves” (p. 4). Not only were the parents engaging with Stanford in increasing numbers, but Lythcott-Haims found from discussing with other student affairs colleagues that they were present on other colleges nationwide.

Unlike Levine and Dean, Lythcott-Haimes (2015) had a kinder and more gentle view of helicopter parenting (or “overparenting”—a term she used in lieu of “helicopter”)
as a parenting style born out of love and a desire to protect. She identified with such parents and described herself as having “helicopter” tendencies at times with her own children. As a former freshmen dean at Stanford, Lythcott-Haims (2015) discussed how she witnessed the once clear developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood become blurred. She wrote, “Each year it was harder to convince parents of college students to take a backseat and let their son or daughter be the driver of his or her own college experience. And each year more students were grateful for a parent’s involvement rather than wanting to try and handle matters on their own” (p. 302).

As a remedy, Lythcott-Haims (2015) advocated for development of more self-efficacy on the part of students. She felt that self-efficacy could be achieved by parents changing the way they raised their children, turning away from over parenting and practicing techniques throughout their childhood such as normalizing struggle, teaching practical life skills, promoting critical thinking, and preparing them for hard work.

In Letting Go A Parents’ Guide to Understanding the College Years (2003), authors Karen Coburn, an Associate Dean of Freshman Transition, and Madge Tregger, a college psychotherapist, gently cautioned parents throughout the work to listen to student complaints and concerns. They cautioned against any intervention, instead “Seek out resources on campus such as counselors or student life personnel, who deal with similar situations routinely” (p. 253). However, Coburn seemed to evolve from the staunch advocate for keeping parents away as one might assume from reading Letting Go.

**Mutual Goals**

In a 2006, article Organizing a Ground Crew for Today’s Helicopter Parents, Coburn, the same author of Letting Go, reported her dismay at the criticism she received
from a political science professor from a large Midwestern university. The professor had read an article reflecting Colburn’s pride at her institution’s three-day family orientation program. In short, the professor was appalled any college would plan and offer such a program for families of new students. In the article Coburn responded to the professor’s complaints discussing all the ways in which both students and parents are different than students and parents of the past. While she conceded that some of the examples the professor provided of unhealthy parental engagement she found familiar, Coburn still asserted:

The challenge to us in higher education is not whether to involve parents. The challenge is to figure out how to enlist these already involved parents in our mutual goal of helping students become engaged learners, competent and creative problem solves, and responsible and effective citizens—in essence, helping students grow up. (p.11)

As to the case for dedicated PFPs and parent/family personnel, Coburn (2006) discussed the vital role parents could plan in a son or daughter struggling with depression, hopelessness, or other serious concerns. If a parent could not get their child to engage with university resources, it would be wise for the parent to intervene and reach out to the university for their child: “And at times like these, a designated contact for parents can make all the difference in supporting that student’s needs in a timely manner” (p. 12).

The concept of capitalizing upon the shared mutual goals of both the university and students’ family also was advocated for by Self (2013):
Parent programming professionals should act as agents of change to encourage their campuses to embrace parent involvement on their campuses. The alternative, continuing to see involved parents as a nuisance to be avoided and mocked with terms such as *helicopter parents, lawnmower parents, or snowplow parents*, does not serve students, as it inhibits the involvement of students’ biggest source of support and guidance – their parents. (p. 8)

**Implications for the Future**

It is important to remember that viewing parents who wish to engage with their son’s or daughter’s college experience as undesirableness, who must be institutionally stiff armed away, has been a relatively brief philosophy when considered in the totality of American higher education. If one considers the founding of Harvard in 1636 as the beginning of higher education in America (Thelin, 2011), then over a 381-year period from then to now, it is only in a period of roughly 30 years (the mid-1960s through the late 1990s) that administrators and student services often operated from a philosophy of undergraduates as fully formed, mature, functioning capable adults and, therefore, their parents who attempted to engage often as interlopers. There were a variety of societal and legal changes discussed that prompted this change, just as there have been a number of factors which have swung the institutional norm to engaging with parents and families of undergraduates.

As Wartman and Savage (2008) affirmed, colleges offering services and programs directed to parents is not a new phenomenon. In the early 20th century, many colleges and universities offered a variety of collaborative programs and services for parents such as gender specific groups like mothers’ associations and dads’ associations or groups. Such
groups raised money for various student organizations and activities, engaged in campus beautification projects, fed students, and more. According to Wartman and Savage, “Little evidence has emerged that parent relations were considered problematic in these early years” (p. 76).

Companionable relationships with students’ families and their university began to deteriorate in the late 1960s and 1970s (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Wartman and Savage (2008) highlighted the fact that during this turbulent period, many institutions questioned their parent outreach and services: “Some schools abandoned events for parents during the Vietnam War years, only to initiate or reintroduce programming for parents again in the 1980s and 1990s” (p. 77). While many institutions turned their backs on parents/families so to speak during this period, in 1972 Syracuse University developed one of the first dedicated parent offices in response to the tumultuous time of student protests (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Syracuse established their parent office as federal funding for students was being cut, therefore making parents responsible for more of the cost of college, “made it clear that parents were a new emerging customer in higher education” (p. 77). While Syracuse University and their early creation of an office dedicated to parents was decades ahead of its time, other institutions would follow.

In the 2015 National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, when asked when their institution began parent/family services, 2.3% responded before 1970, 7.4% between 1970-79, 5.7% between 1980-89, 12.5% between 1990-99, 29.6% between 2000-2009, and 23.3% between 2010-15 (Savage & Petree, 2015). In addition to early adopters such as Syracuse, others saw the need for parent engagement early. In 1985 associate dean of students at Leigh University, Robert Cohen, wrote an article, From In
Loco Parentis to Auxilio Parentum. Cohen too was decades ahead of the parent/family engagement curve when he asserted that, while parents were not “part of our client population,” the university still needed to engage effectively with them: “I take it as axiomatic that we ought to be helpfully responsive to parents” (p. 3).

Despite research to the contrary, some in higher education continue to believe “the only appropriate institutional response to parents is a closed door” (Savage & Petree, 2015, p. 4). Others, however, have been persuaded otherwise due to new development theories, and the growing evidence provided by research that students are more likely to complete college if they have family support. In Let’s Drop Helicopter Parents from Our Vocabulary, White (2013) observed that academics often wanted it both ways: “First we ask parents to help get their children to our institutions and then we ask those parents to stay away” (n.p.). White emphasized:

Not only is this approach illogical, but it’s also unsupported by research and ignorant of cultural differences . . . For many first-generation college students, parents and family members are an integral part of the college experience, whether celebrating her successes or assisting with family responsibilities. (n.p)

Savage and Petree (2015) first conducted a survey of parent/family professionals in 2003. At the time, many in student affairs were concerned that in working with parents, student development and autonomy could perhaps be undermined. There also was the concern over limited campus resources being siphoned away from undergraduate programs and being reallocated to parent/family support programs. As Savage and Petree asserted, “Despite the concerns of many in higher education, programming and messaging for parents was becoming standard” (p. 4). Perhaps as Henning suggested, this
new era of university relationship with students and their families could be described best as *In Consortio Cum Parentibus*, or in partnership with parents and families (as cited in Kiyama et al., 2015)

**Best Practices in Parent/Family Programming**

Leading PFPs are doing a great many things, all considered parent/family engagement. PFPs are providing information to parents/families in a variety of ways, including dedicated parent/family websites; printed or electronic newsletters; email listservs; parent calendars; social media sites dedicated to parents; apps; text alerts; parent only portals with access to billing, grades, etc.; available staff to respond to calls and inquires; and more (Kiyama et al., 2015). In addition to this variety of forms of communications, universities are offering a variety of orientation options and programs for families. Such programs not only cover the sort of standard topics such as financial aid, housing, meal plans, etc., but can help establish expectations, make parents aware of campus resources, and much more. Some programs are taking the opportunity of parent/family orientation to “encourage parents/family members to have honest conversations with their students regarding consumption of alcohol and drugs, and issues of consent and sexual assault” (Kiyama et al., p. 56).

Beyond parent/family orientation, universities also host a variety of events such as parent/family pre-admission campus tours, special weekends, siblings’ weekends, etc. as well as offer parent/family associations with opportunities for the parents to volunteer for or advocate on behalf of the university (Kiyama et al., 2015). The 34 highly recognized parent family programs originally invited to participate in the study engage with parents/families in meaningful and helpful ways in the ways described previously. By
exploring the ways in which the 27 program directors implemented best practices (see Appendix B) in the field for their students’ families, hopefully insight was gained into ways in which they are contributing to student success.

The field views the *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs* (2015) as their current list of best practices. The standards are divided into 12 parts, including mission, programs, organization and leadership, human resources, ethics, law, policy and governance, diversity, equity and access, internal and external relations, financial resources, technology, facilities and equipment, and assessment.

This study focuses on best practices in the five broad categories (reflective of the five research questions):

- Research Question One regarding organizational and operational structures was in line with three *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs*: mission, organization and leadership, and human resources.

- Research Question Two concerning events, programming, and services corresponded with three *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs*: mission, program, diversity, equity, and access.

- Research Question Three exploring assessment was in direct alignment with one *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs*: assessment.

- Research Question Four revealing challenges was consistent with six *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs*: mission,
human resources, diversity, equity and access, internal and external relations, financial resources, technology and assessment.

- Research Question Five regarding resourcing was in keeping with three CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs: human resources, internal and external relations, financial resources.
CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

From an initial analysis of the literature, as well as the conference proceedings and resources of the AHEPPP, the highly recognized PFPs appear to be leading the field in key areas. The purpose of studying leading PFPs’ most innovative initiatives, responses to challenges, and current assessments, is for others to gain valuable insight into maximizing their own PFPs’ role in student success. Five research questions formed the foundation for this study of recognized PFPs and how they are currently serving their given population of parents/families:

1. What are the organizational and operational structures of highly recognized PFPs?
2. What are the most innovative events/programming/services that highly recognized PFPs offer?
3. What assessments are being used with PFP: what is being measured, what outcomes are being measured, and what is being learned?
4. What are the greatest challenges faced in meeting parent/family needs?
5. To what extent and how are highly recognized PFPs being resourced?

Research Methodology

This study technically employed a mixed-methods approach in that there were a few quantitative questions included in the questionnaire, but it was primarily a qualitative study. The researcher selected a qualitative as opposed to a quantitative approach due to the research questions underpinning the study. A qualitative exploratory approach to this topic, with its inherent characteristics of open-endedness and organic-ness, has hopefully
produced “in-depth, rich and detailed data from which to make its claims” (Braun & Clarke, 2014, p. 21).

Creswell (2009) described five of the more pervasive ways researchers conduct qualitative studies, including ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research, and narrative research. With this exploratory study, the selected participants were providing information about the phenomenon of effective and evolving parent/family engagement in higher education. A definition of effective parent/family engagement may be gleaned from the CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs (2015) and would describe a program that built “collaboration between parents and families and the institution for the common goals of student learning, development, and success” (p. 377). Operating with that definition of parent/family engagement, the phenomenon (collaboration between parents/families and the institution) was being analyzed by this exploratory study. In short, how are these selected programs doing it? How are they assessing it? And what are they learning?

**Research Design**

The four purposes of research include exploration, explanation, description and predication (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This study utilized both exploratory and descriptive techniques and design to reveal how selected PFPs were implementing best practices within the field and the resulting implications for student success. Babbie (1983) distinguished between exploration and description as: “Exploration is the attempt to develop an initial, rough understanding of some phenomenon. Description is the precise measurement and reporting of the characteristics of some population or phenomenon under study” (p. 98). In keeping with exploratory research, this study
concerned itself with a persistent phenomenon (Babbie, 1983). In this case, the phenomenon was exceptional parent/family engagement programs and what and how they are doing what they are doing.

Both the questionnaire and the interview questions are in keeping with descriptive research methodology and design. As Knupfer and McLellan (1996) emphasized, “descriptive research does not fit neatly into the definition of either quantitative or qualitative research methodologies, but instead it can utilize elements of both, often within the same study” (p. 1196). Description often emerges following exploration, and particularly regarding educators, such research fulfills their wish “to know how others are implementing the new multimediated technologies, the national information infrastructure, and so on, and are very happy to hear reports that describe what others are doing, as well as what happens as a result of the process” (Knupfer & McLellan, 1996, p. 1210).

**Participants**

The 34 highly recognized PFPs for this study were identified primarily by their role in AHEPP (see Appendix C). The first group selected consisted of nine universities that were founding members of AHEPPP and helped to establish many of the best practices in the field. The next group selected consisted of three universities with board of AHEPPPP directors’ emerita who also lead dynamic programs. Additionally, the researcher selected 15 schools based upon 2014-2016 AHEPP awards in a variety of professional PFP categories. Finally, the author vetted the list with Marjorie Savage, AHEPPPP founding board member, CAS board member, lead author of the multi-year
National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, and recognized expert on parent/family engagement in American higher education.

Based upon her expertise and active involvement in AHEPPP as both a founder and as a current editor for the AHEPPP Journal, Savage suggested the inclusion of seven more AHEPPP member institutions with exceptional programs. While no national body “ranks” PFPs, the researcher is confident that the 34 schools initially approached for this study represent an adequate purposeful sample of most recognized programs in the field. These 34 programs are noted for their leadership and/or excellence by their leading professional organization, AHEPPP.

According to Palinkas et al. (2015), “it should be kept in mind that all sampling procedures, whether purposeful or probability, are designed to capture elements of both similarity and differences, of both centrality and dispersion, because both elements are essential to the task of generating new knowledge through the processes of comparison and contrast” (p. 542). This approach for exploratory study seemed logical for the purpose of examining how best practices are being implemented by many of the most recognized programs. Nationally, PFP professionals collectively have been surveyed biennially beginning in 2003. The purpose of that longitudinal exploration has been to track the development of PFPs across higher education, while addressing new concerns in the field. With the most recent survey conducted in 2015, 223 institutions responded to the online questionnaire (Savage & Petree, 2015). This current study targeting 34 specific colleges and universities will add to the literature by focusing solely upon the activities, practices, and organization of highly recognized programs in the field.
The researcher elected the approach for purposeful sampling of these specific 34 schools in an effort to provide information-rich cases (Palinkas et al., 2015) related to the phenomenon under consideration, namely a systemic exploration of the most recognized parent family programs in higher education. As stated earlier, schools were selected based upon their role in the leading professional organization in the field, AHEPPP. The added input in the selection process from Marjorie Savage of additional AHEPPP institutions is in keeping with the principles of purposeful sampling in an effort to identify information-rich cases.

**Instrumentation**

This study involved two distinct phases. The first phase consisted of an electronic questionnaire with individualized links sent to each of the 34 parent program directors. The second phase consisted of phone interviews conducted with 10 of the survey respondents.

**Questionnaire**

A questionnaire specifically designed for PFP directors entitled *Best Practices in Family Programs* was developed by the researcher (see Appendix D). The questionnaire underwent extensive revision from its initial form based upon vetting and piloting by multiple individuals, including professors well versed in survey development and implementation, and university staff members employed in a variety of campus fields who interact with parents/families. The survey also was vetted by perhaps the foremost expert in parent/family programming in American higher education. The purpose of this small pilot was to assure the intent of the questionnaire items. In addition to standard Likert scale items, six open-ended questions solicited directors’ reflections upon present assessment, barriers to parent/family engagement, and more. The survey consisted of 28
questions asking directors about: background information about their PFP, reporting, resources, beliefs concerning funding and support, events and services offered, faculty and staff education concerning parents/families, communication, parent councils/advisory boards, serving underserved populations, barriers to parent/family engagement, use of assessments, greatest accomplishments, greatest challenges, and opportunity to share personal experiences.

**Interview**

The last question on the questionnaire was a solicitation for willing parent/family program directors to participate in follow-up interviews with the researcher. Twenty-one respondents indicated their willingness to be interviewed and provided additional contact information.

Eleven directors from the 21 were selected randomly. Ultimately, 10 were reached and interviewed. Selected participants were emailed both the interview consent forms and the eight interview questions prior to the interviews (see Appendices E & F). Due to distance between the researcher and the participants, the researcher conducted phone interviews rather than face-to-face interviews. The consent documentation discussed the use of audio equipment, and the email sent to potential interviewees stated that interviews would be recorded. The researcher asked prior to the beginning of each interview for permission to record. In addition to the audio recording, the interviewer filled out a standardized interview worksheet for each subject, taking notes for each question while she was recording the interview. The average time for the recorded phone interviews was 30 minutes.
Data Collection

Utilizing Qualtrics software, an individualized survey link was emailed to each the 34 parent family program directors at the 34 selected institutions. The individualized link was contained within a cover letter (emailed) describing the study (see Appendix F), as well as Institutional Review Board consent documentation (see Appendix F). The initial materials were first emailed to the 34 selected individuals June 14, 2017. Reminder emails encouraging directors to complete the questionnaire were sent on June 26, 2017, and July 11, 2017. Paper copies of the questionnaire along with self-addressed return envelopes were mailed to non-respondents on July 6, 2017. Twenty-six of the 34 PFP directors completed the survey online, and one director submitted a completed paper copy of the questionnaire, for a total of 27 completed questionnaires out of 34 potential respondents.

As stated earlier, 11 individuals out of the 21 who had indicated their willingness to be interviewed via the questionnaire were randomly selected for interviews. Ultimately 10 interviews were conducted, with contact failing to be made with one director. The researcher conducted phone interviews utilizing an Olympus VN-721 PC digital voice recorder and an Olympus TP8 telephone pickup microphone from August 8, 2017, through August 18, 2017.

Data Analysis

Due to the small number of the sample of directors of highly recognized programs, with the questionnaire the researcher focused primarily upon simple percentages, commonality, and patterns to explore how these programs are contributing to student success. After the collection of questionnaires within Qualtrics software, the
researcher ran analytics to reveal percentages and patterns within the responses. The responses for the six-open ended questions from the questionnaire also were migrated from Qualtrics into NVivo 11 software for organization and coding. With the audio recorded interviews, interviews were transcribed. The transcriptions were imported into NVivo11 software and organized, grouped, and coded. The researcher focused on trends, commonality, and patterns within the responses. Both the questionnaire and the follow-up interview questions were developed to gain a deeper understanding of the work of interviewees’ programs and to support the study’s research questions (Table 1).

Table 1

_Relationship between Research Questions, Questionnaire Items, Interview Questions, and CAS Standards Parts_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>CAS Standards Parts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,3,4,5, 15,16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9,10,11,12,13,14,25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1, 2, 7, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22,23,24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17,18,19,20,21,26,27</td>
<td>4, 6, 7</td>
<td>2,4,7,8,9,10,12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6,7,8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations

The study was limited to a small, select group of institutions considered by the field’s premiere professional organization and by a recognized pioneer/leading consultant in the field as being highly recognized in terms of effective family and parent
engagement. While based upon demonstrated expertise in the field, this list is subjective and does not include all outstanding PFPs. The questionnaire distributed to program directors of the most recognized PFPs relied upon self-disclosure without a means to validate information independently.

Summary

This study sought to add to the literature by focusing on a selected group of most recognized parent/family engagement programs. It sometimes seems as if virtually every college or university of any size has a parent/family webpage of some sort, and perhaps mentions the importance of parents/family in either concrete or nebulous language somewhere in the institution’s strategic planning documentation, or most certainly in their ancillary recruitment literature. This study attempted to look beyond whether an institution simply had a parent/family program and to begin exploring what the highly recognized programs were doing. To learn what offerings or resources were considered a sort of baseline for these successful programs, and what they were offering, was innovative. This study also explores what and how they were assessing, and what challenges and barriers program directors experienced or reflected upon for the field at large. Institutions and other stakeholders within the field can utilize the data collected by this study to begin their own parent/family engagement programs, compare their existing programs, adopt innovative practices discussed by participants, and more. By digging deeper into these selected parent/family engagement programs and their practices, as well as how they are organized and resourced, others can avoid a sort of institutional “reinventing of the wheel” by taking advantage of the experiences and reflection of directors of some highly recognized programs in the field.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This exploratory study was based upon the results of a completed questionnaire, phone interviews, and an analysis of existing research in the field of parent/family engagement in higher education. A population of 34 specifically selected highly recognized parent and family programs was identified by the researcher. The 34 directors of those programs were contacted with an explanation of the study and an electronic link to a questionnaire designed by the researcher.

Twenty-seven of the 34 directors contacted completed questionnaires (79.4%). The questionnaire (see Appendix D) was designed by the researcher and consisted of 29 questions, 12 of which were open-ended. The last question was a solicitation for volunteers willing to be interviewed. Twenty-one directors provided additional contact information and stated their willingness to be interviewed. Eleven directors were randomly selected from the 21 volunteers and contacted for phone interviews. In the end, 10 directors were reached and 10 phone interviews with directors were completed. The interview (see Appendix E) consisted of eight questions developed by the researcher to provide additional data for analysis and a more in-depth consideration of parent/family engagement as currently practiced by some of the most highly recognized programs.

Findings by Research Question

Research Question One: What are the organizational and operational structures of highly recognized PFPs?

The questionnaire began with several general questions regarding basic information concerning staffing and structure of the respondents’ programs (see
Appendix C). Directors were asked (QQ2) how many years their institutions had had a PFP (Table 2), and how many individuals worked exclusively (QQ 3) in their PFP (Table 3). It is not surprising that most of the respondents had programs that were seven years or older due to the simple fact that they were selected for this study based upon their recognition in the field as a founding member of AHEPPP, an AHEPPP award winner, or upon the recommendation of the nation’s leading expert in the field as to having an exceptional program.

Table 2

*Years Institution has had PFP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 years or less</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 years or more</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nationally, PFPs tend to be very small departments or divisions within Student Affairs, or some other department, as reflected in the numbers of exclusive PFP full- and part-time staff (Table 3).

Table 3

*Number of Individuals Exclusively PFP/Full time & Part time*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Individuals</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>More than 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked (QQ4) in what broad institutional division their PFP was organizationally structured. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents’ programs were part
of Student Affairs, 11% were part of Enrollment Management, and 4% were under Advancement. Of the remaining that responded “Other,” the divisions were given: “Enrollment and the Student Experience (recently combined Enrollment and Student Affairs)” and “Student and Academic Life (recently created unit after merging of Student Affairs and Undergraduate Education).”

As part of exploring the organizational structure of the selected programs, the study sought to learn which university position the directors of these PFPs reported (QQ5). On the survey, respondents were not provided choices because the researcher did not believe she could anticipate all possible choices. Given the variety of responses (see Table 4), that assumption proved accurate. Most respondents reported to a Student Affairs administrator, or directly to the Dean of Students.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Position</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Students (or Student Life)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate or Assistant Vice Present for Student Affairs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate VP for Student Affairs &amp; Dean of Students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP for Student Affairs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate VO for Student Affairs and Dean of Students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Vice Provost</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate VP for Enrollment /Student Experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued
Table 4

*University Position PFP Director Reports (continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Position</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate Dean of Students with a dotted line to the VP of Student Affairs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate VP for Advocacy and Support in Student Affairs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Director of External Relations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further illuminate the institutional structure of highly recognized PFPs, the first interview question (IQ1) asked directors to describe their program’s operational and organizational structure. All interviewees provided a brief outline of how their program was organized within their university’s larger organization. The taped interview responses to IQ1 were transcribed and imported into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis.

As Director A described his program, often parent/family directors themselves or members of their staff have other work roles or responsibilities beyond their own PFP. Some work a portion of their time for PFP and a portion for another department or program:

> And so Parent and Family programs are held inside the Department ___________ in the Division of Student Affairs. We have myself, the director of ___________, an associate director, and then a coordinator that will have responsibilities in the parent and family program area. The coordinator is the only full-time person that works with Parent and Family Programs. Then myself
and the associate director. I'll work half, and then the associate director will work a quarter time with Parent and Family Programs.

While Director A described a program consisting of a director and assistant director who worked a portion of their time for parent/family programming, as well as a program coordinator and graduate assistant who worked solely for parent and family engagement, Director B and several other directors described much leaner staffed programs:

Well, I have an office of one, and I have no staff, no administrative support, not even student help, and that's budget related. I report to the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, who in turn, reports to the Vice President for Student Affairs, so I fall within Student Affairs.

Director C, like Director B, described his program as a one-person program, with some administrative support:

Organizationally, it's a one-person office with a half, maybe not even half, a shared administrative assistant. But my position is a director position within the division of student affairs. I report to the Associate Dean of Students . . . And then, operationally, we're kind of billed as the primary-point person for the institution and all things related to parents, -- once they've (students) committed.

Director D described a program which relied heavily upon undergraduate and student administrative support throughout the year:

Office of Parent and Family Programs at ___________ is a part of the Division of Student Affairs. It has two full-time employees: director and assistant director; and student staff: one graduate assistant for the entire year, including summer
(during the summer she is an hourly employee), one Federal Work Study undergraduate assistant for the entire year, and, during the summer, four family orientation leaders (undergrad students). I am director and report to the Vice President for Student Affairs

In addition to the formal organizational structure of the programs within their respective universities, this study also was interested in the directors’ perceptions concerning the supportive role, if any, that parents’ associations and/or parent advisory boards/councils played—if the director’s university had either or both. Of the 27 survey respondents, 16 (59.2%) indicated their university had a parent/family association and 15 (55.5%) had a parent/family board or advisory council.

In general terms, for universities that have parent associations, such organizations often are open to any parent of a student attending that institution. Some universities automatically “enroll” all parents within their parent association as a sort of general member—if incoming students provide parent/family member email address during admission process. Others require interested parent/family members to go online and to simply provide an email address to enroll. Yet, other universities have lengthy online forms requiring parents to fill in all information to “join.”

Many universities offer various levels of membership within their parents’ associations such as a bronze, silver, or gold levels with varying benefits based upon the increasing financial cost of the level of membership. Generally, parents who are at the baseline level of membership receive parent/family information, while parents who pay staggered membership fees receive the information plus additional perks such as university “swag” or discounts. Still other universities have a one-level membership
program for all. In addition to the main university parents’ associations, some institutions have regional parents’ clubs, with a parent or groups of parents acting as the parent/family liaison/ambassador for the university within their area (University of Arkansas, 2017).

Unlike parent associations, parent councils or advisory boards are often made up of parents who have been invited to work with the university to address parent or student related issues or programming. Some parent councils require a financial gift to the institution to be considered for the council (University of South Carolina, 2017), while others convey a more open call for volunteers at large to serve on their parent council (Hofstra University, 2017).

PFP directors were asked about their own parent associations--if applicable to their institution (QQ15). Of the directors who indicated their universities had parent associations, the majority felt their associations were proportional to their institution’s size and provided adequate level of engagement and involvement (Table 5). However, it is worthy to note that with each question, one third of the respondents either strongly disagreed or only somewhat agreed that their university parents’ associations were meeting expectations of engagement and demographic and proportional makeup.
Table 5

Program Directors’ Perceptions of Parents Association

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides adequate level of engagement and involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership is demographically reflective of our student population</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate size and proportional to our institution</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, directors who indicated their institutions had parent councils/advisory boards (QQ16) seemed to have confidence in their efficacy. Yet, several seemed concerned about such boards being demographically reflective of their student populations (Table 6).

Table 6

Program Directors’ Perceptions of Parent Council/Advisory Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides adequate funds for ancillary programming and needs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides an adequate level of engagement and involvement for parents and families</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is demographically reflective of our student population</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides PFP with practical information we can use</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Research Question One. In describing their PFPs’ organizational and operational structure both in questionnaire responses and in the interviews, patterns emerged among this select group of program directors. Seventy-nine percent of programs were within Student Affairs, and 77% of the respondents reported to either the Dean of Students or another high-ranking administrator within Student Affairs. Most PFPs were small staffed, with many consisting of only one or two individuals employed full time. In the interviews, some discussed seasonal help by undergraduate or graduate students, while many discussed being a one- or two-person “shop” and the subsequent challenges of being so sparsely staffed.

While this study focused on a small selected portion of highly recognized PFPs, it is interesting to reflect upon staffing at large within the field of parent/family engagement. According to the most recent national statistics regarding PFPs, the number of full-time professionals in the field “does show steady and significant increase over the years” (Savage & Petree, 2015, p. 11).

According to Savage and Petree (2015), nationally the percentage of respondents who worked full time in PFPs was 38.2% in 2015, which was up from 36.3% in 2013. Steady growth could be seen in the increase in reported full-timers from 22.9% in 2009 to 30.3% in 2011. It would appear that the number of “full timers” in the field is growing. It also would appear that the field nationally continues to evolve with practitioners working to convince university leadership of the necessity and desirability for full-time, fully-staffed parent/family engagement programs.

Of the directors who indicated their institutions had parent associations and/or
parent advisory councils, most agreed or strongly agreed that such programs provided adequate levels of engagement and were demographically reflective of their student populations. Approximately one third of respondents, however, either strongly disagreed or only somewhat agreed that their parent associations were reflective of the diversity of their student population. With parent councils/advisory boards, the percentage was even greater; 56% strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that their board was demographically reflective of student population. This awareness of and concern regarding the lack of diversity in representation not just within parent groups or councils, but also in terms of their efforts to offer programming, services, and communication to all parents/families, was a recurrent pervasive theme in the interview responses across several of the questions.

**Research Question Two: What are the most innovative events/programming/services the highly recognized PFP offer?**

Directors were asked which events or services for parents and families their programs provided and to make an assessment as to its effectiveness (QQ2). Prior to diving into the “most innovative” program or service (IQ2), a helpful reference point was to try to reflect upon what might be considered “standard” by highly recognized programs in terms of the types of services and events they offer. Table 7 provides an insightful snapshot into which events and services highly recognized programs are currently providing.
Table 7

*Events or Services PFP Provides*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Service</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EVENTS/PROGRAMS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Orientation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move In Day</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family Weekend</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling Day/Weekend</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other event/program</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNICATION/TECHNOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails (basic with campus info, due dates, etc.)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Newsletters (campus info, but also suggestions for conversations, tips for letting go, career planning, etc.)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide communications and/or printed materials in any language other than English</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print newsletter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University App (with Parent/Family section)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized Parent/Family App</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other communication or technology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook page specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter account specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social media specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive parent/family handbook</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos for parents/families</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars for parents/families</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line courses for parent families (using Blackboard or other similar platform)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family calendar (printed and distributed)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued
Table 7

Events or Services PFP Provides (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Service</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family calendar (digital)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent website</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parent education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miscellaneous Parent Resource or Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portal for access (with student's permission) to grades, enrollment verification,</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with feeder high schools</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family Association/Organization</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family Advisory Board or Council</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other miscellaneous parent resources or groups</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each sub-category within QQ9, a write-in “other” option was available. Table 8 provides the directors’ “other” responses and reflects the variety of programs and services highly recognized PFPs are offering. Highly recognized PFPs are providing a variety of events/programs as well as using technology creatively.
### Table 8

**Directors’ Write-In Responses to “Other”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Program</th>
<th>Communication/Technology</th>
<th>Social Media Specifically for Parents/Families</th>
<th>Parent Education</th>
<th>Misc. Parent Resource or Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring VIP Day</td>
<td>Online pre-orientation for families (Facebook group (moderated))</td>
<td>Program, “___, ___,” encouraging student independence</td>
<td>Regional Parents Clubs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Sendoffs</td>
<td>Event App</td>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>Online Orientation</td>
<td>VIP Discount Program and Parent Volunteer Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Weekend</td>
<td>Print card with office information and after-hours info</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Monthly Tips</td>
<td>Work with blog subscribers in targeted areas for events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum for high net worth early admit families</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Welcome Guide w/ FAQ’s</td>
<td>Developing Parent Portal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ Breakfast</td>
<td>Guidebook for orientation</td>
<td>Parent &amp; Family Transition Guide</td>
<td>Starting Parent &amp; Family Board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ Tour &amp; Tea</td>
<td>Webinar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While reflecting upon both what was considered standard offerings by highly recognized programs, as well as some of their “other” offerings, directors were asked (QQ9) to rate the effectiveness of the events and services their universities provided...
(Table 9). Under the category of events/programs, directors rated their own parent orientations (88%) and parent/family weekends (96%) as being effective or very effective. In evaluating communications, directors rated their own electronic newsletters, which were the more comprehensive type of communication offering suggestions, etc., (92.59%) and their more basic emails (91.67%) as being the most effective, as opposed to other forms such as print newsletters or text messages. Directors ranked Facebook pages designed specifically for parents and families as the most effective forms of social media for their programs (72%). For the category of parent education, parent website (72%) and parent/family handbooks (68.18%) were ranked as the most effective
Table 9

Directors’ Perceptions of Impact to Effectiveness of PFP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Minimally Effective</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EVENTS/PROGRAMS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Orientation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
<td>64.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move In Day</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>36.84%</td>
<td>31.58%</td>
<td>26.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family Weekend</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>56.00%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling Day/ Weekend</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other event/program</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNICATION/TECHNOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails (basic with campus info, due dates, etc.)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
<td>54.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Newsletters (campus info, but also suggestions for conversations, tips for letting go, career planning, etc.)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>70.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide communications and/or printed materials in any language other than English</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print newsletter</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University App (with Parent/Family section)</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized Parent/Family App</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other communication or technology</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook page specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>32.00%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th># Minimally Effective</th>
<th># Average</th>
<th># Effective</th>
<th># Very Effective</th>
<th># Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter account specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social media specifically for parents/families</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive parent/family handbook</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos for parents/families</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars for parents/families</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line courses for parent families (using Blackboard or other similar</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>platform)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family calendar (printed and distributed)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
<td>64.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family calendar (digital)</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Website</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>28.00%</td>
<td>36.00%</td>
<td>36.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parent education</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Misc. Parent Resource Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental portal for access (with student's permission) to grades,</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>enrollment verification, financial, etc.)</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued
Table 9

*Directors’ Perceptions of Impact to Effectiveness of PFP (continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Minimally Effective</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family Association/Organization</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family Advisory Board or Council</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other miscellaneous parent resources or groups</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
In QQ10, directors were asked out of all their events and services, which one did they think was most important in terms of supporting student success and why. Many directors listed more than one resource, while several directors responded with lengthy paragraphs describing the impact of several event and services. The written responses to QQ10 were imported from Qualtrics software into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis.

Thirteen directors categorized their parent orientation program as the most important in supporting student success. Typical of the thoughts of many directors was the write-in QQ10 survey response:

More than likely, parent and family orientation since that's our highest attendance rates all throughout the year and I think that it helps set parents up for success with their relationship with their student early on.

One director emphasized the importance of parent orientation and the vital role it played in student success—so much so that the university also offered an online version to parents who could not physically attend.

I believe the most important service we provide in terms of supporting student success is orientation programs for parents. Our office is responsible for planning and running all information sessions that parents attend during summer orientations. Over the past three years, we have collected thousands of responses from parents, studied best practices, and have created a program that we believe is essential for parents/families to participate in to best set their family up for success at the University. For those that cannot attend, we offer an online version.
A large majority of our budget ($110,000) goes into this effort and is funded by orientation programs.

Following parent orientation, six directors discussed emails or emailed newsletters as the most effective in supporting student success. One respondent wrote:

*Emails to the parent listserv have continued to be reported by our parents as the number one resource because the information is accurate and timely*

The importance of emails/electronic newsletters was echoed by others:

*I truly think the general communication we provide (via e-newsletter, social media, answering calls) is the most helpful resource. Through proactive communication with the e-newsletter and social media, we are able to share information before they even know they need it. It is also a great tool during times of crisis. We constantly get praise from parents that they are able to have an understanding of what is happening on campus and can share that with their student.*

Another director affirmed the positive parent/family response to parent/family newsletters:

*Our email newsletter. Parents/families love it and praise it regularly! They say they feel connected because of it and are able to inform their students of things happening on campus. Students tell us they learn of things because a parent/family member forwarded an email to them. It helps us spread the word with announcements directed at families and news we want families to share with students.*
While discussing the impact of emails/email newsletters, it is worthwhile to note that QQ14 asked directors how many times a semester (on average) did parents/families receive emails and/or email newsletters from their PFP. From the responses, monthly emails or newsletters were the norm among respondents (Table 10).

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times a semester</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “Other” Responses Detail: Families can choose the e-mail delivery frequency. Five times a year (2x in the fall 2x in the spring and a summer send-off). All parents get an email newsletter once a month. Parents who subscribe to the blog get that sent to their inbox every time a new blog is posted - normally each business day year-round, with a few weeks in the summer when I only post once or twice a week. General newsletters monthly, topic-specific information as needed, and a question of the month. Twice a month. Every other week. Bi-Weekly in the fall and spring semester. 2-3 times a month during the school year.

The third element referenced by four directors (QQ10) in supporting student success was the family handbook and/or calendar (some directors referenced handbook and calendar as one resource). Family handbooks and/or family calendars provide a one-stop source of resources. One director observed:

*Parent Handbook - Provides parents an opportunity to know what resources exist to help their students be successful.*

Finally, the daily resource/referral work done by PFPs was listed as the most important to contributing to student success. As one director corroborated:
Our daily resource/referral work with parents/families is the most important. We have an amazing campus network and our staff are very knowledgeable about all aspects of the university—it can make an almost immediate difference for those we are working with. If we are talking with someone on the phone, e-mailing with them, or interacting on social media, we can provide referrals, specific links to more information, or even ask them to have their student stop by the office so that we can get to the root of a problem or just connect an anxious student with resources.

As another director wrote about referral work:

. . . It is nice for them to have a place that not only explains those limitations (FERPA restrictions), but can have an intentional conversation with them to ensure they are directed to the correct department and are not sent down a rabbit hole across campus.

As to the second half of QQ10 as to “why” selected events/services were the most important in supporting student success, while the answers varied, most contained the central idea of effective communication to partner with parents/families for student success. By using a variety of means to communicate with parents/families the resources that are available, information about the student experience, etc., PFPs enable parents to reinforce the university’s success messages for their students. As one director stated:

. . . for parents and families and helps us educate them about important issues and support services at _______ so they are equipped with the information and knowledge they need to support their student.
Another director wrote about the overall campus culture that supported the work of the institution’s PFP, which supported parents/families, ultimately resulting in support for the students:

*Ultimately, we are fortunate to have an overall campus culture that truly values partnering with parents and family members. Thus, not only is the parent/family orientation programming solid, but our move-in/welcome process is very effective as well as how we, as a campus, work with families throughout the academic year. The why for this? Our campus is highly collaborative and we view families as partners who ultimately, know their students best.*

Moving from a simple listing and analysis of events and services that most supported student success, the researcher also was interested in the unique events and services this population of highly recognized programs was offering. Given their role as leaders in the field, directors were asked in the interview (IQ2) to discuss their program’s most innovative events, programs, and services. The audio taped interview responses to IQ2 were transcribed and imported into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis.

Director D highlighted her program’s unique offerings:

*Facebook page/Facebook live, Siblings Day, Commencement ______ (celebration for the graduating senior families), web chats (such as, how to guide your student in internship and job search), on-site special topics workshops (such as, how to mentor your student with disabilities), including families in Title IX initiatives (such as, newsletter articles on how to talk with their student about sexual violence; on-site workshops), and International Family Orientation Parent Council engagement.*
Director E identified the offering of printed materials (handbook and calendar) as well as a special move-in transition/meal for parents and families:

. . . But we still do our own-- we still print a handbook and did a 100 page one this year. We also have it online this year. It's not unique, but I think now that luxury of having a printed one is. We also have it online, but almost 95% raise their hands that they still want a hard copy instead of online. We also still print our own family calendar. We don't shop it out. We had kind of calling cards with emergency phone numbers on it that people can put in their wallet, so people like those.

Then on the first night of the move in, the first-year night before the students move in what we call the ‘_________’ and we have a big cookout. It's hamburgers, hot dogs. It’s for everybody, students, family, upperclassmen, whoever is here. Wednesday night – we fed about a thousand people. We don't charge the mothers and dads who will partner with us. And they decorate (moms and dads) all the cafeterias. We get live music in each of the venues. Again, they're all decorated with red-and-white-checked tablecloths, and flowers, and our human mascot does family pictures and all. And it's at the end of that cookout, about 7:30, that then people walk over to the kick-off of the “________” and people at that point have to say bye to their kids and their kids will then go to their dormitory rooms. It's kind of a good way to handle the long day of moving in and make the transition on Thursday, and the students will be busy with their activities.

Director F discussed innovation in terms of thoughtful partnership with other programs or offices on campus. Director F also highlighted the positive feedback
received from parents and families that his program focused more on the transition the
entire family was experiencing as opposed to sticking strictly to utilitarian concerns such
as “how to navigate the campus”:

*I'd say that really, anything we do that's innovative, or creative, or well done, it's
in partnership with other campus entities. I think our orientation and transitions
programs office is an example of our-- the way we welcome students to the campus,
our all-around welcome programming is absolutely amazing. We partner with
orientation transition programs in our campus events office and other offices,
housing and dining, to really welcome not only students, but families in ways
through fun or exciting, to just kind of relaxing, to educational programming for
families. I’d say our summer orientation programming, we do a transitions session
that starts the parent/family experience for a day and a half at summer orientation.
We get really good feedback from families that they appreciate how our 75-minute
orientation session with them is more about the transition their student or their
family is going through, than it is about how to navigate our campus, or the 10
things you need to know before you get here.

Considered innovative by some, the issue of education of faculty and staff to
parent/family engagement was addressed in this study. Three questionnaire items (QQ11,
QQ12, and QQ14) explored what selected PFPs were currently doing regarding education
for campus employees. This topic within the field has been receiving attention, as
ongoing efforts have been made by PFPs to educate their own university faculty and staff
about what their office does, and the valuable resource they can be for faculty/staff.
Furthermore, there have been efforts by many to go beyond the education of what the
PFP does, and to try to convert university faculty and staff into adopting the philosophy of parent/family engagement as both good and beneficial for students as well as the institution.

When asked in QQ11 to what extent does your PFP provide information for faculty/staff to help them in their interactions with parents and families, five reported “not at all,” 21 reported “somewhat,” and only one categorized their information as “extensive.” Directors who provided information for faculty and staff education were asked what was the main theme or point of such messages. The written responses to QQ11 were imported from Qualtrics software into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis. The two recurring themes were parents as partners in student success, and the theme of the university as a team with everyone working together toward students’ success. Directors wrote of working to convert faculty and staff into viewing parents/families as partners in students’ success as opposed to unwanted interlopers.

One respondent wrote:

My main message is that parents are our partners. I help staff have a positive view of parent involvement and to help them understand that parents support our messages. I also try to demonstrate how my office can support getting their messages to students (through parents!)

Another director echoed the parents as partners theme by writing:

The main theme is that parents/families are partners. Pushing them away doesn’t help support students, but working with them to appropriately support the student is valuable.
Yet another director joining the chorus of promoting the parents as partners’ mindset wrote:

_The importance of noting parents/family members as partners. Also, that the love and support a family can provide their student -- is ultimately what is most important. Whether it's the family of a first-generation college student or the family of a campus alumni, the key is noting that by us working together to support their student, on a foundation of love/support from the family -- student success is possible._

Directors reported in response to QQ13 speaking at faculty meetings followed by department professional development as the most used methods for delivering information about parent/family engagement to faculty and staff (see Table 11).

Table 11

_Delivery of Information to Faculty and Staff_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak at faculty meetings</td>
<td>28.95%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23.68%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department professional development</td>
<td>26.32%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Note:_ Responses provided for “other” in survey question QQ13 included: Distribution of materials to departments/offices. Present and the annual academic advising conference. Direct outreach to advisors and college reps. Normally it is anecdotal information - I will talk to other offices about a family I have been dealing with and need to pass on to their office, and I try to give some background or help navigating that family based on my interaction with them. Section in the faculty handbook. Host a table at new faculty orientation. Meet with faculty and staff before they bring information to our Parents Council. Individual phone calls or meetings. Informal communication, occasional participation in Associate Deans’ meetings, providing communication to colleges re: our resources.
Summary of Research Question Two. The PFPs selected for this study used a wide variety of events, programming, and services to support their students’ families. Many of the programs in this study offer some of the same events and services that other PFPs nationwide offer. The innovation with these PFPs appeared, as one director alluded, lies in “the way” they go about doing their work. For example, many colleges offer some type of parent orientation, but many do not continuously survey parents soliciting feedback for directed change and improvement—or for example, offer online orientation for parents who cannot physically attend.

Much of the innovation these programs are currently doing lies not in the novelty of a given event or service, but in the level of excellence and execution they are bringing to their resources for parents, as well as their commitment to implementing best practices based upon CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs (see Appendix B) for their events and services.

To further illustrate innovation through excellence, many universities have parent/family Facebook pages, so the directors in this study may or may not see their own parent/family Facebook pages as a unique offering in the field. However, many such pages “for parents” at universities at large consist of the university posting items, and parents/family members may or may not be able to post below in the comment section in response. Such passive pages often have very low numbers of likes or followers proportionally to the number of parents/family who could be engaged because the university has not set up such social media to really be “social” or interactive but, instead, as a type of bulletin board for the school. To contrast that type of typical parent/family Facebook page, one parent/family Facebook group created, supervised, and monitored by
a director in this study has almost 7,000 members. Unlike many parent/family pages, this parent/family Facebook group is robust with parents initiating posts and continuously posting daily as active participants. The innovation lies in that the university is not posting most of the content—the parents/families are creating the content.

These types of parent/family engagement Facebook groups/pages are unique in higher education. The university’s PFP director stated on the group’s homepage: “The goal of this page is to distribute information from _____ and for you to support each other, provide advice, and help _____ students,” and by following the page one can see it is what the parents/families do in both their solicitations for advice and help, and their response to other parents/families, as well other university staff within the group responding with information. The uniqueness or innovation is the 7,000 parents/family members, who either post or silently read this Facebook group page, are having an authentic engaged experience with the university and with each other. It is in fact a true “social” media established by that PFP director for parents/families and, therefore, truly innovative. Most of the random university parent/family Facebook pages the researcher has followed for over a year are not real “social” media in that they constrain posting and do not encourage true interaction.

The same could be said of websites and innovation (Figure 1). When one looks at many of the parent/family websites of the 34 originally selected institutions, many are substantially better when compared to other university parent/family webpages at large. The usability, graphic design, organization, and availability of information often were far superior when compared to the more typical generic parent/family webpages that many universities offer.
Figure 1. University of Arkansas parent & family webpage.

In addition to innovation through excellence in their events, programs, and services for parents and families, the selected PFP directors are innovative in both their thinking about and their commitment to the continuing process of educating their own faculty and staff as to the value and benefits to effective parent/family engagement.

Research Question Three: What assessments are being used with your PFP: What is being measured, what outcomes are being measured, and what is being learned?

Three questions on the questionnaire addressed assessment. First, directors were asked in QQ22 if certain listed assessments were being used with their programs (Table 12).
Table 12

Assessments Used with PFP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey sent to Parent/Family email listserv</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Parent Council members</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Parent Association members</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey available on website</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey after specific event (parent weekend, parent orientation, etc.)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for parents to provide feedback on website</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Directors also were asked to assess how helpful the assessment was to their program (Table 13). The two types of assessment rated the most helpful were surveys after specific events and surveys sent out to the parent/family email list.

Table 13

Directors’ Perceptions of Helpfulness of Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Extremely Helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey after specific event (parent weekend, parent orientation, etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey available on website</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey sent to Parent/Family email listserv</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Parent Association members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Parent Council members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for parents to provide feedback on website</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, directors were asked in QQ23 with their assessments (Table 14) what outcomes were being measured.

Table 14

Directors’ Assessment of Outcomes Being Measured

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family participation in or with a given event or service</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family satisfaction with event/service</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family gained knowledge or skills through participation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student gained knowledge or skills through their interaction with their parents (through their parents' increase in knowledge or skills)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. “Other” responses included: connection to the institution, usefulness (instead of satisfaction), feeling of connectedness to the institution

Directors were asked in the questionnaire in QQ24 to provide an example of something their program learned from assessment and to describe its impact upon their program.

The written responses to QQ24 were imported from Qualtrics software into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis. The responses regarding the impact of assessment fell into three broad categories: most effective forms of communication, modification of the logistics with current or future offerings, and the identification of services parents/families want most (including the priority of career planning resources).

**Communication.** The value of assessment regarding communication was most referenced by directors for QQ24. Eight directors discussed learning not only the frequency and types of communication parents/families preferred, but also which existing forms of communication they could abandon and instead focus their resources most effectively.
One respondent stated:

*We learned several years ago that our parents didn't read printed newsletters mailed home, compared to our emails. We discontinued mailing the newsletter.*

Another director echoed abandoning an existing resource after assessment revealed that it was not achieving a desired outcome:

*We used to produce a magazine and mail it twice a year. Our membership indicated they were not reading it and it was not contributing to their desire to maintain membership so we eliminated it and funneled more resources into electronic communication and events.*

Directors discussed not only parent/family preferences in various forms of communications, but also changes in parent knowledge of resources from year to year, and how communications may be modified to address that change. As one director reflected upon the impact from assessment:

*In my parent survey this spring, I included a question about parents' knowledge of resources in specific topics of life on campus. I learned that parent familiarity with resources drops significantly in the second-year across all topics. Because of this, one of my goals in the coming year is to create a second-year newsletter to mail to parents of second-year students in order to address some of the biggest challenges second year students face. Additionally, this survey very clearly pointed out a lack of information in specific areas, so I will be partnering with those campus partners in order to increase the amount of information on those topics we share in parents’ communications.*
Logistics/execution of programs. Six directors discussed the valuable role assessment played in determining the logistics or execution of programs and services their program offered. Directors referenced data provided from assessment in driving subsequent changes to the length of programs and presentations, the dates and times programming was offered, as well as the physical location of a program—all as being changes driven by assessment data.

As one director wrote:

Another example - we used to hold our Parents' Council meetings in a big auditorium (lecture style). Some Council members asked if we could meet in a different place, at round tables so there could be conversation and networking among members - so we changed that - and the networking and social aspect of our meetings is now one of the most-highly-complimented parts of the meetings.

One director spoke of a large change to the parent and family portion of summer orientation based upon assessment feedback and the belief that the change would impact parent/family ability to support their student:

For the past three years, the parent & family portion of summer orientations has followed the trend to split parents from students soon after they arrive on campus. After three years of feedback stating that families want to have the orientation experience together, that the information presented in sessions where only parents were present is important for students to hear as well, and feedback that the student time on campus was not well utilized, we have made the change where students and parents will stay together for the majority of the summer orientation experience and they will have much flexibility in what they choose to do on
campus, with a few key pieces mandatory. It is important to note that students will still attend their academic advising session, course registration, and any placement testing without the parent present. This has shifted much of the ownership of summer orientation programs overall to PFP, which has been a difficult change for a small staff to manage. However, we anticipate the outcome to be positive and we hope to see families as a whole readier to begin college.

**Services parents/families want.** Four directors responded with the role assessment played in identifying the services that parents/families wanted for their students. Directors reported utilizing assessment results to modify existing programs and for planning for the future. Three directors specifically reported the desire for career services and planning as a priority revealed by their assessments.

As one director reflected:

*We learned that the most important issue for parents is Career Services in addition to the fact that the issue that their student asked for help with the most was also Career Services. Though we already do a good deal of work with that department, we are re-inventing some of the Career Services programming that we have during Orientation and Family Weekend to better address this. In addition, we are discussing how we can partner to develop more innovative programming about Career Services, using multiple delivery methods (in person, E-newsletter, webinar, etc.), etc.*

Interview question IQ3 further explored assessment. The 10 directors interviewed were asked what assessments were being used with their PFPs, what was being measured, and what was being learned. The taped interview responses to IQ3 were transcribed and
imported into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis. Directors echoed much of the data received from QQ22, QQ23, and QQ24, but discussed more fully both formal means of assessment, such as annual/biannual parent surveys, as well as more informal means of assessment or data gathering. Several directors, although not directly asked, also spoke to challenges with assessment of their programs.

Five directors discussed their formal parent surveys, either done annually or biannual. While the specific goals of those types of surveys no doubt vary from institution to institution, there appear to be overarching goals shared by many programs. Director A’s thoughts regarding annual parent surveys, as well as their specific event surveys (assessing participation in and satisfaction with), could serve as a model for what many directors often sought in their own varying forms of assessment:

*We do a survey each year that kind of gauges the different outcomes that we have for the program. We really focus on three goals of the Parents Family Programs: making sure that families are encouraged and to help them encourage their students and support their students while they're here, serve as that link between the university and parents, and then be a resource. All of our surveys are centered around those three questions-- for all the different events that we have. Are parents feeling connected? Are they able to give their students recommendations and let them know about resources available on campus whenever their students are in need? Also, are they being engaged? First of all, are they wanting to be engaged? Then, are they being engaged after the fact?*

In addition to more formal forms of assessment such as electronic annual or biannual parent surveys, or post-event satisfaction surveys, directors also spoke to
informal means of assessment such as phone logs of parent questions and feedback from “question of the month” type of forums--soliciting parent input on social media or blogs. Directors reported topics that appeared in phone calls or in “question of the month” types of inquiries often were addressed in later blogs, parent emails, or newsletters.

Director G described the impact of her online poll question:

*The other thing I do have a poll my website that I change every month, and I usually get a pretty good response rate. I would say I get 2 to 400 people responding every month, which, when I talk to my colleagues in the field, they're all shocked that I can get that many people. But I put it in my newsletter every month saying, "Oh, be sure to fill out the poll," and I tend to get some good responses, and it's a really good way to kind of get quick feedback about something. Or I try to make it timely, so maybe I'll ask about careers during the month of the career fair to make sure it all wraps together with some messages we're trying to send parents.*

In the phone interviews, although not directly asked, several directors addressed challenges with parent/family assessment. Some of the challenges discussed were finding the necessary resources for the types of assessment directors desired. As Director B stated:

*Assessment is probably one of the things that's the biggest challenge for me as a one-person office. It's frustrating for me because, for example, the session that I was just talking about that I do during orientation. I have all the data from that for the past maybe five years. The questions have changed slightly. I tweak the presentation based on evaluations and things like that. But essentially, when you*
look at it, the same primary concerns come up for our families over and over and over and over again. I have that data, but I don't have time to get into it to say, ‘Okay, what does this really mean?’

Only one director discussed specifically learning outcome-based assessments as being a strength for his program. Two other directors expressed that parts of the assessments their programs used were learning outcome based, while three directors discussed specifically the need for more learning-based outcomes assessments for PFPs.

As Director F reflected:

More of it is satisfaction related, you know? We really have to shift to more of the learning outcomes piece. We do have some learning outcomes in there, but we find the challenge with that is-- it's how do you draft a survey that speaks to families to where they're at and their student's experience? . . . I think we get good data back on the degree to which they are interacting with our electronic materials, the degree to which they feel connected to the university, the degree to which they feel like they get information they need to support their students. But I don't think we get learning outcomes based data from that survey. . .

And so now we really assess more to just make sure we're kind of still in the right place. But we don't really-- I've been in the role for ____ years . . . and we really don't have any significant things we need to change, we feel. Other than to continue to figure out ways to communicate more effectively to first-gen families, families of color, and then also just-- we're going to have this new family weekend coming up in fall '18. We've sent out different assessments for that to hear from families and hear from campus partners about what they think would work and--
we've reached out to other campuses, what they feel works and doesn't work. We do use assessment to drive things that are in partnership with other offices, but I think the learning piece is where we have to strengthen it.

This desire for more learning outcome-based assessment also was expressed by Director D:

*I find it difficult to create an assessment instrument/method to measure family learning outcomes. Would love to see examples of such assessment. Also, I would love to meaningfully measure correlation between the family engagement and student success.*

As Director C observed:

*We were doing-- and still to a certain extent are getting a lot of satisfaction surveys without not as much learning outcome based surveys, but we do a few different needs' assessments. What I'm trying to do - and I haven't yet launched, but it's kind of in the hopper for the next couple of years - is a cycle of needs' assessment. One of the places that we know we're missing the mark is stuff for families of-- there's room to improve for stuff for families of low-income students, our students and families of color, and our out-of-state students.*

**Summary of Research Question Three.** The PFPs in this study conduct a variety of assessments and report changing, modifying and adapting programs and services based upon knowledge gained from assessment. Broad categories of assessment include annual or biannual parent surveys, post-event satisfaction type surveys, and a variety of informal means of collecting feedback such as phone logs, question of the month, etc. Sixty-seven percent of director respondents in this study reported their
institutions send out a parent/family survey via email. Fifteen directors found these types of surveys to be either helpful or extremely helpful. Most of these surveys are either conducted annually or biannual. Eighty-nine percent of the director respondents reported utilizing surveys after specific events such as family orientation, family weekend, etc. Twenty-three directors reported these types of event specific assessments as being helpful or somewhat helpful to their PFP.

Three categories emerged when directors were asked to provide examples of something their programs had learned through assessment: most and least effective forms of communication, changes to logistics of future offerings, and the identification of services that parents/family most wanted. Several directors spoke to their individual challenges regarding assessment. Challenges included the time or staffing to process assessment results, and by some the desire for more learning-based outcome forms of assessment as opposed to post-event satisfaction forms. Also, the larger assessment challenge that was discussed in the review of the literature and as one director stated, “Meaningfully measure correlation between the family engagement and student success.”

**Research Question Four: What are the greatest challenges faced in meeting parent/family needs?**

The questionnaire contained five questions pertaining to challenges faced by PFPs. QQ17 asked, based upon the director’s own perceptions of his/her population, to what extent does his/her PFP’s events, services, and resources meet the needs of parents and families based upon socioeconomic status (SES). Table 15 reflects directors’ perceptions in their program meeting the needs of families based upon family’s SES.
Table 15

*Perceptions of Meeting the Needs of Parents/Families Based Upon SES*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low SES parents/families</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>48.39%</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle SES parents/families</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>32.26%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High SES parents/families</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>19.35%</td>
<td>56.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Directors believed their respective institutions were the most successful in meeting the needs of high and middle SES students (Table 15). Similar results were reflected with QQ18 when directors were asked to what extent your PFP events, services, and resources meet the needs of parents and families based upon their student’s college readiness (Table 16).

Table 16

*Meeting the Needs Based Upon College Readiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents/families of student with low college readiness</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>41.67%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/families of student with average college readiness</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued
Table 16

*Meeting the Needs Based Upon College Readiness (continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents/families of student with high college readiness</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QQ21, which asked to what extent does your PFP work to serve the needs of families of distance or on-line learning students (Table 17), revealed that 58% of director respondents believed their programs did “not at all” or “very little” met the needs of families of distance and online learners.

Table 17

*Meeting the Needs of Families of Distance/On-line Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No applicable (no distance/on-line students)</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To a great extent</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two open-ended questions from the questionnaire pertained to the research question focused on challenges. QQ19 asked directors what they felt would indicate success for enhancing diversity, equity, and access for their PFP. The written responses to
QQ19 were imported from Qualtrics software into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis.

One director offered a formula for indications of success in this area:

1. Having a clear vision for inclusion, equity and access 2. Putting that vision into action through outreach, services, and programs 3. Evaluating the success of the outreach, services, and programs

Some directors focused more on the makeup of their parent advisory board and or parent association memberships, with most commenting on the lack of diversity. Others focused more on parental/family participation at events such as orientation or family weekend.

A recurring theme in responses was the idea of the impact of affordability upon access. Nine director responses discussed the impact of fees for participation in family weekend/orientation and/or fees for membership in parents groups. Several directors discussed the necessity to charge for events out of budgetary necessity, but believed that any charge impacted the potential for equity and access. As one director stated:

I think if I felt like our price point was a little more affordable for families. We are $55 per parent to attend parent and family orientation and that includes their one-day session with materials/lunch, etc. but also their membership for a year that keeps them 'involved, informed and invested' with events, information and a benefit member card.

One director looked forward to increased diversity now that the university was funding the program:

We're in the middle of a funding shift. We previously charged nominal membership dues to make up for the fact that we didn't receive university funding.
Now the university has provided us with a recurring budget moving forward, which is an amazing step in ensuring better access to our PFP program. Since this is so new (being implemented for the upcoming school year), we don't have specific numbers for measuring success. I am eager to see our email subscriber numbers up, Family Weekend participation up, etc. I suspect that we'll see more diversity in all areas now that we don't have to charge dues.

Four directors discussed either increased parent association membership and/or intentional outreach to first-generation student families. Others discussed the need for more international or multilingual materials.

QQ20 asked directors to identify factors and/or choices that keep some parents and families from engaging with their PFP. The written responses to QQ20 were imported from Qualtrics software into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis. Many directors offered multiple factors that prevented engagement. Twelve directors discussed parents/families not being aware of the benefits that a parent/family engagement office could offer. Many believed this was especially true for parents/families that had not been able to attend orientation and/or move-in or another event in which their PFP had been present. As one director wrote:

*If families can't attend orientation or be on our campus for move-in, they miss out on opportunities to really connect with our office as well as other campus resources. Also, if families lack access to a computer or smart phone, they'll have limited access to a lot of the information we provide. Finally, if students don't note a parent/family email address on their admissions application, it's difficult for our office to ensure that we actually obtain that email address.*
Six directors referenced costs as a barrier to engagement. The cost could be in the form of travel to events or programs, the cost of the orientation fee itself, or the cost of membership dues to join that school’s parent association. Three directors cited language barriers and the lack of bi- or multi-lingual staff or materials for parents in languages other than English. Other miscellaneous responses included a campus culture that did not value family engagement, perhaps previous interaction with “other university departments (or colleges that another one of their children attended) that were not positive,” as well as parents who simply did not wish to be engaged.

IQ4 asked, “What are the greatest challenges you face in meeting parent/family needs?” The taped interview responses to IQ4 were transcribed and imported into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis. It is of interest that, despite all the press given to helicopter parents, only 2 of the 10 directors referred to issues with parent expectations. Director C attested to problems with parental expectations:

Entitlement and high expectations. That's easy for me-- we have a wealthy population of students and families with very high expectations. We have very high out-of-state tuition, and we have a lot of out-of-state students. I think that comes with a somewhat justifiably so very high expectation of the institution to deliver, right, and to have a fantastic experience that all-- and all, any type of mistake or whatever is a breach of-- is a breach of our values according to parents. . . We have a ton of multi-generation families. And so, yeah, it comes with a lot of expectations.

Director H also spoke to helping parents understand helpful, as opposed to unhelpful involvement in their student’s experience:
Probably, I think maybe getting them to understand that maybe what they want isn't what they need. And helping them understand and coach them to understand what is really needed and what really will help them as they progress with their student. I guess sort of the greatest challenge is getting them to really understand truly what they need. Helping them find that instead of kind of giving in to the FERPA fight or whatever. Not giving into it, but engaging in that instead of saying, 'Let's talk about what you really need and what you're really—' almost like counseling. 'Let's talk about what are you really feeling like right now that's causing you to ask these things' I think that's one of the greatest things is helping them really understand what their true needs are.

The challenges most discussed by directors in response to IQ4 were reaching underrepresented families, the challenges of limited budgets and staffing, and the impact on services. Also discussed were the challenges of involving and relying upon several other offices on campus to deliver services to parents/families. Three directors spoke directly to the need to work well with other campus offices, and their efforts to build relationships with various campus entities. Director H described what other directors had emphasized: the need for other departments to support the work of the PFP:

*I as a department, cannot be successful or can be effective without all of the other colleagues that are around me. But so much of what happens-- if there's something major that's going on, if a student is thinking about taking their own life, if there's been a death in the family, all those major, major things, those are not things that I'm going to deal with myself. Those are things that I'm going to bring in my colleagues and say, 'Okay, I'm going to have this person contact*
you,’ or whatever. I need to be really dependent and be able to trust that my colleagues, when I'm making these referrals, are making these connections, are going to follow through. Some colleagues are, obviously, more receptive to that intervention or that connection than others are.

There's a real challenge when you're sending something out there that's really significant and you're trying to make sure that that student, that family is well cared for. There’s an element of the unknown there that, ‘Gosh, I really hope’ - - and most of my colleagues this isn't an issue with. But the few areas that are, it can be very unsettling because you have you, meaning me, the imperial 'you.'

You're the face of the institution, particularly when you do these kinds of orientation sessions and things like that and you're saying, ‘We are here. We care about your student. We care about you. We're going to do everything we can.’

Then when the actual situation arises, I want to be sure that what we're saying publicly and out front is really what we're doing on those individual case-by-case situations. I think that that's a challenge to have that follow-through all the way through in every situation that comes up.

Three directors spoke primarily to challenges of the parents/families they never have contact with—often underrepresented families. Director F addressed struggles in connecting with and supporting underrepresented families:

If I'd say that underrepresented populations, how we continue to work on that, I'd say international students and their families, how we support them, I'd say limited staff, limited programming budget, are probably our bigger challenges and issues that we face. And then just having that family weekend now that we're going to be
involved in, and how we figure out how to encourage the campus to develop a budget around that in partnership with us and others are significant challenges coming up.

IQ6 also addressed Research Question Four indirectly in that it asked directors to identify primary external barriers to parent/family engagement in higher education. IQ7 indirectly addressed Research Question Four as well by asking directors to identify internal barriers. The combination of both external and internal barriers provided additional challenges to parent/family engagement.

After the researcher began interviewing directors, she realized that IQ6 and IQ7 should have been combined as one question concerning both barriers. What might be considered an external barrier by one director could be considered an internal barrier by another. Although the two questions were asked as two separate questions throughout the interviews and transcribed, entered, analyzed, and coded into NVivo 11 software as two separate questions, the researcher made the conscious choice to discuss both internal and external barriers together, due to the nature of the overlapping answers in both sets of responses.

Four directors cited as a barrier the parents/families of students not wanting to be perceived as a helicopter parent. Director D discussed the negative impact of this reluctance on the part of parents/families to be labeled negatively:

*A wide misperception that parents and families are a burden to our institutions and our students. Even parents are now prefacing their questions, ‘I don’t want to seem like a helicopter parent . . .’ A small minority of parents are over-involved or inappropriate. On the other hand, first-generation students and students who*
come from certain cultures (such as Latino/Hispanic cultures) thrive better when their families are engaged and informed. The media who perpetuate negative stereotypes of over-involved college parents.

Director G also addressed the power of the mostly mythical helicopter parent label as a barrier to fostering a partnership with parents/families and the institution:

*I guess kind of for both external and internal, I would say one of the biggest barriers that I find is kind of that media popular portrayal of college students is harmful. I think the term, helicopter parent, as I'm sure you've heard and believed, is just so awful. It makes people not want to call and not want to be involved when they should be, or it makes my colleagues scared to get a call from the parent. I feel like when I tell people outside in the world what I do for a living, their responses are usually, ‘Oh, I'm sorry,’ or, ‘That's awful.’ That is not the portrayal we want of our college parents because they're very helpful. They're an important resource for us. They're a great partner. And you might get the one really squeaky wheel, but you'll get that-- whenever you work with people, you're going to get that. It's just part of it.*

Director B also discussed the continuing negative impact of the media in perpetuating the stereotype of the dreaded helicopter parent and the stifling impact that portrayal can have on parent/family engagement:

*This is the good time of year to talk about this because right now we're seeing all of the articles out there and the media presence about sending your student off to college. I mean, even The Today Show did a segment last week. There is all this information out there about these are the things you should send with your*
student. These are the things you should talk to your student about. All of this stuff.

Then you have those of us that are in higher education, and more often than not, it is the academic side of the institution that's saying, 'Well, wait a minute. These students are 18-years-old, most of them, coming into this environment. They are adults. Why in God's name are we connecting with the family?' I think the internal barrier is that there's not an across-the-board recognition that appropriate family engagement can be a really positive reinforcement to student success.

. . . It's interesting because that's the impression (helicopter parenting) that's kind of perpetuated in the media. In my experience at least, those are few and far between, the ones that are just so over the top engaged. Occasionally, you run across one. And usually, it's more from almost an instability perspective sometimes than it is from an over parenting perspective. But it's just that idea, that cliché that's out there, that you spend so much of your time addressing that instead of being able to create these positive messages going out about, 'We have this whole new crop of students coming in in a couple of weeks. Think of the opportunities we have to engage with the students, with the families, that whole gamut.'

In addition to not wanting the helicopter parent label, directors identified the barrier of total unfamiliarity with the college experience. Directors E and I used the same phraseology when discussing the barriers first-generation parents/families face. Director E stated:
One barrier would be just parents and families not understanding the university experience. First generation families, I think, are varied. They don't know what they don't know.

Director I also emphasized the barrier faced by the families of first-generation students of not knowing what it is that they don’t know:

But I think of that first-generation college parent family, my parents were first generation college parents, so I get it. I have an understanding of that, and that's a you-don't-know-what-you-don't-know situation, where they're trying to sort of manage through a minefield of information and really don't know where to place that next step. So reaching out depends on what the university's philosophy might be on working with first generation parents, which is a growing population. It's a big question.

Barriers cited by four directors were the issue of budgets and staffing and the impact upon the director’s program’s effectiveness. Director D stated the symbiotic relationship between a university leadership’s philosophy toward parent/family engagement and their willingness to dedicate financial resources:

The faculty and senior administration misperception that dedicating a budget to the family education and engagement is wasted money.

This lack of funding and staffing for PFPs sometimes springs from a university either not philosophically supporting parent/family engagement, or engaging in a type of magical thinking believing a one- or two-person department can effectively serve the needs of thousands of parents/families. Director I addressed this issue of a discontent between what a university desires and the resources it provides:
I think from a university perspective, having a good understanding of the limitations and resources - if you're only going to put a resource and three-quarters or whatever in place - understanding that the programming that you're going to get for that, of that department, for instance.

Tied to the barrier presented by lack of funding and resources also were the barriers cited by five directors of some within the university not recognizing the importance of good parent/family engagement. As one director observed, “I think the internal barrier is that there's not an across-the-board recognition that appropriate family engagement can be a really positive reinforcement to student success.”

Several directors reflected upon the need for university faculty and staff to educate themselves more on the changing family dynamic, and the research supporting the value of appropriate parent/family engagement. Director G affirmed the need for university personnel to live in the present and not the past in terms of engagement:

I think part of that as well is that people don't understand that times are different and that families are more involved now. I get a lot from both my colleagues here and from people that I meet out in the real world that, ‘Oh, well my parents weren't involved when I was in college.' You know, that's great, but it's different now. College is more expensive, and families are more connected. And it's just not parents being overbearing, students are calling them and asking them for questions or asking them their questions. I think that is a really big barrier in helping everybody understand that parents are here and we should just support them and welcome them and make them our partners.
Director B spoke to the need for university-wide recognition in the value of parent/family engagement:

*Then you have those of us that are in higher education, and more often than not, it is the academic side of the institution that's saying, 'Well, wait a minute. These students are 18-years-old, most of them, coming into this environment. They are adults. Why in God's name are we connecting with the family' I think the internal barrier is that there's not an across-the-board recognition that appropriate family engagement can be a positive reinforcement to student success.*

... *Across our internal audiences, help them to understand how it can be a positive, not in the day-to-day classroom experience. We do not want the family members calling the professors. That's not what it is. But if you create that loyal affinity to the institution, then ultimately, that's going to result in some very positive things in terms of reputation, in terms of donor support, in terms of referrals, all of those things. I don't know that we necessarily, across the board, recognize that.*

**Summary of Research Question Four**

Directors of PFPs face a variety of challenges in meeting parent and family needs. These challenges are due to a variety of factors, including modern universities having a varied student body made up of diverse demographics and life experiences, as opposed to American universities even a few decades ago which tended to have more homogenous student populations. PFP directors deal with the ongoing challenge of affordability and access for the parents/families of their students, as well as the demographic makeup of their parent associations and parent councils reflecting the diversity of their student body.
Directors also spoke to the challenges of communication and awareness. Parents/families and faculty/staff may not be able to take advantage of the services and resources PFPs can provide if they are not aware of the existence or purpose of such programs, or if they do not agree with the basic philosophy of parent/family engagement.

One ongoing challenge was the negative image of the *helicopter parent* perpetuated by the media. Parents and family members fearful of being labeled as helicopters may not seek out much needed services and resources from PFPs as a result of fear of being labeled negatively.

**Research Question Five: To what extent and how are highly recognized PFPs being resourced?**

QQ6 asked directors about their annual budget for PFPs and services (excluding salaries). All 27 respondents provided information; however, one did not provide a figure, but a verbal explanation (Table 18).

Table 18

*PFP Budgets*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Additional information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$2,500.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000.00*</td>
<td>*$10K from sell of ad space in P &amp; F Guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$19,142.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Amount</td>
<td>Additional information</td>
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<tr>
<td>$80,000.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000.00*</td>
<td>*Fee based program so can depend upon enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$140,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$170,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$213,000.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,000.00*</td>
<td>*Plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$260,000.00*</td>
<td>*Self-generated budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No figure provided*</td>
<td>*NA budget self-generated by charging for events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher intentionally did not identify a mean or even a mode with the budgets provided. The worth of such statistical measurements is not apparent for this group of figures. Roughly half of the programs had budgets under $75,000 and half above. The programs participating in this study were varied in terms of their institution’s size, missions, resources, and student bodies. It is reasonable, therefore, that their allotted budgets vary widely. It is worth noting that, during the interview process, the researcher only spoke with one director who conveyed having a larger budget for programming and services than always needed.

In QQ7 directors were asked to what extent they felt their PFPs were being adequately funded and supported (Table 19). Combined, the majority of directors felt they were both fully resourced and supported (25.93%), or somewhat supported with most needs being met (37.04%).
Table 19

Feeling Adequately Funded and Supported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (on par with other universities/other programs our size)</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat (most of our needs for funding and support are met)</td>
<td>37.04%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To a great extent (our program is fully resourced and supported)</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IQ5 asked directors to what extent and how are they being resourced. The taped interview responses to IQ5 were transcribed and imported into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis. Several directors spoke with gratitude toward their university for whatever amount of budgeting they were given, but at the same time some expressed concern for potential budget cuts in the future. Director D expressed concerns regarding her program’s budget considering pervasive budget cuts across the landscape of higher education:

*I am satisfied with our budget and staffing. I just pray that it stays that way.*

*Having a dedicated PFP office, two full-time administrators and six student staff members allows us to proactively plan and program. All of us in administration would love to have more money to do more things, but we must also be realistic. What are the primary needs of our parents? How do I inspire my staff and maximize our resources to meet those needs creatively? That’s my challenge every single day. And that is what keeps me going. Our office is funded through the Division of Student Affairs and we have an operating budget of about $90K*
(Family Weekend, Family Orientation plus all other services, events and programs). We must bring in the revenue for the Family Weekend, Siblings Day, _______, and ________. Only ________ is self-funded; all other events are partly supported by our budget.

Director B addressed the impact budget cuts had had on resourcing her program:

I started this department _____ years ago, okay? _____ years ago, the _________ has been very supportive of having this department . . . years later, this department is still not part of the permanent university budget even though I have submitted the budget protocol request for that year after year, after year. My budget this year is $ ________ because of across-the-board budget cuts. So how am I being resourced? I've got a hope and a prayer.

Budget concerns also arose for some directors with the issue of limited staffing.

Director F affirmed:

. . . We're only one full-time staff member. So we really don't have budget money to do things other than the $5,000 to $10,000 we raise every year through advertisements that go in some of our literature, whether that's electronic apps or printed materials.

Director I reflected upon her own program’s budgetary constraints, as well as a staffing decrease:

Okay, I'll talk that our operational budget without salary included is $12,000 a year. Which probably isn't the smallest one that you've heard of depending on the school. We have our family weekend budget. It's a self-supporting program and we charge folks a $40-per-family fee to register. I guess the math can be done. I'm
not going to do it right now off the top of my head. But we generally have between 1,500 and 1,800 families, depending on who we're playing in football that weekend, that register. It ranges but that's generally how we support family weekend. Sometimes we're able to do a few other things, if we budget carefully and well, with the residual funding from that. As far as human resources, one full-time and one part-time staff member. I'm the full-time staff member and I have a 27-hour per week office coordinator. That has actually decreased in the past two years.

IQ8 asked directors what university supports you would suggest for helping PFPs to more effectively engage parents and families. The taped interview responses to IQ8 were transcribed and imported into NVivo 11 software for coding and analysis. Note: fuller responses to IQ8 are also included in Chapter V.

Five of the 10 directors brought up issues of budget and/or staffing. Directors also addressed budgeting about their institution/program charging for family weekends, etc., and how that impacted participation from lower SES families. Addressing the issue of staffing, Director G stated:

I know that I've had a lot of fun the last ___ years really building this program and being creative, but I even put it in my annual report this year that I'm reaching a point where it's going to be maintaining and not growth until I get more resources because I can only do so much as one person.

Director E addressed affordability and the impact upon parent/family participation:

. . . Orientation for parents, but it's about I think $65 or $70 now. And so that $70, you need some more money to fund people's needs, the cost that to do that.
We’ve got to figure out a way to communicate with people that one year or make it more available and easier for others to come.

As was evident in the responses, several directors discussed the importance of “buy in” at various levels of the university and the importance of the support that results from buy in to the effectiveness of having a robust PFP. Director A described the importance of the support he received:

Our department is very supported in the division and throughout campus. A lot of people like to partner with us. So it has really worked out really well for us here at ________. And I've been very fortunate to have administrators and hire my supervisors that really understand family engagement, and understand, and want parents to be involved.

Leadership support also was reported by Director C:

. . . Something we're blessed to have here is the recognition and then full support of the very top leadership of the president's office because they understand the importance of families being engaged on campus. And that goes from engaging with the parents' council because that's also a fundraising-type arm, to speaking to parents at all kinds of different events, during family weekends, to this year they're doing a-- our president and his wife, the university ambassador, are doing a-- every Sunday, they make themselves available _______ students. This year they're doing that on Family Weekend. They're like, 'Sure, that's great. Our entire day is booked, but we'll take an hour and a half out of our day to _______ with parents because we understand what it means to engage with them.' Having that
buy in and support, whether financially or not, from the very top of the institution I think is really important.

Director B expressed a desire for more acknowledgement from the top as to the value of parent/family engagement:

*I think that there needs to be, at least in my perspective here at ________, is a university-wide acknowledgment starting at the top, that family engagement, not the department of family engagement, but engaging families is as important as engaging the students from the perspective to the incoming to the current population and that that broad message across the university needs to be one of inclusivity, so it's not just parents anymore; it's parents and families or families because so few of our students come from that traditional mom and dad, two-parent family in this day and age. They're coming from all different kinds of family constellations. And I'm constantly going around to colleagues that are presenting, and they're saying, ‘Parents, parents, parents,’ but I'm saying, ‘No, no, no, no, no. Please, please. Parents and families.’ Be inclusive because that's where our students are coming from. So I just think that broad message of how we perceive families in the higher education process and then how we treat them.

More consistency.

Connected to the idea of the importance of university leadership buy in is the origin as to why a given university would have a dedicated PFP in the first place. QQ8 stated, “There are several beliefs about parents/families that drive university leaders to have a dedicated Parent/Family Program. To what extent is each of the following an important driver to your university leadership?” The primary reason university
leadership creates PFPs, according to the directors, is so that parent/families can help guide students to campus resources (Table 20). Other reasons include the belief on the part of university leadership that PFP is an easier way for the university to communicate with parents and families. Additionally, a PFP can help manage parent/family expectations.

Table 20

*Drivers for Dedicated PFP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PFP is an easier way for university to communicate with parents/families</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>77.78%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFP is helpful in dealing with overzealous parents/families</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>51.85%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFP can help manage parent/family expectations</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>59.26%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFP can be especially beneficial to families of first generation students</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40.74%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/families can be turned into donors</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40.74%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/families, if aware of campus resources, can help guide students to them</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>85.19%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

132 continued
Table 20

*Drivers for Dedicated PFP (continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A dedicated PFP helps our university be competitive in the educational marketplace</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Research Question Five**

The program budgets for programming and services reported by the directors varied, as well as the concept of “budget” itself. With the lowest budget reported as $2,500 to the highest of $260,000, there is wide discrepancy in the field of financial resources for this group of highly recognized PFPs. Many programs do not have a conventional, dedicated, same line item in their university’s budget for programming and services but, instead, rely upon revenue from various sources. Some programs rely on fees generated by orientation registration, and/or fees from participation in family weekend, while some rely on the sale of ads in publications, etc. to fund the programming and services they offer.

Regardless of the origin of the revenue they rely upon to run their program, originated, 63% of the respondents believed their programs were either fully resourced and supported, or that they were somewhat supported with most of their needs being resourced and supported. An additional 22% believed their funding and support was on par with other universities/other programs their size. It is important to remember that these respondents are directors of some highly recognized programs, and it would be
interesting to contrast their beliefs about their levels of funding and support with PFPs at large.

Despite many respondents in this study’s apparent relative satisfaction with their funding and support, that is not to say money and the impact of finances were not on the minds of directors. In the nine director interviews over the course of eight questions, the word “money” was used 33 times. Several directors talked of a desire for more money to offer more programming and services, or to pay for more much needed staffing. Directors also talked of money in terms of affordability for parents/families. The impact of affordability was a theme that wove itself throughout many of the write-in survey questions, as well as several of the interview questions. Many directors were concerned with the fees their programs charged for parent orientation, family weekend, etc., and the impact such expense had on parent/family participation and engagement.

**Summary**

This study examined what a selected group of highly recognized parent/family engagement programs are currently doing. This study attempted to learn what services and programs these PFPs were offering, how they were being resources and supported and, as leaders in the field, what they were doing that was innovative or unique. The study also examined what and how they were assessing their work, and how they were implementing what they learned from their assessments. Finally, the study identified challenges and barriers the directors identified as obstacles to ever more expansive parent/family engagement.

An area of concern apparent in this study included assessment. While PFPs are doing a great deal of assessment, a vital piece that appeared to be missing was as one
director stated, “Meaningfully measure correlation between the family engagement and student success.” While research in the field supports family engagement supporting student success, the researcher believes that many directors would like an assessment they could implement at their own institutions that showed specifically and quantifiably how their parent/family engagement was impacting the success of their student body.

The primary focus for all the respondents to the questionnaire, and of the 10 directors interviewed, was how, by effectively serving parents/families, the individual student could be better served. How, by supporting and educating their parents/families, the individual student could then be more effectively supported by the institution. Based upon the results of this study, Chapter v provides a conclusion and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I think we have to start to kind of reframe the ways we're communicating with families, first generation and non-first generation, on their terms and their needs. More focus on them and less on us. . . Now, I think we need to see that we're in this together with students and families--Director F

Background for Study

Parent and family engagement programs are based upon the philosophical belief that parents and families of college students are important stakeholders within the world of higher education, and there are benefits from that familial involvement, especially within the context of the modern college experience (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015). Many institutions realize that parents/families can play an important role in student retention by acting as an advocate for the student continuing enrollment, provided the university communicates the right messages effectively with them (Noel-Levitz, 2011).

Parents/Families as Partners

Even if a given university could communicate effectively with parents/families their messaging as to available resources for students, one may question how influential a parent’s advice might be to a college student. The answer would appear to be quite influential. The 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement reported that students talked most frequently about academic performance with their fathers. With their mothers, college students discussed academic matters as well as personal and family matters. The survey reported that 75% of college students followed the advice of a parent or guardian. The logical extension of this and other current research for higher education is that parents/families can and should become engaged partners in their own student’s success.
Purpose and Significance of Research Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to unpack more of the detail behind the work and the resourcing of some highly recognized PFPs. The researcher sought to learn what these specific PFPs were doing, how they were doing it, how they were organized and resourced, and how they were going about assessment. In addition to the many successes and the positive resources and services these programs have provided to parents/families, the researcher also wanted to explore challenges and barriers to family engagement as identified by the directors. The researcher hoped this study could accomplish multiple goals. First, to help validate the worth of the work that robust PFPs do. Second, to convince perhaps reluctant university leaders in times of challenging budgets to nevertheless fully resource and commit to effective parent/family engagement. Finally, to identify and explore the work of these programs as real-life, working examples of best practices within the field. To those collective ends, the following five research questions were explored in this study:

1. What are the organizational and operational structures of highly recognized PFPs?
2. What are the most innovative events/programming/services that highly recognized PFPs offer?
3. What assessments are being used with PFP: what is being measured, what outcomes are being measured, and what is being learned?
4. What are the greatest challenges in meeting parent/family needs?
5. To what extent and how are highly recognized PFPs being resourced?
Methodology

The number of PFPs has continued to grow nationwide, fueled in part by the realization of the potential positive role in student success that parents/families can have. Growth in the number of programs also was reflected in the rapid growth within the premier professional organization for the field. AHEPPP was formed in 2008 with nine member institutions, quickly growing to 49 members after one year. Today, the organization has over 180 college and university members (AHEPPP, 2017).

Population

Many of the institutions participating in this study were affiliated with AHEPPP in that their institution was a founding member, their program was a professional award winner, or their program was recommended for inclusion by AHEPPP Journal editor, Founding Board Director, Board of Director Emerita, and nationally recognized parent and family engagement expert, Marjorie Savage. Thirty-four schools were initially solicited to participate in this study and were sent the study’s questionnaire.

Instrumentation

The study consisted of two phases. In the first phase, individualized Qualtrics links for the questionnaire were emailed to each of the 34 selected parent/family engagement program directors. In the end, 27 directors completed the questionnaire. The last question invited program directors to participate in phone interviews. Twenty-one directors volunteered, and 11 were randomly selected by the researcher. Ultimately, 10 directors were able to be contacted and interviewed.

The interviews consisted of eight questions (see Appendix E), which asked directors to describe various aspects of their own programs (organizational and operation...
structure, resourcing, assessment, etc.). The interview also contained questions about barriers to parent family engagement, university supports, challenges, etc.

**Data Analysis**

Qualtrics software provided analytics for the finite questionnaire items. The 12 open-ended questionnaire responses from Qualtrics were migrated to NVivo 11 software. The researcher used NVivo 11 software to code and group responses into themes or nodes. The interview responses were transcribed from digital audio recording files. NVivo 11 software was also used with the interview transcripts as responses were coded and grouped into nodes. In the end, NVivo11 software was used to sort, analyze, and code a total of 162 open-ended question responses and 80 interview question responses.

With each group of responses, the researcher began by running simple word frequency, followed by text analyzes in the NVivo11 program. NVivo 11 has the capability to search and identify words, forms of words, synonyms, and a variety of other analyses based upon the researcher’s selection of options within the software. Using a variety of NVivo 11’s built-in analytical abilities (word/text analysis, organizational “trees,” word clouds, etc.), the researcher was able to begin each analysis with a clear picture of emerging common themes with each response item and across response items. The researcher created nodes within groups of response items and across response items.

**Role of the Study within the Field**

In this exploratory study, selected PFP directors answered questions concerning what they are doing, how they are doing it, and what they are learning in the process. There has been excellent research on the field at large, with a biannual survey of parent and family programs conducted since 2003. *The National Survey of College and*
*University Parent Programs* provides parent/family engagement researchers data and insightful analysis for the national landscape.

To the researcher’s knowledge, this may be the first study conducted to explore a selected group of highly recognized PFPs. The researcher began with a loose curiosity as to what some highly recognized programs were doing. That curiosity grew into desire to focus the research lens on a selected group and to determine how they were organized, resourced, offering services, and assessing their work. In short, this exploratory study asked 27 directors of highly recognized parent and family engagement programs to reflect upon their own programs as well as the field at large.

This study is timely for numerous reasons, including what appears to be a trend of colleges and universities steadily supporting and staffing PFPs increasingly over time (Savage & Petree, 2015). As other universities consider increased support for their PFPs, they can use the expertise provided by these directors. By studying the programs within this study, other universities that hopefully consider increased support for their PFPs can use the expertise provided by these directors.

**Limitations**

This study was based upon a small specifically selected group of parent/family engagement programs. The programs were selected based upon their role in the field’s premiere professional organization and by the recommendation of a national expert in parent/family engagement. While these programs are all highly recognized in the field, their selection was subjective and not inclusive of all outstanding parent/family engagement programs. To the researcher’s knowledge, there is no existing ranking system objectively identifying “best” parent/family engagement programs in the country.
Both the questionnaire and the interview relied upon self-disclosure by the selected PFP directors, and there was no means to validate their responses externally.

The following portion of the study contains discussion of findings, two sets of implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a summary.

**Discussion of Findings**

This section briefly discusses the implications for each of the five research questions. The findings for each are fully articulated as well as summarized in Chapter IV.

**Research Question One: What are the organizational and operational structures of the highly recognized PFPs?**

Most PFPs in this study were under Student Affairs and reported either to the Dean of Students or a Student Affairs administrator. Many of the PFPs in this study (and nationwide) are small “shops” often consisting of one or two full-time employees—meaning individuals who do not have their time split between parent and family engagement and another program or department. Some PFPs are robustly staffed with full-time and part-time professional staff, as well as seasonal undergraduate and graduate workers, but that was not the norm for the participants in this study, nor the norm nationwide for PFPs at large.

While many of the individuals in this study accomplish Herculean tasks and serve both their programs and their universities exceptionally well on their own, should they be on their own? Given the current research that supports the positive impact of parent/family engagement upon student success, is the allocation of one full-time individual enough? Realistic to the job at hand? As many directors expressed in this
study, their current and future concerns in looking to meet the needs of historically underserved populations—can one person do all the job requires, and truly be expected to be effective in developing/implementing new strategies to reach underserved populations?

**Research Question Two: What are the most innovative events/programming/services that highly recognized PFPs offer?**

When asked to identify both “most innovative” and in a separate question “most important in supporting student success,” directors did not confine themselves to single events or services but, instead, frequently spoke and/or wrote about multiple services and programs. Directors reported parent orientation as being the most effective service in terms of supporting student success. Communication in terms of both emails and e-newsletters was listed at the next most important in supporting student success.

In response to IQ2, many directors began by saying, “I don’t know how ‘innovative’ this is, but one important (or impactful) thing we do is . . .” Many of their programs and services they went on to describe were not necessarily innovative in their novelty or uniqueness. The innovation was in both the number of parents/family members reached combined with the level of excellence in the execution of the program or the service.

**Research Question Three: What assessments are being used with PFP: what is being measured, what outcomes are being measured, and what is being learned?**

PFPs in this study reported using a variety of assessments including annual or biannual parent surveys, post-event satisfaction type surveys, online question of the month inquires, phone logs of parent questions/concerns, and other forms of feedback.
The two most popular types of assessment were annual or biannual surveys emailed to parents/families, and specific post-event satisfaction surveys. Directors reported using data gained from both of these forms of assessment to make direct and immediate modifications to their present events and services, as well as using data to shape plans for future offerings.

Three directors spoke specifically to a need for more learning outcome-based assessment for their programs. This desire for more leaning-based outcome assessments for families also was expressed by several directors. One director noted, in spite of the numerous research studies which support the theory of family engagement and student success, she wanted to be able at her institution to “meaningfully measure correlation between the family engagement and student success.” As assessment that could be used to do that at each institution, and/or across multiple institutions, it would be of tremendous value to parent/family engagement personnel nationwide.

The field at large seemed to have a collective desire for more assessment. The National Survey of College and University Parent Programs (Savage & Petree, 2015) discussed the issue of assessment, noting a decline from 60% in 2013 of respondents, indicating they used assessment in decision making for their program, to 42% in 2015. The survey posed the question, “What might make it easier for parent/family staff to conduct and use assessment?” The answer for the field at large, and for the directors in this study desirous of more assessment, appeared to be manpower support from their institutions.

CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs (2015) Part 12 Assessment states, “PFP must have access to adequate fiscal, human, professional
development, and technological resources to develop and implement assessment plans” (p. 383). The directors in this study all valued assessment and realized its worth to their programs. The challenge for some in their desire to do more assessment, or to analyze the data they had, was the adequate human resources to accomplish the task.

As the field continues to expand, and as universities hopefully increase support for their PFPs in conducting more comprehensive and complex assessment, there likely will be more sharing of assessment instruments among directors. In the AHEPPP 2020 Strategic Plan (2015), research and assessment are listed as the fourth goal. Objectives included expanding research in the field, as well as assessing and communicating “the impact of PFPs at higher education institutions” (n.p.). As one of its objectives, AHEPPP is committed to serving as a clearinghouse for parent/family engagement research/assessment and to “identify existing assessment tools and make them accessible to our members.”

**Research Question Four: What are the greatest challenges faced in meeting parent/family needs?**

The challenges most discussed by directors were their attempt to reach historically underserved families and limited resources. Directors frequently addressed the challenge of attempting to meet parent/family needs with limited budgets and staffing. A recurring theme was the impact of affordability to access. Directors lamented the fact that many of their students’ families cannot afford the fees often associated with attending either or both family orientation or family weekend. Because they cannot attend such events, as one director stated, “They miss out on the opportunity to connect with our office as well as other campus resources.” As another director noted regarding
affordability and its impact upon access, the families most often impacted are from historically underserved populations and they are the ones “that need us the most.”

Another challenge took the form of a misunderstanding that impacts the field, the reluctance of some university and staff to engage with parents/families citing FERPA concerns. Adherence to FERPA did not prevent the directors in the study from running highly recognized parent/family engagement programs. A few directors commented upon FERPA in both their open-ended survey responses as well as in the interview questions. As one director wrote:

_We encourage faculty and staff to interact with parents and families rather than put up the ‘FERPA wall.’ We work to educate them about the realities of FERPA and that it doesn't mean they can't talk to parents and families. Most often, family members are calling out of lack of knowledge/info as well as concern for their student, and they often just need someone to listen. We also let faculty and staff know that our office is here to support them._

**Research Question Five: To what extent and how are highly recognized PFPs being resourced?**

As the universities in this study were varied, so were their funding models. Some programs had large dedicated line items in budgets; others much smaller. Some programs were more revenue dependent than others, relying upon revenue from ad sales in publications that were distributed to families, or in ticket sales or fees from family weekends, family orientation, fees, etc. Several directors spoke to problems they saw with charging individuals to participate in both parent orientation and family weekend.
Directors realized that any fee charged was cost prohibitive for some families, which had a direct impact upon equity, diversity and access.

The questionnaire revealed that 37% of the directors felt their program was “somewhat supported” with most of their needs being met, while 26% reported their programs were “to a great extent” being fully resourced and supported. Twenty-two percent believed their programs were supported on “average,” meaning on par with other universities their size, while 15% felt their programs were supported “very little” or “not at all.”

These highly recognized programs not only utilize best practices in the field, but helped to create, write, and codify those best practices into existence. It appeared that, even with their history of experience, excellence and leadership in the field, consistent funding and support from their parent institutions should be improved.

**Implications for Practice--Part One**

The findings from this exploratory study may motivate university leaders into analyzing their own institution’s parent/family engagement. What follows are three suggestions for endeavors university leaders could undertake immediately that do not require additional funding or personnel. These relatively simple practical suggestions focus on university leaders moving their institutions toward adopting and practicing parent/family engagement philosophies more in line with *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Parent and Family Programs* best practices in the field.
Implication One: Eliminate Even the Causal Usage of the Term *Helicopter Parent*

Several directors in this study expressed the strong desire to eliminate *helicopter parent* from both the popular lexicon and certainly the argot of university faculty and staff. As Director G stated:

*I think the term, helicopter parent, as I'm sure you've heard and believed, is just so awful. It makes people not want to call and not want to be involved when they should be, or it makes my colleagues scared to get a call from the parent. . . That is not the portrayal we want of our college parents because they're very helpful. They're an important resource for us. They're a great partner.*

One of the goals of effective parent and family engagement is for students and their families to “develop lifelong affinity for the institution and its initiatives” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015, p. 377). That process of building an affinity for an institution cannot begin until everyone at the institution understands what the term *parent/family engagement* means, and moreover works to dispel any institutional mythology which gives *parent/family engagement* negative connotations.

University leadership can frame discussions addressing exactly what *parent and family engagement* will be for their campus and communicate that vision to all stakeholders, including the university’s faculty and staff. Moreover, leaders can use the *helicopter parent* terminology conversation to directly address any negative misconceptions associated with parent and family engagement in higher education.
Implication Two: Campus Culture and Parent/Family Engagement

University leaders can evaluate the impact of their campus culture upon their parent/family engagement efforts. Campus culture is crucial to the success of parent/family engagement. Many directors within this study attributed their successes to both supportive leadership and supportive colleagues in other departments, a campus culture reflecting a willingness to partner, assist, and validate the work of their PFP. That is not to say directors did not encounter naysayers within their institutions who wished to close the door to parents/families; however, overall many directors felt, at least to some extent, supported by the campus culture of their universities. Education of faculty and staff as to the value of parent/family engagement was a vital component of creating a supportive campus culture.

At any university, the faculty’s own parents may or may not have attended an orientation, moved them to campus, kept up with their college experience, etc. Furthermore, the frequency and extent they communicated with their families in a pre-cell phone age was profoundly different. Therefore, many will need to be coached in order to fully understand the differences in the relationship current students have with their parents/families, and to then be open to the existing research that supports the positive value of parent/family engagement in higher education.

Implication Three: Parents/Families as Partners in Student Success

Along with effective communication, university leaders can initiate conversations/professional development aimed at honestly viewing parents/families as partners in student success promoting true engagement. Within the literature and from
the directors’ responses, viewing parents/families as partners who, as one director wrote, “Ultimately know their students best,” is vital for effective engagement. The more aware parents/families are of resources, the better they can partner with universities in promoting their student’s success. Directors talked extensively as to the benefits of partnering with families. University leadership would do well to follow the family partnering philosophy as described by Director F in his program:

We really emphasize that we're here in partnership with families to do things if it helps them. One is we provide information or education about how to navigate the campus, so they can support their students in that way. If we don't have answers to questions that they either send us via email, or by phone, or in person, we refer them to whoever else on campus could provide those correct answers, or we have that office touch base with the family. We provide what we call coaching, and that is just really non-judgmental perspective if families have questions about maybe something their student is going through, or they themselves with the transition to college, or with aspects of college. . .

We're very clear that we're not an office that "manages" families. No, it's really partnering. I mean, we really value the fact that whatever they've done as a family for their student to be here, and however their student defines family, we need to honor that.

Our constant challenge are the ways that we make sure that we're reaching out to all families across identities, and across ways of operating. Some families are more of an individualistic perspective on one end of the continuum, whereas there are families that are much more collectivist on the other end of the continuum.
Some students, for them, they define their educational experience by really leveraging their family to be involved in the decision making. And so, those negative stereotypes about parents and families? We just don't do any of that.

In partnering with parents/families, a university needs to ensure that in all its publications, on all its webpages, in all its materials, that the terminology used is “parents and families” and not just “parents.” Every webpage tab, every link, everything formerly labeled “parents,” should be changed to reflect the current reality of the lived experience of today’s undergraduates, using instead “parents and families.”

Implications for Practice Part Two--Directors’ Voices

Commentary on IQ 8

The directors’ responses to all the interview questions provided a great deal of rich material for this study. The final interview question asked directors: “What university supports would you suggest for helping PFPs to more effectively engage parents and families?” The researcher believes that abbreviated responses to this question should be included in this chapter of the study for the benefit of all potential parent/family engagement stakeholders. Some portions have been previously referenced, however, the researcher made the decision to include each of the director’s responses--regardless whether a portion had been previously referenced in the study.

Director A

I think from the beginning, just letting parent and family members know that this is an office, or a department, or someone that they can call if they have a random question, or that they can just simply send an email. I think just being upfront from the beginning, we understand that this is going to be a transition for your
student and you, and we want to make sure that we can get your questions answered and support you . . .

We're asking them literally to stop doing everything and anything for their student. That's impossible for them to do. That's one of the things that when I meet with staff and whenever we do presentations to faculty, ‘Guys, just think about it. We're asking these parents to give up everything that they know with their kid for the past 18 years. That is hard to do and almost impossible. And so why not be a resource and support them and let our office do that?’

. . . Our department is very supported in the division and throughout campus. A lot of people like to partner with us. . . I've been very fortunate to have administrators and my supervisors that really understand family engagement, and understand, and want parents to be involved. But we're going to direct that energy in a way that's supporting the university in a different way, and not necessarily on top of your student the whole time.

Director B

I think that there needs to be, at least in my perspective here at ____________ is a university-wide acknowledgment starting at the top, that family engagement, not the department of family engagement, but engaging families is as important as engaging the students from the perspective, to the incoming, to the current population and that that broad message across the university needs to be one of inclusivity.
It's not just parents anymore; it is ‘parents and families’ or ‘families’ because so few of our students come from that traditional mom and dad, two-parent family in this day and age. They're coming from all different kinds of family constellations. . . ‘Parents and families’, be inclusive because that's where our students are coming from. I just think that broad message of how we perceive families in the higher education process and then how we treat them - - more consistency.

Director C

The ones that I see-- the biggest things right now . . . health and wellness, so your health and counselling and wellness offices. Our places, whether or not they're inside of student affairs or not. Then your career office because it's something that's so vital and at the forefront of families' minds, especially if they're investing a fair amount of blood, sweat, tears, and money in our student being here. Then the piece that I'm still working on, and I think are vitally important, but I know that we're still working on is academic partnerships . . . and advising [partnerships] . . . I think those are two pieces that are extremely important.

Last, something we're blessed to have here is the recognition and then full support of the very top leadership of the president's office because they understand the importance of families being engaged on campus. That goes from engaging with the parents' council because that's also a fundraising-type arm, to speaking to parents at all kinds of different events, during family weekends . . . having that buy in and support, whether financially or not, from the very top of the institution I think is really important.
Director D

1. Dedicate a larger budget for PFPs. Supporting families means supporting students. 2. Having a dedicated PFP office is money well spent. Proactively communicating with and educating families from the admission process to their student graduation is important and takes effort and expertise of professionals. Planning a comprehensive communication strategy with families rather than farming out “parent tasks” to different staff members/offices is a wise strategy. 3. Ask PFP office to present professional development sessions to departments around our campus to educate administrators and faculty about our resources but also about our parents. 4. Collaborate with faculty on grants and research.

Director E

I think we’re going to have to continue to be high tech in how we reach them with our story. . . How do we really reach the people that don’t come [to orientation]? . . . We really need a library of different topics and subjects that would help the people that don’t have orientation. How do we reach them?

. . . But we really need a better online presence, a library for people to go and find out from different short subjects . . . Podcasts that they can begin to understand on their own time, so it’s not just on our terms. One of the problems we had with all our orientation sessions are they were Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Obviously, it's a hard to connect, they're going to have to take off from work at least to do that and I think that's the challenge. Also the cost [fee parents/families pay to attend orientation]. We've got to figure out a way to
communicate with people that one year or make it more available and easier for others to come.

Director F

I think something that we're trying to do . . . Is [asking] how are we doing more to not just expect families to come here? How do we do more to meet them where they're at in their communities and their homes? And then how do we do more in different languages and really resource that so it's not just English language based?

I do think that we're starting to see that it's safer to feel that more likely than not, most families, regardless of socioeconomic status will have a smartphone. We're starting to see that gap close. Before they won't even have a desktop computer at home, or a laptop. Most families will have access to a smartphone. It is how we are leveraging that technology in different languages and in messaging and ways that speaks to first-gen and non-first-gen families.

. . . And now I think we need to see that we're in this together with students and families. So that's money. And that's a reframe. We have to really reframe how we do things. Oh well, I think that's really exciting for people I work with here and others. I mean, we just-- we're not perfect. We've got a lot to work on. I think if we're speaking ideally, which sometimes can sound like a utopia, we just have to own the frames we've operated from, of predominantly white, upper, middle-class, male, heterosexual on down the line model . . .

But our growingly diverse student and family population's lack of money going to higher education, I think we have to be prepared. We have to change, and
actually, we will be stronger for it. But then how do we communicate to all families so that folks feel included . . . Younger people, I think, are teaching us the importance of meeting individuals where they're at and not just generalizing the cross identity. When we start to do things that folks aren't used to, especially those with privileged identities, how do we challenge and support them through it without them feeling like they're being demeaned or ostracized in some way. But also, the reality is if we want the society to be more inclusive, we've got to recognize privilege and dismantle it. But those are tough things. . . We're going to continue to work on that.

Director G

I know that I've had a lot of fun the last ____ years really building this program and being creative, but I even put it in my annual report this year that I'm reaching a point where it's going to be maintaining and not growth until I get more resources, because I can only do so much as one person.

I am very lucky that I do have support from above. My senior VP . . . is very supportive . . . other administration, it's a little bit-- we don't know, we know we just had a new president . . . I have not met him yet, so I don't know what his feelings about parents are. We will see . . . having other staff and faculty understand that this is what we're doing. I am very lucky.

Director H

I think just making sure there's always a place at the table for us, and realizing kind of what I just said, to know that if you engage parents properly, and you invite them to the table, and you work with them, they can be some of your
greatest allies. No matter what department you work in, no matter whether it's just a classroom, whether it's any of our student affairs initiatives. But knowing that parents are a big piece of this, and if we engage them properly, they are really going to help us do what we want to do. I think being able to say, ‘Hey, do we have somebody that can come and represent our parent voice at the table?’ I think that that would really help.

Director I

In our particular case, I think at least one more body would be helpful. I mean, we used to be two full-time and one part-time staff up until a couple of years ago. I think that that certainly would be helpful in sharing the load. But I think beyond that is that there has to be some realization that the Parents Office in our case, parent family programs in general, the realization that we're helping everyone by engaging the parents, or we're making less traffic for other people. We're kind of directing that in one direction.

We have a lot of skill in dealing with whether it be crisis or challenging circumstances. We're problem solvers by nature, and understanding what a benefit the program can be across the campus, but that it goes both ways. So that when, for instance, the Parents Office has programming on campus or we're providing some kind of service, it would be helpful if others beyond the division in which they resided - which I deal with a lot of apart from my immediate colleagues - but from around campus. Having more buy-in or support and volunteers, or in people who are interested or want to contribute to some kind of programming or to the e-newsletter or whatever that might be.
We're improving, but as I said, we're going to do a PR campaign because there are some people on campus who don't even know we exist. I think, I said this to our new senior VP last week, we're the original one-stop shop. We're folks in this office who don't just transfer a parent around campus, who don't not take what their need as seriously. We problem solve with them. We talk it through, and we find a way to follow-up with them about things if we're not sure so that they're not feeling like, 'Nobody cares about me.' We can really, really impact the community in general and make it a really positive place to be just by doing some really simple things.

Really, it's simple. It's a philosophy. Don't make this person go through 10 yards of red tape when, really, the answer is very simple. It's just if somebody takes a few minutes to listen to what they need. I guess, that doesn't really necessarily mean a lot of extra resources. It's just could you all have the same philosophy or could you support that, and respond in a timely way if we're trying to get someone an answer or whatever that might be.

Director J

I think, just in general, they could extend partnerships more often. For example, athletics does their own separate orientation, and I think they could invite us in to meet the parents and be a part of that relationship. Or in any programming, attach our office to it.

There's so many free ways to be helping us reach parents, and that's by advertising our things that we're doing. We're trying to do a huge push with the university social media because I think our Facebook has a couple of hundred
people looking at it, and we have ________ thousand students. So help us get the
word out that we exist, and that’s a very easy way that they could help us engage
parents and families. We have good support like that.

We're working with them [Orientation], so we hand out a paper form, a contact
form, and have them fill it out while they're at orientation. However, instead of
keying in every bit of that . . . I called over to orientation and said, ‘Y'all have got
to be capturing some of this information when they apply.’ . . . they said, ‘Oh,
yeah. Sure. We are.’ I ask, ‘Well, can you send me the spreadsheet [that?]
everybody registered for orientation?’ and then I format it how I need it, and then
we start with that.

We're not keying in all of that data. It's still not the most ideal way to do it, but it
is a more accurate and efficient way to do it. They're good about sharing . . .
They're good about partnering with us on that stuff. But yes, I could see where
there might be some hesitance on the part of other organizations to share
information with folks in their own university, because we definitely run into that
sometimes.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

Over the course of this exploratory study, several areas were touched on that
further research could explore more fully. Studies in these areas could help support the
need for fully supported and fully resourced comprehensive parent/family engagement
programs.
**Recommendation One: Role of Campus Partnerships and PFPs**

Future research could identify the most common campus partners for PFPs, as well as explore the nature of the partnership. Future research also could analyze the impact of the partnerships upon PFPs effectiveness.

**Recommendation Two: Diversity, Equity and Access**

Future research resulting in practical ways to increase diversity, equity, and access for all forms of parent/family engagement, including those surrounding issues of affordability and language barriers, would be valuable to the field.

**Recommendation Three: Impact of Parent/Family Engagement upon Student Success**

Future research with a large population that could directly measure the wide scale impact of parent/family engagement upon college student success would have a tremendous impact upon the field.

**Summary**

As stated in Chapter I, parent and family engagement has been a “hot” topic in education over the past 15 years (Savage & Petree, 2015). Most universities currently offer some form of parent/family engagement. This exploratory study answered questions related to highly recognized PFPs and the ways in which they were organized, operated, and resourced; undertook innovative events and services; used and learned from assessment; and faced challenges. This study is timely in that it is based upon the perspectives and expertise of 27 directors of highly recognized PFPs.

The 27 programs in this study are following best practices for the field, as outlined by the *CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education for Parent/Family*
Programs; however, two areas are impacting future potential: assessment and affordability. Findings of this study indicate that many directors use assessments extensively (often post-event satisfaction type), but many have the desire for different types of assessments. Finally, the study indicates that directors are concerned with issues of affordability and its impact upon access.

The study revealed a desire for additional assessment that measures family learning outcomes. Directors indicated that they are doing a great deal of assessing, particularly of the post-event/parent family satisfaction type. Directors, however, are seeking assessment instruments which would “meaningfully measure correlation between family engagement and student success” (Director D). Larger, more complex assessment of the correlation between family engagement and student success would shape the future of the field and provide data for directors advocating for additional resources with university leadership.

This study also revealed the impact of money, both upon the events and services PFPs can offer as well as families’ ability to afford/access those resources. Programs that rely primarily on self-funding through fee-based offerings appear to present a barrier to resources and engagement for families who cannot afford to participate. The researcher concluded that resourcing for the program itself, and affordability of services for families, had an impact upon PFPs and their ability to meet best practices to the fullest extent.

Second to financial issues surrounding resourcing and affordability is the impact of the directors themselves upon the work and the success of their programs. Although this study did not measure the impact of individual directors upon their own programs, the researcher observed that the director of any given PFP has a tremendous impact upon
the program itself. As stated earlier, PFPs often are “small shops,” frequently with one or two individuals undertaking parent/family engagement for an entire institution.

This study explored the work of 27 highly recognized parent/family engagement programs that truly view parents/families as partners in student success. All the participating directors were extremely forthright in their assessment of their own programs, both their successes and areas in which they felt their programs could improve.
REFERENCES


National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). Graduation rates of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by


APPENDIX A

Initial “Best Practices” for Parent and Family Programs

According to Wartman and Savage (2008), the Office of New Student Orientation and Parent Programs at Northeastern University surveyed 60 colleges and universities in the late 1990s seeking to identify “best practices” in the field. That original list of best practices was modified at the 2007 Administrators Promoting Parent Involvement conference and follows:

- A clearly written mission statement
- Central coordination of campus events for parents and families
- A parents’ orientation program for parents of incoming students, reflecting the parental perspective on information offered at student orientation
- Multiple campus events for parents, including but not limited to parents and families weekends and move-in events
- Other educational and social events and programs unique to the institution
- A central, personal contact point for parents with phone number and email address
- An active and current web site
- An active parents’ association or active parents’ council or advisory board
- Outgoing publications such as newsletters, bulletins, and e-newsletters
- A campus resource guide or handbook for parents
- Special funds with parent input for use by funds-development programs, with fees or dues designated for support of student scholarships or other projects or services
- A defined and recurring assessment process to measure use of, satisfaction with and success of programs and services. (p. 80)
APPENDIX B

CAS Parent and Family Program Standards 2015

Part 1. MISSION

The mission of Parent and Family Programs (PFP) is to build collaboration between parents and families and the institution for the common goals of student learning, development, and success.

PFP must develop, disseminate, implement, and regularly review their missions, which must be consistent with the mission of the institution and with applicable professional standards. The mission must be appropriate for the institution's students and other constituents. Mission statements must reference student learning and development. Inherent in the mission statement should be a vision for students and their families to develop lifelong affinity for the institution and its initiatives.

Part 2. PROGRAM

To achieve their mission, Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must contribute to

- students' formal education, which includes both the curriculum and the co-curriculum
- student progression and timely completion of educational goals
- preparation of students for their careers, citizenship, and lives
- student learning and development

To contribute to student learning and development, PFP must

- identify relevant and desirable student learning and development outcomes
- articulate how the student learning and development outcomes align with the six CAS student learning and development domains and related dimensions
• assess relevant and desirable student learning and development
• provide evidence of impact on outcomes
• articulate contributions to or support of student learning and development in the domains not specifically assessed
• use evidence gathered to create strategies for improvement of programs and services

STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT DOMAINS AND DIMENSIONS

Domain: knowledge acquisition, integration, construction, and application
  • Dimensions: understanding knowledge from a range of disciplines; connecting knowledge to other knowledge, ideas, and experiences; constructing knowledge; and relating knowledge to daily life

Domain: cognitive complexity
  • Dimensions: critical thinking, reflective thinking, effective reasoning, and creativity

Domain: intrapersonal development
  • Dimensions: realistic self-appraisal, self-understanding, and self-respect; identity development; commitment to ethics and integrity; and spiritual awareness

Domain: interpersonal competence
  • Dimensions: meaningful relationships, interdependence, collaboration, and effective leadership

Domain: humanitarianism and civic engagement
  • Dimensions: understanding and appreciation of cultural and human differences, social responsibility, global perspective, and sense of civic responsibility
Domain: practical competence

- Dimensions: pursuing goals, communicating effectively, technical competence, managing personal affairs, managing career development, demonstrating professionalism, maintaining health and wellness, and living a purposeful and satisfying life

[LD Outcomes: See The Council for the Advancement of Standards Learning and Development Outcomes statement for examples of outcomes related to these domains and dimensions.]

PFP must be

- intentionally designed
- guided by theories and knowledge of learning and development
- integrated into the life of the institution
- reflective of developmental and demographic profiles of the student population
- responsive to needs of individuals, populations with distinct needs, and relevant constituencies
- delivered using multiple formats, strategies, and contexts
- designed to provide universal access

PFP must collaborate with colleagues and departments across the institution to promote student learning and development, persistence, and success.

PFP must help families maintain a connection to the institution.

PFP should provide programming and services in person and online, information about issues related to student learning and development, and opportunities to interact with other families and students.
Programming and services may include parent and family orientation programs, parent and family weekends, move-in and send-off events, educational workshops and seminars, newsletters, and fundraising. Other programs should be specifically reflective of the institutional history, traditions, and culture.

PFP must

- distribute information on a timely basis to take advantage of the impact of naturally occurring developmental stages experienced by students and families
- encourage parents and families to work with their student so that the student will learn to access institutional resources independently
- assist parents and families to investigate and navigate institutional resources, services, and programs
- collaborate with essential campus partners
- consider diverse perspectives in developing parent and family programs
- provide information for faculty members and staff to help them interact effectively with parents and families and understand their expectations
- advocate for the appropriate distribution of emergency information to parents and families in accordance with institutional policy

Programming should address topics such as

- educational planning (academic advising, selection of major)
- standards of academic progress and other academic policies
- career planning
- student budgeting and money management
- educational costs, financial aid, and financial planning
• health and wellness
• resources to support students with disabilities
• resources through visitor services
• institutional support services (study skills, tutoring, and other learning assistance programs)
• diversity, multicultural, and international programs and services
• membership in a diverse community and interactions across differences
• involvement in co-curricular activities
• campus safety
• global citizenship
• on-campus, off-campus, commuter, or distance learner student issues
• information related to the transition to college and the potential change in family dynamics
• organization and roles of the institution's administration
• realistic parent and family expectations of their student
• appropriate levels of involvement with their student and the institution
• campus policies on rights and responsibilities, conduct, and access to educational records

Part 3. ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

To achieve program and student learning and development outcomes, Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must be purposefully structured for effectiveness. PFP must have clearly stated and current

• goals and outcomes
• policies and procedures
• responsibilities and performance expectations for personnel
• organizational charts demonstrating clear channels of authority

Leaders must model ethical behavior and institutional citizenship.

Leaders with organizational authority for PFP must provide strategic planning, management and supervision, and program advancement.

Strategic Planning
• articulate a vision and mission that drive short- and long-term planning
• set goals and objectives based on the needs of the populations served, intended student learning and development outcomes, and program outcomes
• facilitate continuous development, implementation, and assessment of program effectiveness and goal attainment congruent with institutional mission and strategic plans
• promote environments that provide opportunities for student learning, development, and engagement
• develop, adapt, and improve programs and services in response to the changing needs of populations served and evolving institutional priorities
• include diverse perspectives to inform decision making

Management and Supervision
• plan, allocate, and monitor the use of fiscal, physical, human, intellectual, and technological resources
• manage human resource processes including recruitment, selection, professional
development, supervision, performance planning, succession planning,
evaluation, recognition, and reward
• influence others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the unit
• empower professional, support, and student personnel to become effective leaders
• encourage and support collaboration with colleagues and departments across the
  institution
• encourage and support scholarly contributions to the profession
• identify and address individual, organizational, and environmental conditions that
  foster or inhibit mission achievement
• use current and valid evidence to inform decisions
• incorporate sustainability practices in the management and design of programs,
  services, and facilities
• understand appropriate technologies and integrate them into programs and
  services
• be knowledgeable about codes and laws relevant to programs and services and
  ensure that programs and services meet those requirements
• assess and take action to mitigate potential risks

Program Advancement

• advocate for and actively promote the mission and goals of the programs and
  services
• inform stakeholders about issues affecting practice
• facilitate processes to reach consensus where wide support is needed
• advocate for representation in strategic planning initiatives at divisional and institutional levels

PFP should maintain a website that can be accessed from the institution's home page to address the information needs of parents and families.

PFP must be located in an organizational structure that can best provide for effective programs and services for achievement of its mission.

Such locations may include student affairs, enrollment management, or advancement.

Part 4. HUMAN RESOURCES

Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must be staffed adequately by individuals qualified to accomplish mission and goals.

PFP staff should include full-time professionals.

PFP must have access to technical and support personnel adequate to accomplish their mission.

Within institutional guidelines, PFP must

• establish procedures for personnel recruitment and selection, training, performance planning, and evaluation

• set expectations for supervision and performance

• provide personnel access to continuing and advanced education and appropriate professional development opportunities to improve their competence, skills, and leadership capacity

• consider work/life options available to personnel (e.g., compressed work schedules, flextime, job sharing, remote work, or telework) to promote recruitment and retention of personnel
Administrators of PFP must

- ensure that all personnel have updated position descriptions
- implement recruitment and selection/hiring strategies that produce a workforce inclusive of under-represented populations
- develop promotion practices that are fair, inclusive, proactive, and non-discriminatory

Personnel responsible for delivery of PFP must have written performance goals, objectives, and outcomes for each year’s performance cycle to be used to plan, review, and evaluate work and performance. The performance plan must be updated regularly to reflect changes during the performance cycle.

Results of individual personnel evaluations must be used to recognize personnel performance, address performance issues, implement individual and/or collective personnel development and training programs, and inform the assessment of programs and services.

PFP personnel, when hired and throughout their employment, must receive appropriate and thorough training.

PFP personnel, including student employees and volunteers, must have access to resources or receive specific training on

- institutional policies pertaining to functions or activities they support
- privacy and confidentiality policies
- laws regarding access to student records
- policies and procedures for dealing with sensitive institutional information
• policies and procedures related to technology used to store or access student records and institutional data

• how and when to refer those in need of additional assistance to qualified personnel and have access to a supervisor for assistance in making these judgments

• systems and technologies necessary to perform their assigned responsibilities

• ethical and legal uses of technology

PFP should have sufficient and specifically trained staff to support technology including the maintenance of program websites, social networks, communication systems, and developing emerging technology.

PFP must also receive specific training on the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) if appropriate for institutional policies.

PFP personnel must engage in continuing professional development activities to keep abreast of the research, theories, legislation, policies, and developments that affect their programs and services.

PFP staff should pursue opportunities for support, professional development, and networking.

Administrators of PFP must ensure that personnel are knowledgeable about and trained in safety, emergency procedures, and crisis prevention and response. Risk management efforts must address identification of threatening conduct or behavior and must incorporate a system for responding to and reporting such behaviors.

PFP personnel must be knowledgeable of and trained in safety and emergency procedures for securing and vacating facilities.
PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL

PFP professional personnel either must hold an earned graduate or professional degree in a field relevant to their position or must possess an appropriate combination of educational credentials and related work experience.

INTERNS OR GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

Degree- or credential-seeking interns or graduate assistants must be qualified by enrollment in an appropriate field of study and relevant experience. These students must be trained and supervised by professional personnel who possess applicable educational credentials and work experience and have supervisory experience. Supervisors must be cognizant of the dual roles interns and graduate assistants have as both student and employee.

Supervisors must

- adhere to parameters of students' job descriptions
- articulate intended learning outcomes in student job descriptions
- adhere to agreed-upon work hours and schedules
- offer flexible scheduling when circumstances necessitate

Supervisors and students must both agree to suitable compensation if circumstances necessitate additional hours.

STUDENT EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

Student employees and volunteers must be carefully selected, trained, supervised, and evaluated. Students must have access to a supervisor. Student employees and volunteers must be provided clear job descriptions, pre-service training based on assessed needs, and continuing development.
Part 5. ETHICS

Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must

- review applicable professional ethical standards and must adopt or develop and implement appropriate statements of ethical practice
- publish and adhere to statements of ethical practice and ensure their periodic review
- orient new personnel to relevant ethical standards and statements of ethical practice and related institutional policies

Statements of ethical standards must

- specify that PFP personnel respect privacy and maintain confidentiality in communications and records as delineated by privacy laws
- specify limits on disclosure of information contained in students' records as well as requirements to disclose to appropriate authorities
- address conflicts of interest, or appearance thereof, by personnel in the performance of their work
- reflect the responsibility of personnel to be fair, objective, and impartial in their interactions with others
- reference management of institutional funds
- reference appropriate behavior regarding research and assessment with human participants, confidentiality of research and assessment data, and students’ rights and responsibilities
- include the expectation that personnel confront and hold accountable other personnel who exhibit unethical behavior
• address issues surrounding scholarly integrity

PFP personnel must
• employ ethical decision making in the performance of their duties
• inform users of programs and services of ethical obligations and limitations emanating from codes and laws or from licensure requirements
• recognize and avoid conflicts of interest that could adversely influence their judgment or objectivity and, when unavoidable, recuse themselves from the situation
• perform their duties within the scope of their position, training, expertise, and competence
• make referrals when issues presented exceed the scope of the position

Part 6. LAW, POLICY, AND GOVERNANCE

Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must be in compliance with laws, regulations, and policies that relate to their respective responsibilities and that pose legal obligations, limitations, risks, and liabilities for the institution as a whole. Examples include constitutional, statutory, regulatory, and case law; relevant law and orders emanating from codes and laws; and the institution's policies.

PFP must have access to legal advice needed for personnel to carry out their assigned responsibilities.

PFP must inform personnel, appropriate officials, and users of programs and services about existing and changing legal obligations, risks and liabilities, and limitations.

PFP that use volunteers must provide appropriate training and support to ensure that guidelines and legal standards are followed.
PFP must inform personnel about professional liability insurance options and refer them to external sources if the institution does not provide coverage.

PFP must have written policies and procedures on operations, transactions, or tasks that have legal implications.

PFP must regularly review policies. The revision and creation of policies must be informed by best practices, available evidence, and policy issues in higher education.

PFP must have procedures and guidelines consistent with institutional policy for responding to threats, emergencies, and crisis situations. Systems and procedures must be in place to disseminate timely and accurate information to students, other members of the institutional community, and appropriate external organizations during emergency situations.

Personnel must neither participate in nor condone any form of harassment or activity that demeans persons or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

PFP must purchase or obtain permission to use copyrighted materials and instruments. References to copyrighted materials and instruments must include appropriate citations.

PFP must inform personnel about internal and external governance organizations that affect programs and services.

Part 7. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND ACCESS

Within the context of each institution's mission and in accordance with institutional policies and applicable codes and laws, Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must create and maintain educational and work environments that are welcoming, accessible, inclusive, equitable, and free from harassment.
PFP must not discriminate on the basis of disability; age; race; cultural identity; ethnicity; nationality; family educational history (e.g., first generation to attend college); political affiliation; religious affiliation; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity and expression; marital, social, economic, or veteran status; or any other basis included in institutional policies and codes and laws.

PFP must

- advocate for sensitivity to multicultural and social justice concerns by the institution and its personnel
- ensure physical, program, and resource access for all constituents
- modify or remove policies, practices, systems, technologies, facilities, and structures that create barriers or produce inequities
- ensure that when facilities and structures cannot be modified, they do not impede access to programs, services, and resources
- establish goals for diversity, equity, and access
- foster communication and practices that enhance understanding of identity, culture, self-expression, and heritage
- promote respect for commonalities and differences among people within their historical and cultural contexts
- address the characteristics and needs of diverse constituents when establishing and implementing culturally relevant and inclusive programs, services, policies, procedures, and practices
- provide personnel with diversity, equity, and access training and hold personnel accountable for applying the training to their work
• respond to the needs of all constituents served when establishing hours of
  operation and developing methods of delivering programs, services, and resources
• recognize the needs of distance and online learning students by directly providing
  or assisting them to gain access to comparable services and resources

PFP should include statements related to disability and equal opportunity laws in all print
and electronic materials in accordance with institutional policy.

PFP should respect the diversity of the families of students, acknowledging the many
different cultures and backgrounds represented by the families, including non-traditional
family structures such as single parent households and foster families.

PFP should educate parents and families in general about all aspects of diversity in the
college community and within society and be prepared to identify resources for support
both on campus and locally as needed.

PFP staff must be knowledgeable of current trends and changing demographics of their
institution as well as how they relate at the national level.

PFP should include programming for the unique family needs of student populations such
as commuter, transfer, foster, homeless, and international, LGBT, and first generation
students.

PFP should provide access to the institution's policies and procedures and resources in
multiple language formats including printed forms for families who do not have
technology.

Part 8. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must reach out to individuals, groups, communities,
and organizations internal and external to the institution to
• establish, maintain, and promote understanding and effective relations with those
  that have a significant interest in or potential effect on the students or other
  constituents served by the programs and services
• garner support and resources for programs and services as defined by the mission
• collaborate in offering or improving programs and services to meet the needs of
  students and other constituents and to achieve program and student outcomes
• engage diverse individuals, groups, communities, and organizations to enrich the
  educational environment and experiences of students and other constituents
• disseminate information about the programs and services

PFP should create a role for parents and family members within the institution through a
parent/families organization, association, or club. Such a group should develop family
affinity for the institution, offer referral to programs and services, and provide
opportunities for parents and families to have input on institutional matters affecting their
students. A staff member of the institution should be charged with supporting and
advising such an organization.

PFP should inform family members about issues that impact the health, well-being, and
success of students through a variety of delivery methods communication methods,
including newsletters, e-newsletters, websites, social networking, and educational
programming. This material should display appropriate institutional branding.

PFP should provide a parents and family resource guide or handbook to address student-
life topics of priority to the institution (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, service-learning and
study abroad opportunities, research opportunities, financial literacy, health and
wellness), resources and benefits available to parents and families, institutional policies
and procedures, the academic calendar, and support services for students and their families.

Promotional and descriptive information must be accurate and free of deception and misrepresentation.

PFP must have procedures and guidelines consistent with institutional policy for

- communicating with the media
- distributing information through print, broadcast, and online sources
- contracting with external organizations for delivery of programs and services
- cultivating, soliciting, and managing gifts
- applying to and managing funds from grants

PFP should be represented on the institutional crisis response team. PFP should advocate for appropriate information to be sent to parents in the event of an emergency or campus crisis in accordance with institutional procedures.

Part 9. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must have funding to accomplish the mission and goals.

In establishing and prioritizing funding resources, PFP must conduct comprehensive analyses to determine

- unmet needs of the unit
- relevant expenditures
- external and internal resources
- impact on students and the institution
PFP may supplement institutional funding by developing revenue from sources such as fundraising, grants, and fees for services provided.

PFP must use the budget as a planning tool to reflect commitment to the mission and goals of the programs and services and of the institution.

PFP must administer funds in accordance with established institutional accounting procedures.

PFP must demonstrate efficient and effective use and responsible stewardship of fiscal resources consistent with institutional protocols.

Financial reports must provide an accurate financial overview of the organization and provide clear, understandable, and timely data upon which personnel can plan and make informed decisions.

Procurement procedures must

- be consistent with institutional policies
- ensure that purchases comply with laws and codes for usability and access
- ensure that the institution receives value for the funds spent
- consider information available for comparing the ethical and environmental impact of products and services purchased

Part 10. TECHNOLOGY

Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must have technology to support the achievement of their mission and goals. The technology and its use must comply with institutional policies and procedures and with relevant codes and laws.

PFP must use technologies to
• provide updated information regarding mission, location, staffing, programs, services, and official contacts to students and other constituents in accessible formats
• provide an avenue for students and other constituents to communicate sensitive information in a secure format
• enhance the delivery of programs and services for all students

PFP must
• back up data on a regular basis
• adhere to institutional policies regarding ethical and legal use of technology
• articulate policies and procedures for protecting the confidentiality and security of information
• implement a replacement plan and cycle for all technology with attention to sustainability
• incorporate accessibility features into technology-based programs and services

When providing student access to technology, PFP must
• have policies on the use of technology that are clear, easy to understand, and available to all students
• provide information or referral to support services for those needing assistance in accessing or using technology
• provide instruction or training on how to use the technology
• inform students of implications of misuse of technologies

Part 11. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT
Parent and Family Programs’ (PFP) facilities must be intentionally designed and located in suitable, accessible, and safe spaces that demonstrate universal design and support the program’s mission and goals.

Facilities must be designed to engage various constituents and promote learning.

Personnel must have workspaces that are suitably located and accessible, well equipped, adequate in size, and designed to support their work and responsibilities.

The design of the facilities must guarantee the security and privacy of records and ensure the confidentiality of sensitive information and conversations. Personnel must be able to secure their work.

PFP must incorporate sustainable practices in use of facilities and purchase of equipment.

Facilities and equipment must be evaluated on an established cycle and be in compliance with codes, laws, and accepted practices for access, health, safety, and security.

When acquiring capital equipment, PFP must take into account expenses related to regular maintenance and life cycle costs.

Part 12. ASSESSMENT

Parent and Family Programs (PFP) must develop assessment plans and processes.

Assessment plans must articulate an ongoing cycle of assessment activities.

PFP must

- specify programmatic goals and intended outcomes
- identify student learning and development outcomes
- employ multiple measures and methods
- develop manageable processes for gathering, interpreting, and evaluating data
- document progress toward achievement of goals and outcomes
• interpret and use assessment results to demonstrate accountability
• report aggregated results to respondent groups and stakeholders
• use assessment results to inform planning and decision-making
• assess effectiveness of implemented changes
• provide evidence of improvement of programs and services

PFP should employ multiple methods to evaluate and assess the program's effectiveness in meeting the needs of families.

PFP must employ ethical practices in the assessment process.

PFP must have access to adequate fiscal, human, professional development, and technological resources to develop and implement assessment plans.

General Standards revised in 2014;

PFP content developed/approved in 2010
## APPENDIX C

Selected Parent/Family Engagement Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent/Family Program</th>
<th>Reason for Selection as &quot;Highly Recognized&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auburn University</td>
<td>2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State Univeristy</td>
<td>Parent/Family Expert Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonzaga University</td>
<td>2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hofstra University</td>
<td>Parent/Family Expert Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson Wakes University</td>
<td>Founding Board of Directors AHEPPP &amp; 2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
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<td>Kennesaw State</td>
<td>Parent/Family Expert Recommendation</td>
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<td>Miami University Ohio</td>
<td>Founding Board of Directors AHEPPP</td>
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<td>Mississippi State University</td>
<td>2015 AHEPPP Award</td>
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<td>Missouri State</td>
<td>Parent/Family Expert Recommendation</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina State University</td>
<td>Founding Board of Directors AHEPPP</td>
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<td>Ohio University</td>
<td>AHEPPP Board of Directors Emeritae</td>
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<td>Purdue University</td>
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<td>Rochester Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Parent/Family Expert Recommendation</td>
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<td>Sam Houston State University</td>
<td>(2) 2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
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<td>Southern Methodist University</td>
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<td>University of Arkansas</td>
<td>2014 AHEPPP Award &amp; 2015 (2)</td>
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<td>Founding Board of Directors AHEPPP</td>
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<td>University of Kentucky</td>
<td>AHEPPP Board of Directors Emeritae</td>
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<td>University of Louisville</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Memphis</td>
<td>Parent/Family Expert Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Minnesota</td>
<td>Founding Board of Directors AHEPPP/2014 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North Carolina Chapel Hill</td>
<td>Founding Board of Directors AHEPPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Rochester</td>
<td>AHEPPP Board of Directors Emeritae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Carolina</td>
<td>(2) 2015 AHEPPP Award &amp; 2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Florida</td>
<td>2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tennessee</td>
<td>(2) 2014 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanderbilt University</td>
<td>2014 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincennes University</td>
<td>Founding Board of Directors AHEPPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Commonwealth University</td>
<td>2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wake Forest University</td>
<td>2016 AHEPPP Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Michigan University</td>
<td>Parent/Family Expert Recommendation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(2) indicates awarded two separate AHEPPP awards in a given year
Q2 Approximately how many years has your institution had a Parent/Family Program (PFP)?

- 3 years or less
- 4-6 years
- 7 years or more

Q3 How many individuals work **exclusively** in your Parent/Family Program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of individuals</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>More than 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full-time</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Part-time</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q4 In what broad institutional division is your Parent/Family Program organizationally structured?

- [ ] Student Affairs
- [ ] Alumni Relations
- [ ] Advancement
- [ ] Enrollment Management
- [ ] Other ________________________________

Q5 To which university position do you report (VP of Student Affairs, Dean of Students, Provost, etc.)?

Q6 What is your annual budget for parent/family programs and services (excluding salaries)?
Q7 To what extent do you feel your PFP is adequately funded and supported?

- Not at all
- Very little
- Average (on par with other universities/other programs our size)
- Somewhat (most of our needs for funding and support are met)
- To a great extent (our program is fully resourced and supported)
Q8 There are several beliefs about parents/families that drive university leaders to have a dedicated Parent/Family Program. To what extent is each of the following an important driver for your university leadership?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PFP is an easier way for university to communicate with parents/families</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PFP is helpful in dealing with overzealous parents/families</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFP can help manage parent/family expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFP can be especially beneficial to families of first generation students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents/families can be turned into donors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/families, if aware of campus resources, can help guide students to them</td>
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<tr>
<td>A dedicated PFP helps our university be competitive in the educational marketplace</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q9 Please indicate which event or service for parents/families your program offers (Yes/No), and if "Yes" then to what extent it impacts the effectiveness of your PFP.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENTS/PROGRAMS</th>
<th>Parent Orientation</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Minimally Effective</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Move In Day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parent/Family Weekend</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sibling Day/ Weekend</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other event/program</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATION/TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>Emails (basic with campus info, due dates, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Electronic Newsletters (campus info, but also suggestions for conversations, tips for letting go, career planning, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide communications and/or printed materials in any language other than English</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Print newsletter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Text message</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University App (with Parent/Family section)</td>
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<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Specialized Parent/Family App</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Other communication or technology</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Facebook page specifically for parents/families</td>
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<td>Twitter account specifically for parents/families</td>
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<td>Instagram specifically for parents/families</td>
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<td>Blog specifically for parents/families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other social media specifically for parents/families</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Education</strong></td>
<td>Comprehensive parent/family handbook</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Videos for parents/families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Webinars for parents/families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>On-line courses for parent families (using Blackboard or other similar platform)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parent/Family calendar (printed and distributed)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parent/Family calendar (digital)</td>
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<td><strong>Parent Website</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Other parent education</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

201
| **Other** Parental portal for access (with student's permission) to grades, enrollment verification, financial, etc. | □ □ □ □ □ □ |
| Relationships with feeder high schools | □ □ □ □ □ □ |
| Parent/Family Association/Organization | □ □ □ □ □ □ |
| Parent/Family Advisory Board or Council | □ □ □ □ □ □ |
| Other miscellaneous parent resources or groups | □ □ □ □ □ □ |

Q10 Out of all the PFP events and services provided by your program, which one do you think is the most important in terms of supporting student success and why?

Q11 To what extent does your PFP provide information for faculty/staff to help them in their interactions with parents and families?

- □ Not at all
- □ Somewhat  (program supplies some information to faculty and staff)
- □ Extensive (program supplies extensive information to faculty and staff)
Q12 If you provide information for faculty and staff to help in their interactions with parents and families, what is the main theme or point of your message?

Q13 If you provide information for faculty and staff to help in their interactions with parents and families, how do you deliver that information?

- Emails
- Department professional development
- Speak at faculty meetings
- Other ________________________________

Q14 How many times a semester (on average) do parents/families who have signed up receive emails and/or email newsletters from your program?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- 2-3 times a semester
- Other ________________________________
Q15 Below are several statements about your institution's Parents' Association (open to any parent). Please indicate to what level you agree with each of these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Association is of adequate size and is proportional to our institution</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Association provides an adequate level of engagement and involvement for parents and family members</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Association membership is demographically reflective of our student population</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q16 Below are several statements about your institution's Parent Council/Advisory Board (often tied to some monetary donation and/or selection process). Please indicate to what level you agree with each of these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Council/Advisory Board provides adequate funds for ancillary</td>
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<tr>
<td>programming and needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Council/Advisory Board provides an adequate level of engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>and involvement for parents and families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Council/Advisory Board is demographically reflective of our</td>
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<tr>
<td>student population</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Council/Advisory Board provides our PFP with practical information</td>
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<tr>
<td>we can use</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q17 Based on your perceptions of your population, to what extent does your PFP's events, services and resources meet the needs of parents and families based upon socioeconomic status (SES)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low SES parents/families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle SES parents/families</td>
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<tr>
<td>High SES parents/families</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q18 To what extent does your PFP's events, services and resources meet the needs of parents and families based upon their student's college readiness?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents/families of student with low college readiness</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/families of student with average college readiness</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/families of student with high college readiness</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q19 What do you feel would indicate success for enhancing diversity, equity and access for your PFP program?

Q20 What are some of the factors and/or choices that keep some of your parents and families from engaging with your PFP?

Q21 To what extent does your PFP work to serve the needs of families of distance or on-line learning students?

- No applicable (no distance/on-line students)
- Not at all
- Very little
- Average
- Somewhat
- To a great extent
Q22 Are the following assessments used with your PFP? If "Yes" how helpful is the assessment to your PFP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey after specific event (parent weekend, parent orientation, etc.)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Extremely Helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey available on website</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey sent to Parent/Family email listserv</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey of Parent Association members</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey of Parent Council members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunity for parents to provide feedback on website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q23 With your assessments, what outcomes are being measured?  Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Check all that apply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family participation in or with a given event or service</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family satisfaction with event/service</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Family gained knowledge or skills through participation</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student gained knowledge or skills through their interaction with their parents (through their parents' increase in knowledge or skills)</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q24 Can you provide an example of something your program learned from assessment, and how it impacted your program or your program's services?

__________________________________________________________________________

Q25 Reflecting upon your Parent/Family program, which particular program/initiative/partnership/etc. do you consider your PFP's greatest accomplishment?

__________________________________________________________________________
Q26 What has been your program's greatest challenge in the field of Parent/Family programming?

________________________________________________________________

Q27 What do you foresee as the greatest challenges or changes to Parent/Family programming in the next 5 years?

________________________________________________________________

Q28 What about your experience as a PFP professional, or about your program would you like to share?

________________________________________________________________

Q29 If you would be willing for Christy Spurlock to contact you for an interview regarding best practices and your experience and insight to Parent/Family programming, please provide a phone number and your preferred email address where you most easily can be reached. Interviews would be 30 minutes up to a maximum of one hour in length.
APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your PFP’s organizational and operational structure.

2. What are the most innovative events/programming/services that your PFPs offers?

3. What assessments are being used with your PFP: what is being measured, what outcomes are being measured, and what is being learned?

4. What are the greatest challenges you face in meeting parent/family needs?

5. To what extent and how are you being resourced?

6. What do you think might be the primary external barriers to parent/family engagement in higher education?

7. What do you think might be internal barriers or challenges to parent/family engagement in higher education?

8. What university supports would you suggest for helping PFPs to more effectively engage parents and families?
Dear Parent/Family Engagement Program Directors:

My name is Christy Spurlock and I am a student in the WKU EdD program. For my dissertation entitled *Best Practices in Parent and Family Programs: Implications for Higher Education and Student Success*, I am contacting the leaders of 34 of “highly recognized” parent/family programs (PFPs). I compiled a list of 34 highly recognized PFPs from resources and expertise from the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP).

Such leading programs as yours are adding value to their universities by contributing to student success through exceptional parent/family engagement. Surveys of PFPs at large have been conducted; however, no study has focused specifically on the leading PFPs in the field. As you know, while still a relatively new field, many universities such as yours have professionally recognized programs. By studying these, others may be able to collaborate more effectively with parents/families as well. A systematic exploration of several of highly recognized programs such as yours may help illuminate your program’s ability and your peers’ ability to maximize and adapt best practices in the field to your individual institutions, and your ability to convert parents into student success partners.

I am specifically interested in the organizational structures of highly recognized PFPs, some of the more innovative programming and services offered, types of assessments being used, greatest program challenges, and how programs are being resourced. I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing this online survey (Qualtrics link)

The survey will require approximately 25 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate, please answer all questions as honestly as possible. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate. Because I am looking at a relatively small, specific population of 34 leaders of highly recognized PFPs, identification numbers associated with email addresses will be kept during the data collection phase for tracking purposes only. This information will be stripped from the final dataset. I have taken all reasonable measures to protect your identity and responses.
The project has been reviewed and approved by The Western Kentucky University Institutional Review Board. The Board believes that the research procedure adequately safeguards the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research study, contact the Human Protections Administrator, Paul Mooney at (270) 745-2129.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me. Data provided by programs in this study may help other institutions gain insight into their own parent/family programs. If you require addition information, or have questions, please contact us.

Sincerely,

Christy Spurlock  
270-202-7915 Christy.Spurlock@wku.edu

Dr. Barbara Burch, Dissertation Chair, Professor Educational Leadership, Provost Emeritus  
270-745-8995 Barbara.Burch@wku.edu
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
Online Survey

Project Title: Best Practices in Parent and Family Programs: Implications for Higher Education and Student Success
Investigator: Christy Spurlock 270-202-7915 Christy.Spurlock@wku.edu
Educational Leadership Doctoral WKU Student.

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. You should keep a copy of this form for your records.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: This study will present findings from the practices of 34 of the most recognized Parent & Family Engagement Programs (PFPs) in higher education. By studying these, others may be able to collaborate more effectively with parents/families as well.

2. Explanation of Procedures: Individual Parent & Family Engagement Program directors will be asked to complete the following survey. The survey will require approximately 25 minutes to complete.

3. Discomfort and Risks: The researcher does not anticipate discomfort or risks to individuals participating in the online survey.

4. Benefits: A systematic exploration of several of the best parent/family programs in higher education may help illuminate their ability to maximize and adapt best practices in the field to their individual institutions, and to convert their parents into student success partners.

5. Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained in all potential publication or presentations.

6. Refusal/Withdrawal: Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Your continued cooperation with the following research implies your consent.

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

WKU IRB# 17-466
Approval - 6/8/2017
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Best Practices in Parent and Family Programs:
Implications for Higher Education and Student Success

Investigator: Christy Spurlock  270-202-7915 Christy.Spurlock@WKU.edu
Educational Leadership Doctoral WKU Student.

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The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: This study will present findings from the practices of 34 of the most recognized Parent & Family Engagement Programs (PFPs) in higher education. By studying these, others may be able to collaborate more effectively with parents/families as well.

2. Explanation of Procedures: Individual Parent & Family Engagement Program directors will be asked a series of questions regarding their programs. The researcher is interested in how these specific programs implement best practices in the field. The interview could last from 30 minutes to one hour.

3. Discomfort and Risks: The researcher does not anticipate discomfort or risks to individuals participating in the interviews.

4. Benefits: A systematic exploration of several of the best parent/family programs in higher education may help illuminate their ability to maximize and adapt best practices in the field to their individual institutions, and to convert their parents into student success partners.

5. Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained in all potential publication or presentations. The researcher will take notes based upon participants’ responses as well as an audio recording when possible. The information derived from participants in the interviews, will not be reported as being from a specific identified individual or university, but rather a generic identifier such as “A PFP director reported …” etc.

WKU IRB# 17-466
Approval - 6/8/2017
End Date - 8/31/2017
Expedited
Original - 6/8/2017
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date ________________

Witness ___________________________ Date ________________

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. *(Initial here)* __________

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THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

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