The Emerging Role of Parents in Higher Education

Marjorie Savage
Parent Program Director
University of Minnesota
mbsavage@umn.edu

Tina Falkner
Associate Registrar
University of Minnesota
rovic001@umn.edu

AACRAO
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U of MN Facts as of Fall 2007

Enrollment – Fall 2007

- Undergraduates degree-seeking: 28,703
- New High School: 5,280
- New Advanced Standing: 1,949
U of M Parent Program History

- Coordinated effort started in 1993 (10 percent of an FTE)
- Design, edit and send parent newsletter
- Full-time director position created in 1999
- Coordinate newsletter, website, email, listserv, on-campus events, off-campus events, online services; parent orientation provided by Orientation & First-Year Programs
Characteristics of Today’s Students/Parents

Level of family involvement is not what it used to be

- Parents have been told to be involved
- College finances
- Technology

Asking parents to “let go” is asking them to change how their family relates
Characteristics of Today’s Students/Parents

Today’s parents are

• Accustomed to guiding their students’ activities
• In close contact with their students
• Frequently college grads themselves
• Experienced in changing institutions
• Technologically savvy
• Increasingly, GenX’ers
Characteristics of Today’s Students/Parents

Today’s students are

• Savvy in technology—and use it all the time
• Respectful of social conventions & institutions; authority oriented
• Financially dependent on their parents
• Close to their parents
• Initiating communication with parents; parents are their “best advisers”
Frequency of Family Communication

- Daily
- 2-3/Wk
- Wkly
- <Wkly

Universities and Years:
- UM/2006
- Colby Col/2004
- NCSU/2005
- Ill. Wesley/2005
Parents’ Expectations of the College/University

- Admissions
- First Year Programs Office
- Parent Program Office
- Colleges
- Departments
- Academic Support Resources
Parents’ Expectations of the College/University

- Flow of information
- A secure, regulated environment
- Nice amenities (larger residence hall rooms, more privacy, better dining options)
- Improved learning conditions, services
- Students’ control over their schedule
- More customization, personalization
- “Value” and “Results”

*Parent expectations affect student expectations*
“The FERPA Effect”

• FERPA launches a significant change in parent/student roles
• Factors that affect response to FERPA
  – Parents’ educational background
  – Cultural background
  – Economic factors
• How/when FERPA is explained makes a difference
• Different institutions deal with FERPA differently
FERPA and Violence on Campus

• Several high profile incidents of violence on campuses nationally
• News outlets discussing how and when information can or should be shared
• Parents not only want their child to know of health and safety concerns, they want to know too – they also want to know how we are preparing to handle them
• Determining when it’s appropriate to use the “health and safety” clause
Meeting Expectations without Violating FERPA

• Talk about policies; make policies readily available – paper and web-based
• Talk about “what usually happens”
• Explain how parents can get information they need
• Make it easy for students to provide information/access
• Collect emergency contact information and explain when it will be used
Privacy and Security Tutorial for Parents

• Addresses privacy and security from a student data perspective
  – Grades, registration, FERPA
  – Housing information
  – Mental and physical health information
  – Faculty information
  – Advising information
Handling Crises without Violating FERPA

- What is a crisis? (Parents may have a different definition)
- Who has the critical information at this moment?
- Who has background information?
Special Considerations and FERPA

- What does a release cover/not cover?
- Is there a single, clear institutional approach? Do all staff people understand the institution’s approach?
- Do staff members know how policies affect other offices on campus?
- What about faculty?
Multiple introductions to FERPA

• Messages at confirmation events, orientation, move-in events
• First-year parent newsletter
• E-mail reminders
• Tutorial (noted earlier)
• Web page on Parent site
• Video featuring university’s general counsel
U of MN Approach to Parents

- Parent Program Coordinator – written book “You’re On Your Own (But I’m Here if You Need Me)”
- Parent Orientation
- Parent Website (www.parent.umn.edu)
- Parent Newsletter
- Parent E-mail
- Online workshops, courses
Parent Orientation

- Optional parent orientation - $25/parent
- 700 participants in 1995
- 3,495 participants in 2006
- Separate from student orientation (but concurrent)
- Focus on resources and services available to the student
- Nitty-gritty of registration, financial aid, FERPA, campus safety, housing, billing
Parent Website
Highlight Contact Information
Parent “Outcomes” (Parallel Student “Outcomes”)

Families contribute to student success by

- Understanding the student experience
- Knowing campus resources
- Supporting University’s goals for student learning outcomes
- Knowing when to empower student to take responsibility, make decisions; when to step in with appropriate support (understand FERPA)
- Developing an affinity for the University
Parent Newsletter

- Paper and on-line
- Timely topics
- Questions answered by counseling staff
- Upcoming events
- “Place for Parents” at Move-In Day and Homecoming
Parent E-mail—February 12, 2008

—Volunteers Needed: Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago
—Career Planning
—Support the U Day
—Epica
—Spring Break Planning
—Miscellaneous

The brief weather report this morning is "8 degrees, dreary." Usually, when students are on their way to or from class, about one in three is talking on a cell phone. Based on observations through my window in Appleby Hall, that number has dropped to about one in twenty today, and the majority of students have hands in their pockets and caps covering their ears. If you're not getting updates as frequently from your student this week, you can attribute it to the cold weather. Suggestion: Send cookies or some other form of care package.

—Volunteers Needed: Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago

We're looking for parent volunteers from the Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago areas to help with receptions for newly admitted students and their parents on the following days:

**Chicago area:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Thursday, March 6, at the Thompson Center at City Hall (downtown Chicago).

**Madison area:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 12, at the Wisconsin Union Tower (downtown Madison).

**Milwaukee area:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Thursday, March 13, at Nicolet High School, 6701 N. Jean Nicolet Road, Glendale, WI.

The receptions are presented as a way to answer questions and address concerns specific to potential students from these three areas. We're hoping to find parents who can help register participants and mingle with families, talking about your student's experience at the University of Minnesota. If you are available to help, please contact Carey Byrne at carey@umn.edu.
Welcome week

- Assist with move-in
- Hold specific informational and “meet and greet” events for parents
- Informal program to remind parents of basics of campus life – allow ample time for questions
- Gives students and parents a break from each other
- Puts faces with offices
Appropriate Family Involvement

National Survey of Student Engagement – “plugged-in parents may help their students succeed”

Parents can benefit the institution through
- Recruitment
- Retention and graduation messages
- Legislative support
- Affiliation (membership in “Alumni & Friends” group or Parent Association)
- Financial donations
- Volunteers (mentoring, assisting with campus events)
- Added value messages – reinforce our messages (i.e., drinking issues, study issues, etc)
Conclusion

- Not going to change family relationships
- Work collaboratively to meet parents/students expectations
- Proactively addressing FERPA concerns is better than reacting to complaints
- Outward expression of commitment to parents makes a difference
Questions?