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## Exploring the Parent and Family Relations Office in Higher Education

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EXPLORING THE PARENT AND FAMILY RELATIONS OFFICE  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Mandy Ronen

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Educational Administration  
Under the Supervision of Professor Barbara Y. LaCost

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## EXPLORING THE PARENT AND FAMILY RELATIONS OFFICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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University of Nebraska, 2011

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This study explored the Parent and Family Relations Office in a higher education setting. Two institutions were studied. One institution, Colorado State University, had an operating Parent and Family Relations Office, and the second institution, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, did not have such an office on campus. Interviews were completed with the staff at Colorado State University to determine the history of the office on campus, programs and services provided to parents and family members, anecdotal stories of times they had assisted students and their families, and advice to institutions who may want to implement a Parent and Family Relations Office on their campus. A survey was sent to parents and families of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students to determine how often parents expect to receive information from the university, how they would like to receive that information, positive interactions they have had with university staff and faculty, frustrating experiences they have had with university staff and faculty, and if they would utilize a Parent and Family Relations Office if made available. Major recommendations include: (a) examining all programs and services that directly involve parents and family members, (b) designating one person on campus as a liaison between

parents and the university, and (c) providing training for faculty and staff members about the needs and concerns of parents and family members.

## **Acknowledgements**

The pursuit of my graduate degree in Educational Administration began as a thought in the back of my mind. As with many professionals in student affairs, working in higher education was not the career path I had laid out for myself. Even towards the end of my undergraduate degree, I had aspirations of working for a professional sports team as an event manager. I am so grateful to the people who have helped me realize my strengths and passions, and ultimately, showed me that student affairs is where I am meant to be.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Mike and Lisa Ronen, and my sister, Becki. Their love and support throughout my life has been crucial to my success, and I would not be the person I am today without them. I have been blessed and fortunate enough to have not only my immediate family's support but also the support of my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They have all been a tremendous source of encouragement and strength.

Much appreciation and thanks must be given to Christine Schneikart-Luebbe. As a student and staff member at Wichita State University, Christine taught me to believe in myself and was a constant source of positive energy. When I think about how I want to interact with students, parents and family members, and faculty and staff, Christine is who comes to my mind.

I spent the first two years of my undergraduate degree at Butler Community College in El Dorado, KS. Some might say that starting your college career at a community college would not provide the same "traditional" college experience as one might have at a four-year institution. I was a part of my own family and had my own

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“The relationship between college students and parents involves a key third player that cannot be ignored – the institution” (“Reasons for Parental Involvement”, 2008, p. 33). Relationships between parents and the university have evolved over time, and changes in those relationships can be addressed through the investigation of perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of both the parents and the university (p. 33). Marjorie Savage, parent program director at the University of Minnesota, stated that “when students enroll in college today, their parents do, too” (“Parent Relations,” 2005, p. 3). Effectively working with parents and families is a growing trend that will assist with retention efforts made by the university (“Good Parent Relations”, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, researching the interactions between parents, family members, and universities is a topic that should be of interest to student affairs practitioners. Today’s students appear to be more dependent and more accepting of parental involvement than the generations before them, so engaging family members and including them after the student has established themselves on campus is a path of exploration for colleges and universities.

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between parents, family members and university officials and to gain knowledge about the Parent and Family Relations Office that several universities across the United States have begun to implement on to their campuses. Having a Parent & Family Relations Office is a fairly new occurrence in higher education. The higher education community will hear directly

from parents and family members who have a student attending a university to see if they would utilize such an office. I examined a university with an operating Parent & Family Relations Office to understand how the office communicates with parents and family members of their students. An objective was to collect data and learn from an institution that has a history of parent and family programs. The second objective of this study was to survey the parents and family members of students who do not attend a university with an operating Parent & Family Relations Office to understand their views and opinions of having this service available to them. Ultimately, I was interested to learn how to assist parents and family members during the years their students attend college.

### **Research Questions**

Considering the transformation of parent and university relationships, I chose to utilize the following question as the main focus of the study: “What is the role of either having or not having a Parent and Family Relations Office in the interactions between parents, family members and universities?” To further assess the separate needs of both parents and family members and universities, sub-questions were considered:

- How do parents and family members of current University of Nebraska-Lincoln students view their communication with the university?
- What are the benefits of implementing a Parent & Family Relations Office on campus, according to parents and family members and university officials?

### **Definition of Terms**

The body of this research can be best understood once the reader becomes familiar with the following terms and their meanings.

*Parent Association:* This is a group of parents and family members who, through the university, are able to meet and discuss pertinent issues facing their students. The Parent Association is a way for parents and family members to stay involved throughout their students college careers.

*Parent & Family Relations Office:* This office is new to higher education. The main function is to assist the parents and family members of the students who attend the university with the issues and concerns they may face. Programs and services specifically for parents and family members may be done through this office as well.

*RAMFAM:* The RAMFAM Association is Colorado State University's Parent Association.

*NASPA:* The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. An organization for student affairs practitioners to join and participate in to keep up to date with higher education information.

### **Delimitations**

The sample of University of Nebraska-Lincoln parents and family members could be viewed as a limitation due to the manner that the names were received. All participants were members of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Parents Association. The parents and family members who are members of this association are already involved in their students' college education. Their viewpoints may differ from those who are not members of this association. A final limitation is only obtaining the perspective of two staff members at a university with a Parent & Family Relations Office. There are other institutions who have similar offices; yet, their perspectives may vary from the opinions of the one university examined in this study.

**Limitations**

Discussing limitations of a research study is a technique utilized by researchers to ensure their study as a valid and applicable addition to the field of study in which they are interested and to discuss any areas that may have inadvertently altered their opinions.

Although I am passionate about this area of higher education, I consider the fact that I am a novice researcher to be a limitation to my study. This project was one of the primary research experiences of my career as a student affairs professional. Limited knowledge of the expectations and the areas that might be encountered presented a challenge. Personal experiences with my family during my college choice process and throughout my undergraduate career may have influenced my perceptions about how involved parents should be and how involved their students should want them to be. As a researcher, I have attempted to put any biases aside and focus on the research at hand, as the data I collected could affect the role a university plays in regards to parents and family members.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In this chapter, I present the role of parents and family members in higher education through the research of several authors. Although there is little research on the topic of the Parent and Family Relations office, there is research that has been completed about how parent interaction has evolved in higher education. In the first section of this chapter, I present the beginning of parental interactions followed by the body of research on parent and family programs that currently exist on college campuses.

#### **Parental Involvement in Higher Education: The Beginning to Present**

Higher education in the United States has evolved over time. Within higher education, the role of parents and family members has been a constant source of development. *In loco parentis* served as a guideline for universities to watch over the actions of their students (Bowden, 2007, p. 482). This “gave colleges virtually unfettered authority over students’ lives and affairs” (p. 482). This doctrine was aborted in the 1960s and replaced by a concept of student development theory by many student affairs administrators (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 9). The creation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) prohibited institutions from sharing information specific to their student with parents and family members and with only a few exceptions, mainly cases involving the physical and mental state of their student. FERPA is very much a part of the institution today (Cutright, 2008, p. 40). The parents and family members of today’s college students are the ones who were affected by this change since it happened while many of them were receiving their education (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 9).

The students who are currently attending institutions across the nation were raised in homes with a different definition of “family” as did the generations before them (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 4). “America today is a multicultural, multilingual, and multifaceted place where the nuclear family is no longer the norm” (p. 3). When the Millennials began to attend college in 2000, their parents were categorized as Baby Boomers; however, today’s college students are more likely to have parents or family members from Generation X, meaning parents born after 1960 (Recommendations, 2008, p. 90 & 91). Parent and family programs, in their earliest stages, were developed with the Baby Boomer generation in mind (p. 91). How should colleges and universities alter their parent and family programs to fit the needs of the Generation X parents? Baby Boomers grew up with the philosophy of “anything should be possible,” and Generation X parents grew up with the philosophy of “anything should be available” (p. 92). Although modifications of programs should take place, the one constant factor between parents of the Baby Boomer generation and parents of Generation X is that they both raised Millennial students (p. 91). “What really matters is not when the parents or their students were born: the family experience as a whole is most critical” (p. 92).

The role of both women and men has shifted since the 1970s and 1980s when the parents and family members of today’s college students were in school (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 4). During these decades the routine of connecting with a parent or family member may have included a phone call from the pay phone in a resident hall or a letter with a stamp being sent through the mail (Cutright, 2008, p. 41). There have been significant shifts between then and now, and the tables below depict the major shift of education and obtaining a degree (p. 4).

Table 1  
*Educational Attainment of Fathers of Incoming Freshmen*

Education Completed	Percentage of Respondents			
	1969	1979	1989	1999
Grammar school or less	10.0	6.2	3.4	3.1
Some high school	16.7	12.1	7.5	5.5
High school graduate	30.2	28.0	27.7	26.0
Postsecondary schools other than college	--	4.3	5.1	4.0
Some college	17.6	13.4	14.6	16.1
College degree	16.8	19.4	21.7	25.1
Some graduate school	--	2.4	2.5	1.9
Graduate degree	8.8	14.2	17.6	18.3

Source: (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 5). *New Directions for Student Services*, Table 1.1

Table 2  
*Educational Attainment of Mothers of Incoming Freshmen*

Education Completed	Percentage of Respondents			
	1969	1979	1989	1999
Grammar school or less	6.4	4.3	2.7	2.6
Some high school	14.4	10.3	5.7	4.1
High school graduate	43.7	41.0	34.8	28.0
Postsecondary schools other than college	--	6.7	8.0	4.9
Some college	18.7	14.4	16.7	18.1
College degree	14.0	15.2	19.6	26.3
Some graduate school	--	2.2	2.9	2.4
Graduate degree	2.8	5.8	9.7	13.6

Source: (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 5). *New Directions for Student Services*, Table 1.2



In 1999, approximately 40 percent of fathers and mothers of incoming freshmen have had no experience with college. Cutright (2008) wrote about an experience of a friend, saying,

I recall a friend who was just short of a college degree discussing the circumstances with her father who had never himself attended. "How much more do you have to do?" he asked. "Three hours," she replied. "Three hours? Aren't you off work on Friday? Just go over and take care of it. (Cutright, 2008, p. 42-43)

Parents and family members of first-generation students may not be familiar with the university acronyms or jargon like FAFSA, subsidized versus unsubsidized loans, student involvement, etc. (Lange & Stone, 2001, p. 18). The entire college process from start to finish can be somewhat intimidating without direction and assistance from the university (p. 18).

There is, however, a consistent increase in the percentage of parents and family members who have attained a degree and many students have been raised with the expectation of attending college. These students have experienced parental and family involvement during their K-12 years, so colleges should expect to see an increase in parents and family members inquiring about their students' educations (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 8). Current parents and family members are much more knowledgeable about the college process than their previous counterparts; typically, they have done their research ahead of starting the admissions application (Lange & Stone, 2001, p. 20). One method a university may use to control the message being sent to parents and family members is the enrollment management approach (Daniel, Evans & Scott, 2001, p. 10). Parents and family members are in contact with multiple campus departments and

offices, ranging from admissions to the registrar to housing, and the institutional message must be consistent throughout those departments (p. 10).

Central to this idea is the notion of consistency in message about core institutional values with all constituents. This strategy should include plans for interactions with families...The message to families from every point of contact should center around an overarching concern for student success (p. 10)

Ernest Boyer calls today's era the *post-in loco parentis era* and is adamant that college and university administrators must work towards instituting a plan that focuses on student success in order to effectively work with parents and family members (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001, p. 12). The task to universities then, is to create a communication plan that reaches all parents and family members and speaks to them as partners to the institution, regardless of personal education level (Cutright, 2008, p. 43).

### **Programming Efforts for Parents and Family Members**

Ward-Roof, Heaton, and Coburn (2008) claimed that, prior to the 1980s, programs geared towards parents and family members were not initiatives that received much attention; in recent years parent and family programs have become increasingly more prevalent. They stated:

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have brought with them a new sense of parenting and a need for higher education professionals to reevaluate and readjust the ways in which they work and relate to students. Through partnerships with parents....we can create additional learning opportunities and also increase the likelihood of student success.

The researchers suggested the following tactics when implementing parent and family programs:

1. Assess parent and family needs
2. Set program goals
3. Secure resources
4. Staff appropriately

5. Create consistent messages that set limits and offer opportunities for appropriate involvement
6. Communicate often
7. Include parents and family members in crisis planning and programming
8. Educate students on how to develop appropriate relationships with their parents (p. 43).

In subsequent sections, I review programs that colleges and universities could use to foster relations with students' parents and families.

### **Parent and Family Orientation Programs**

Successfully operated orientation programs are a definite method to include the parents and family members at the beginning of their students' college careers and will increase the knowledge of expectations to follow (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 45). Successful parent and family orientation programs help parents and family members understand the students' journey as they transition to college. Such programs offer helpful ways for the parents and family members to assist their students (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 29). Many universities offer a parent and family session during orientations; the differences exist in the procedures associated with these sessions. According to Coburn and Woodward (2001), four outcomes should be addressed during the parent and family orientation session. They should "acknowledge the impact of the first-year transition; provide parents information and tools to support their student's success; set expectations and define the relationship between parents and the institution; and promote parents' sense of connection to the institution" (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 29).

#### **Acknowledging the impact of the transition.**

Among universities, methods differ in acknowledging the impact of the first-year transition. For example, the morning after move-in day, Washington University in St.

Louis hosts a session called “Letting Go” that they have offered to parents and family members since the 1980s (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 29). During the session, a senior level administrator serves as the emcee and talks to parents and family members about the changes their students will soon be going through and what their roles as parents and family members will be during the transition to college (p. 29). An aspect of the program that typically receives the most positive feedback is when two upperclassmen assume the role of first-year students and act out a skit in which they are telephoning home three different times during the first semester – after orientation, after midterms, and during finals week. The parents and family members in attendance appreciate the honesty of the students and even find humor in how some of the dialogue in the skit accurately depicted conversations they had recently had with their student. Following the skit, the upperclassmen students answer questions the parents and family members may have and offer advice from a student’s perspective, with the administrator closing the session by suggesting tips on how to parent as a coach or mentor rather than as a rescuer; the administrator then encourages parents to get to know the resources of the university (p. 30).

Other examples of successful and effective transition programs come from Appalachian State University and East Stroudsburg University. For the parent and family transition session at Appalachian State University entitled, “Changing Roles,” members of the counseling staff tell parents and family members about issues students face during college and ways to help them adjust and cope (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 30). At East Stroudsburg University, personnel divide parents and family members into two groups – new parents and veterans (p. 30). The new parents are those parents and family

members experiencing “first child transition” to college; the veterans have had one or more children attend a university (p. 30). The veteran parents and family members lead the discussion by speaking about issues they faced during the child’s first year of college and how they, as parents and family members, dealt with the issues (p. 30).

Extending a transition session to parents and family members during orientation allows for a healthy shift in the role the parents and family members must play in their students’ lives. “Implicit in these programs is the message that parents remain an anchor for their students and play an important role in helping them to gain the most from their college years” (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 31).

#### **Information and tools to support student success.**

Prior to the arrival of parents and family members during orientation, university officials must plan and organize the messages they want to convey about the institution. Current parents and family members of college students utilize e-mail and know how to access web pages; however, university staff needs to be mindful a certain percentage of students’ parents and family members will not possess technological skills (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 31). Access to a multitude of publications should be made available. Suggestions of publications for parents and family members include (a) a parent and family webpage, (b) a calendar with academic and extracurricular activity dates, and (c) a parent and family member handbook (p. 31). In order for a parent and family webpage to be a successful tool, universities should include “links to all major campus services, administrative offices, and academic departments. . . academic calendars and schedules of campus events, as well as links to parent organizations and other resources specifically designed for parents and families” (p. 31). A well-planned university website is

particularly helpful for parents and family members of international students since the website is the main method by which the parents and family members are able to “see” the university (p. 32). Higher education in America differs from systems in other countries, and international parents and family members use the website to better understand American higher education and the structure of our universities (p. 32). Although a majority of parents are likely to use the internet to gain knowledge of the services provided by their son or daughter’s university, there are parents and family members who need other means of assistance. There are parents and family members who would rather hold university documents in their hands. They want to speak with university faculty and staff members face-to-face, and the university needs to respect their wishes (p. 31). The demand for a hard copy of information has led universities to publish parent handbooks. Information in this handbook assists parents and family members as the information included “introduces parents to the administrators on campus and briefly describes the institution’s philosophy, policies, and resources” (p. 31).

The University of Oregon offers a unique approach to ensuring information is received by parents and family members. They provide an opportunity for parents and family members to attend a mock first day of classes that follows this schedule:

Faculty members distribute a syllabus and discuss their expectations of the class. This helps parents of first-generation students gain a better understanding of what will occur in the classroom; for parents who attended college, it emphasizes the current academic side of the institution. This session also helps make the faculty more real to the parents (Colburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 32)

At the University of Denver, the orientation staff presents a program called SOAR for the parents and family members (p. 32). SOAR is a university scavenger hunt for the parents that is designed to learn more about the resources available on campus – career services,

health and wellness offices, student involvement, etc. Although the University of Denver shares the resource information with their incoming students, the staff's hope is that the parents and family members will relay the resource information to the student one more time (p. 32).

### **Relationship between parents and the institution.**

The university establishes the desired type of relationship with parents and family members long before students arrive on campus. The publications sent to parents and other communication with parents and family members is vital for the relationship to begin. "Although parents may appreciate this kind of customer service, it is important for colleges to set boundaries that make it clear that their primary relationship is with the students" (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 33). For example, staff members questioned by parents might respond by suggesting that the student talk with an advisor to try and solve an issue. By suggesting that the student talk to the advisor, the staff member is letting the parent or family member know they are integral to their student's success and the university values them as a partner (p. 33). Universities may host large information meetings at which parents and family members are told they are partners with the university; however, this message may be confusing. The parents and family members are being told they are partners, but information about their student is withheld from them due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Student affairs officials may hear parents or family members say, "You tell me we're partners in our student's education. You'll send us his tuition bills, but you won't send us his grades?" (p. 33). An explanation of FERPA and the institutional policies should be shared and communicated

during orientation and throughout the year to maintain a healthy relationship with parents and family members (p. 33).

The orientation program is a portion of parent and family programs that most universities currently have in place. Trends of interaction with parents and family members are changing to reflect the needs of the students and their families. Although these changes still include offering parent and family orientation sessions, there are multiple services for universities to consider.

### **Electronic Means of Communication with Parents and Family Members**

Parents and families of college students are increasingly aware of the use of technology. They utilize websites and ask questions of university officials when unable to locate the information they are seeking (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 49).

Parents have constant access to students through texting and email, and that access includes instant communication with university officials. A challenge institutions may encounter with technology is parents and family members will expect an almost immediate reply or remedy to the situation their student is facing (p. 49). Patience and understanding are two virtues university staff need when working with the parents who want instant responses.

Even though technology may pose issues with continuous access for parents and family members, the advances in technology can also prove to be a vast cost-saving method (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 49). Parent and family websites, listservs, and e-newsletters are techniques that allow the interaction parents and families want while keeping costs to a minimum (p. 49).



## **Parent and Family Weekend**

Providing a parent and family weekend offers the parents and family members a chance to view the institution from the student's point-of-view (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 49). The date for this event must be selected carefully, as it needs to be far enough along in the semester for the students to become adapted to college life and for the parents to become used to living without the student (p. 49). Institutions who host a parent and family weekend often schedule this event around an already existing event, e.g., an athletic event or campus tradition, because the event provides an engaged activity for the students and their parents and family members (p. 49). However, each institution should assess the best type of parent and family weekend for their campus. The needs of the parents and family members vary among institutions; therefore, the programming efforts should also be varied (p. 50). A crucial portion of a parent and family weekend is stressing the purpose of the institution to the attendees, even though these messages may have been discussed during orientation or in newsletters. There may be parents in attendance who were not aware of the institutional purpose, and opportunities should be provided to all parents and family members (p. 50). Parent and family weekend is a significant time for the university. Many colleges choose to share student success stories, campus traditions, research, entertainment, and student awards during this time (p. 50). Additionally, university officials should use this time with the parents and family members to let them interact with faculty and administrators who are important to the student (p. 50).

## **Parent Associations**

Parent associations advance relationships within a campus community by connecting parents and family members with other parents of college students (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 51). The increased use of technology assists parent associations with developed listservs and encourages a greater awareness of volunteer opportunities on the student's campus (p. 51). Typically, there are benefits to being a member of a university's parent association. Some of those benefits may include "discounts on services within the community, learning more about campus programs and activities, increased contact with campus resources, and becoming part of an established network of parents who can answer questions and offer support" (p. 51).

Housing the association offers challenges. Generally, two departments serve as the home to the parent association: student affairs and the alumni office (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 51). Whether the parent association is housed in student affairs or the alumni office, distinct rules, policies, and expectations should be set in order to have an effective association. The parents and family members who are a part of this group are all volunteers. If the parent association has executive officers, the university should be sure to develop an orientation and job descriptions so the parents and family members are aware of their duties from the beginning of their term (p. 51). A role of the parent association that may go unnoticed is that of serving as a transition for the parents and family members of college students, assisting them through this new phase of life without having them be directly involved in the student's collegiate activities (p. 52).

The role of the parent association takes on many forms depending on the campus the student is attending. Some associations have a fundraising focus where needs of the

campus are met through dollars raised by the parent association (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 52). Other roles of parent associations include,

helping recruit new students by writing letters; attending college fairs; answering questions or directing potential students to campus resources; hosting receptions for incoming students before enrollment to connect those from the same geographical area; supporting parents and family members; offering expert guidance on campus move-in, selection of vendors, budgeting, and getting involved; serving as a parent or family member voice to the campus community by voicing their thoughts on policy and procedure change, serving on search committees or review or advisory boards; and creating and presenting awards to the campus community (p. 52)

Parent associations should reflect the institutional mission, so regardless of the framework of the parent association, the main goal should be consistent across universities.

### **A Look into the Future: Parent and Family Programs**

According to the University of Minnesota National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, universities have realized that parents are a crucial player in the recruitment and retention process, as many universities now offer much more than simply a parent orientation session or a parent handbook at the beginning of the academic year (Savage, M., 2009, p. 1). Savage (2009) conducted a survey to provide insight to the area of parent and family relations. In 2009, 500 institutions were contacted to participate and 261 responded to the survey (p. 5). The survey presented topics such as areas of improvement, staffing for parent and family programs, budgets, and events that take place in the parent and family programs area (p. 2).

The 2009 survey results indicated that 61.4 % of parent programs were housed in student affairs, which was a shift from the previous surveys done in 2003, 2005, and 2007 when about 54% were located in a student affairs office (Savage, 2009, p. 6).

Table 3

*Office or Department Where Parent/Family Services Report*

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

Source: (Savage, M., 2009, p. 6). National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, Chart 1.

A second question asked when the institution began services for parent and family programs. Programs in institutions have grown considerably since the 1970s (Savage, 2009, p. 6). The results indicated that universities began their programs as follows: 6.5% in the 1970s, 9.1% in the 1980s, 16.9% in the 1990s, and 63.9% in the 2000s (p. 6). This information depicted universities changing their services to reflect the need of the Millennial's who began college in the 2000s. Another interesting result of this question indicated that 25.1% of these services were found in NASPA Region III, which is comprised of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia; the least percentage of services were offered (5.5%) in NASPA Region V consisting of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington (p. 8 and 9).

Staffing for the parent programs area was a topic from this survey as well.

Approximately 23% of institutions reported having a full-time staff dedicated solely to

the parent and family programs office (Savage, 2009, p. 9). The titles for this staff person varied with the most common was Director of Parent and Family Programs (33.5 and the next most common was Assistant or Associate Director (18.1%) (p. 9). The results of the 2009 survey showed that most of the staff members in this role had been working in this capacity for 1-5 years, which was expected since the highest number of programs and offices were developed within that time period (p. 9). The educational background of the staff or faculty member in charge of parent and family programs has changed drastically since previous national surveys were conducted. The data in the table below illustrate these changes.

Table 4

*Educational Background*

	2003 Survey	2005 Survey	2007 Survey	2009 Survey
High school	0	3.6%	1.7%	1.2%
Associate	0	0.6%	1.7%	1.7%
Bachelors	31.3%	37.1%	36.6%	24.0%
Masters	60.6%	49.1%	52.0%	59.5%
Ph.D.	8.8%	9.6%	8.0%	13.6%

Source: (Savage, M., 2009, p. 10). National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, Chart 7.

The salaries offered to the director of the parent and family programs has risen steadily with the level of education attained. However the range of salary was broad, with some staff members reporting they made less than \$30,000 and others reporting to have made

over \$100,000 (p. 10). The highest percentage of respondents (26.8%) was in the \$40,000-49,000 range (p. 10).

Budgets are a vital portion of university life. Parent and family programs are no exception. However, survey results indicated a strong variance in the budget for a parent and family office. The most prevalent percentage (38.7%) came from those institutions who said they did not have any type of budget for their program (Savage, 2009, p. 18). Other institutions reported the budget to be \$250,000 (p. 18). The sources of funding for these budgets came from parent memberships, events, donations and gifts, and from a college or university allocation (p. 18).

Savage (2009) asked university officials to respond to the programs and services currently offered to the parents and family members. This information was then compared to the data provided from the surveys conducted in 2003, 2005, and 2007. With the exception of parent orientation, there was an overall decline in the programs and services offered since the 2007 survey results (Savage, M., 2009, p. 12). The universities with new programs may not have had the resources available to them to offer the same amount of programs as universities with established parent and family programs; thus, the decline in overall programs (p. 12).

Institutions also offered a parent and family website. The percentage of institutions that placed a link on their homepage for the parent and family site in 2007 was 81.3% with a substantial drop in 2009 to 66.5% (p 14). The justification for this drop was the same as for the other programs and services offered; the number of new programs has affected the

Table 5

*Parent/Family Services Compared by Year*

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

Source: (Savage, M., 2009, p. 12). National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, Chart 12.

percentages because they do not have the resources to offer the same programs as more established parent and family programs (p. 14).

Best practices were self-identified by respondents. Parent orientation and parent and family weekend were ranked highest as best practices (Savage, 2009, p. 14). These two programs were chosen as best practices because (a) they reach a majority of parents, (b) the campus interaction with parents and family is the highest at these programs and (c) feedback given to the institution indicated that parents and family members enjoyed these programs the most (p. 14).

All programs and services harbor areas in which to improve. The respondents were asked to choose a program weakest. Overwhelmingly, the response portrayed the parent and family website as the weakest practice (Savage, 2009, p. 15). Staff members working in the parent and family programs reported the website was their weakest

because there was not enough time or staff to update the website accordingly. The websites were found to be confusing to users, and information sought by users was not placed in a clear location (p. 15).

Table 6

*Comparison of Best/Weakest Practices*

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

Source: (Savage, M., 2009, p. 16). National Survey of College and University Parent Programs, Chart 19.

When asked how the respondents came to work in a parent and family office, the responses were varied. Almost 23% stated that running the parent and family office was



an added responsibility to their jobs (Savage, 2009, p. 18). The second largest percentage of respondents wanted to work for parent and family programs because of a desire to work with and help students, and they enjoyed working with families (p. 18).

Working with parents and family members of students involves certain skills. The traits listed below were provided by the respondents of the 2009 National Survey of Colleges and University Parent Programs.

1. Listening skills
2. Patience
3. Open-mindedness
4. Ability to not take parent criticisms personally or get defensive
5. Flexibility (p. 20).

Parents and family members also have needs to be met. The respondents commented on those needs by offering the following suggestions.

1. Get to know students and their relationship with parents and family
2. Remember that parents only want the best for their children
3. Communicate with parents on a regular basis and respond quickly
4. Put yourself in their shoes
5. Recognize diversity in parents and families
6. Parents need instruction on how involved to be, how to support your student as a mentor and not as a controller
7. Parents are valuable
8. Treat parents as partners (p. 21).

Working with parents and family members is challenging. By following the steps above, a university can be successful in navigating the relationship between parents and the institution. Functioning with parents and family members in a collaborative manner includes hard work and perseverance. Colleges and universities should strive to develop an effective partnership in order to provide the best service to not only the parents and family members but to the students as well (Cutright, 2008, p. 43).

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### **Research Design**

Due to the limited research available about relationships between universities and parents and family members, qualitative research provided a comprehensive and inclusive methodology. Three characteristics of qualitative research especially were appropriate for this study. First, researchers utilizing a qualitative methodology are “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). I sought to discover truths and meaning regarding the communication efforts between parents and family members and universities and to gather information from the parents and family members about their experiences during their students’ college careers. One aspect of the study included gauging the importance of implementing a parent and family relations office; qualitative research was the best avenue to obtain rich descriptions of the processes and practices from university officials about issues associated with initiating and administering an established functional office. Second, qualitative methods are adaptable and accommodating to the researcher and participants. When conversing with officials at the parent and family office site, and especially with communicating with parents and family members, flexibility proved important. Third, qualitative methodology is based on the concept of discovery. Because of the recent emergence of research pertaining to parent and family relations, all information gathered provides new “discoveries” and thus contributes to the limited but growing knowledge base.

A case study approach, the selected qualitative research method, was applicable. A case study method is defined as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 41). A bounded system, as defined by Merriam, is “the single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 40). In this research study, the case was bounded by time, place, and people. Having a Parent & Family Relations Office is a fairly recent phenomenon in the arena of higher education; therefore time became an important aspect of the case study. Universities with operating offices have begun to emerge only in the past decade. The characteristic of place bounds the research study because I was interested in an institution that currently maintains a parent and family relations office. Colorado State University is a Midwest institution with a Parent & Family Relations Office and could provide its own narrative explaining its objective of establishing a Parent & Family Relations Office on the campus. The study was bounded by people in that the population interviewed was restricted to parents and family members of students at the University of Nebraska. Thus, a comparative case study method was best-suited for this particular project.

### **Epistemology**

Throughout the duration of this study, I chose to take a constructivist approach. Within this epistemology, truth and meaning are constructed and are based more on individual experiences. I sought to understand why participants reported feelings and events; the opinions and views reported by participants were highly valued.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between parents, family members and university officials and to gain knowledge about the Parent and Family

Relations Office. Having a Parent & Family Relations Office is a fairly new occurrence in higher education. I examined a university with an operating Parent & Family Relations Office to understand how the office communicates with the parents and family members of their students. Thus I collected data from an institution with a history of parent and family programs. The second objective of this study was to seek information directly from parents and family members who have students attending a university determine the parameters for utilizing such an office. Thus, I surveyed the parents and family members of students who do not attend a university with a Parent & Family Relations Office to understand their views and opinions of having this service available to them. Ultimately, a major focus of the study was learning how to assist parents and family members during the years their student were attending college.

### **Research Question**

Considering the transformation of parent and university relationships, I chose to utilize the following question as the main focus of the study: “What is the role of either having or not having a Parent and Family Relations Office in the interactions between parents, family members and universities?” To further assess the separate needs of both parents and family members and universities, sub-questions were considered:

- How do parents and family members of current University of Nebraska-Lincoln students view their communication with the university?
- What are the benefits of implementing a Parent & Family Relations Office on campus, according to parents and family members and university officials?

## **Research Site**

Two research sites were used for this study. Research site one was the Parent & Family Relations Office at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO. Colorado State University is a four-year, public, land-grant institution founded in 1870. Fort Collins, CO is a mid-size city of approximately 141,000 people and is located in the northern Colorado at the base of the Rocky Mountains ([www.ir.colostate.edu](http://www.ir.colostate.edu)). Colorado State University has close to 26,500 students in attendance with 4,500 students in their freshmen class each academic year ([www.ir.colostate.edu](http://www.ir.colostate.edu)). Interviews took place in the office of the Executive Director of Parent and Family Programs, Jody Donovan. Access was granted as a result of relationships between the researcher and Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard Jarnot at Colorado State University fostered by membership in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Research site two was at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The participants were parents and family members of students. An electronic survey for parents and family members, instead of face-to-face interviews, was initiated at the site via email through SurveyMonkey. The results were collected and analyzed on campus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

## **Sample**

Patton (2002, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 77) claims that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases...” and “one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 77). Therefore, purposeful sampling was used to select participants. Two samples were needed to acknowledge information from university officials and information from parents and family members.

In order to become familiar with how a university implements a Parent & Family Relations Office, I sought information from personnel at Colorado State University, which has an operating Parent & Family Relations Office. Through membership and involvement in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), relationships were formed with various student affairs officials at universities in the Midwest. Two colleagues provided data for the study through interviews and examples offered by Jody Donovan, Dean of Students and Executive Director of Parent and Family Programs and Kacee Collard Jarnot, Assistant Director of Parent and Family Programs at Colorado State University.

I also sought information from a second set of participants. The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Office granted permission to contact parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students. The official who works with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Parents Association ported this endeavor by agreeing to convey the message and survey to approximately 300 parents who were association members. This specific population provided insight to the needs of parents and family members whose students attended an institution without a Parent & Family Relations Office. The number of Parent Association members at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was close to 300 members, so the projected number of needed participants was 60 which was a 20% response rate.

### **Instrument**

For this study, three data collections were utilized. When interviewing Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard Jarnot at Colorado State University, I used a researcher-created eight-question semi-structured interview protocol of open-ended questions

focused on (a) the history of the Parent and Family Relations Office at Colorado State University, (b) questions about specific families that the personnel remember assisting and (c) concerns the university officials had going into the future. The second instrument used was the survey sent to parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students. The survey was mostly open-ended questions, with a few questions related to demographics that were also researcher-created. This survey addressed (a) interactions the parents and family members had experienced at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and (b) perceptions about the desire for use of an office dedicated to parent relations on their campus. In addition to the data collected by interviewing the Colorado State University officials and the survey sent to the parents and family members of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln students, obtaining information from the Colorado State University websites and other promotional materials which may be sent to parents and family members of students attending Colorado State University proved to be an additional instrument to collect data.

### **Data Collection**

Within this study, two distinct populations were examined – the Parent and Family Relations Office at Colorado State University and parents and family members of students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Therefore, the data collected were diverse and the questions being asked of each group were unique.

A proposal was submitted to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board before data were collected. As soon as approval of the study was granted, I identified potential participants for both phases of the study – the university officials at Colorado State University and the parents and family members of the University of

Nebraska-Lincoln students. Approval from Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board was also granted. All participants were contacted first via email. An informed consent form was given to Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard Jarnot from Colorado State University at the time of the interviews. An informed consent was sent as an attachment to an e-mail to the parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students prior to completing the survey. I visited Colorado State University to conduct interviews and observe how the Parent and Family Relations Office operated. The interview questions sought to understand how the office was implemented, the services offered to parents and family members, and advice the Colorado State University staff would propose to institutions wanting to start a Parent and Family Relations Office. I used two audio recorders to document the interviews and to ensure the thoughts and feelings were summarized appropriately. I transcribed all audio recordings before analysis. I surveyed parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students asking them to describe experiences they had encountered with university staff or faculty members and if they would utilize this type of office if it was offered to them.

### **Data Analysis**

“Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data...which involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said...”(Merriam, 2009, p. 175-176). In this specific research study, there were three areas of collected data to analyze. The first being the interviews conducted with university officials at Colorado State University. I used direct quotes from the staff at Colorado State University. I trusted their opinions and experiences which suggested that low-level coding was the appropriate analysis. I analyzed the interview with Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard



Jarnot, taking portions of what they stated and developing themes in order to organize the data in a way that made sense. A second portion of data to analyze included (a) brochures, (b) the Colorado State University website, (c) newsletters, and (d) other promotional or informational material that was sent to the parents and family members of Colorado students. When analyzing this information, I applied low-level codes were applied initially, followed by analysis of the data using meaning fields, as meaning fields can help depict implicit meanings in published documents. The third and final data set to be evaluated was the survey sent electronically to the parents and family members of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln students. I applied low-level coding first followed by meaning fields as a second means of analysis.

### **Validation of the Research Study**

Having a reliable study is essential in order for other scholars to learn from and trust the research that has been conducted. Maxwell (2005, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 214) stated that “Validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research...”. Merriam (2009) discussed strategies for validating a research study, and this study contained three of the strategies cited by Merriam.

Triangulation occurs when a researcher uses “multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). For this specific study, several data collection methods were combined to determine an outcome to the original research questions. When speaking with university officials from Colorado State University, I conducted personal interviews to collect data. Additionally,

while visiting this institution, brochures and other promotional materials relating to the Parent & Family Relations Offices were collected as a means of data collection.

For the second portion of the study, which included surveying parents and family members of students attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, data was collected through the use of a survey sent electronically. Becoming immersed in the data by constantly seeking out information through the contacts made at universities through involvement with NASPA was the method in place. Staying up-to-date with literature surrounding the topic of parent and family relations with universities and asking questions of those who are more knowledgeable in this area of higher education are other ways of engaging in the data of this research study. I also joined the Parent and Family Knowledge Community, which is an aspect of NASPA, to ensure I was aware of the latest topics in parent and family relations.

The third strategy applied was peer review and examination. Merriam stated that this strategy deals with the researcher becoming involved in “discussions with colleagues regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). Through the relationships formed in NASPA with colleagues at other institutions, the researcher had many resources available. The researcher met with several NASPA colleagues at the beginning of June 2010, in November 2010 and in March 2011 for the regional and national conferences. These meeting times offered a sufficient amount of time to be spent discussing parent and family relations. The Parent and Family Knowledge Community is exclusively dedicated to working with parent and family issues and concerns, so the

resources they supplied online and at the meetings during the conferences proved to be helpful throughout the duration of this study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between parents, family members and university officials and to gain knowledge about the Parent and Family Relations Office. Having a Parent & Family Relations Office is a fairly new occurrence in higher education. I examined a university with an operating Parent & Family Relations Office to understand how the office communicates with the parents and family members of their students. Thus I collected data from an institution with a history of parent and family programs. The second objective of this study was to seek information directly from parents and family members who have students attending a university determine the parameters for utilizing such an office. Thus, I surveyed the parents and family members of students who do not attend a university with a Parent & Family Relations Office to understand their views and opinions of having this service available to them. Ultimately, a major focus of the study was learning how to assist parents and family members during the years their student were attending college.

#### **Research Question**

Considering the transformation of parent and university relationships, I chose to utilize the following question as the main focus of the study: “What is the role of either having or not having a Parent and Family Relations Office in the interactions between parents, family members and universities?” To further assess the separate needs of both parents and family members and universities, sub-questions were considered:

- How do parents and family members of current University of Nebraska-Lincoln students view their communication with the university?
- What are the benefits of implementing a Parent & Family Relations Office on campus, according to parents and family members and university officials?

### **Results from Colorado State University Interviews**

Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO was used in this research study to demonstrate how a Parent and Family Relations Office operates in a higher education setting. The need for this type of operation on campus is exhibited in the interview with Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard Jarnot. The history of parent and family programs, services offered, anecdotal stories, and advice was given to institutions who may want to have an office such as Colorado State's throughout the interview.

#### **History of the parent and family relations office at colorado state university.**

Knowing the history of any program or service at an institution guides the program in a direction that is best suited for that particular campus. Jody Donovan, Colorado State University, said that the Parent and Family Relations Office did not begin as an "office." Rather, the services began in the 1980's as a response to Colorado State University students who became ill or suddenly passed away. The Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs at the time "felt an obligation to take care of students until family could arrive," even though this was not a component of the job description. Jody recounted that the Vice President realized "he needed to figure out how he could have some discretionary money to do things he wanted to do that weren't necessarily in the budget. So, he created the Parent's Fund." The Vice President thought that there could

potentially be parents who would donate to the university to help him support programs and educational components that benefited students. In 2001, the Vice President and the Assistant to the Vice President retired, and Jody was moved from Housing to serve as the Interim Assistant to the Vice President. As a housing official, Jody had been communicating with parents and family members by holding Orientation sessions and speaking to the parents about FERPA. Jody said, “That’s sort of the beginning of the parent track. Let’s talk to parents about FERPA and how they can’t have access to anything...” Research was conducted to learn about what other institutions were offering, and as a result, the parent and family programs was created at Colorado State. In 2008, Jody hired a graduate student, Kacee Collard Jarnot, to assist in the area of parent and family programs, and once Kacee graduated, she was hired as the Assistant Director of Parent and Family Programs.

#### **Services offered.**

While multiple institutions offer a Parent’s Weekend or a Parent Orientation session, Colorado State University provides multiple services and programs to the parents and family members of their students. Kacee Collard Jarnot spoke about those services and expressed their value during the interview. A monthly e-newsletter is sent to parents and family members through a university information system database. This newsletter has a circulation of approximately 18,000 parents and families. The email addresses are acquired through the admissions application. There is a field for a “family address.” Other e-mail information is obtained during Orientation sessions. Kacee said, “...we hand out our brochure and say ‘This is your club for parents and families’.”

Institutions also provide a parent handbook for parents and families. Colorado State supplies a handbook as well, but it serves as a handbook and calendar. Kacee stated, “It has all of the important dates...things to be talking about [with your student], things to be thinking about...when is my bill due, when do the residence halls open...” This handbook/calendar has a welcome letter from Jody and Kacee on the front page, with the second page inviting the parents to join the RAMFAM Association (the parent association) and the Parent’s Fund. The calendar runs from July through August of the next year. Each month there are items listed as reminders. For example, in September 2010 the items included the “Student Involvement Fair” on September 8, the “Billing due date” on September 10, the “RAMFAM Association Meeting” on September 18, and the “International Day of Peace” on September 21. The events and deadlines are listed in the actual month. The top half of the document is divided into sections. Each month, there is a section called “Can We Talk?” which is supposed to be conversation starters for the parent and student. Several questions are listed each month e.g., “What communities and groups have you gotten involved with on campus?” A second section is titled “How Can Families Help?” This section has a bulleted list of ways for parents and family members to assist the student. For example, in September 2010 one of the bulleted points was “Reassure your student that feeling overwhelmed is normal for students learning to manage new academic demands and personal responsibilities.” The third section, entitled “Student and Family Issues,” covers a different topic each month. The topics for the 2010-2011 academic year were,

- Preparation for College
- Transition

- Safety
- Credit Cards and Student Employment
- Communication and Involvement
- Coming Home for Winter Break
- Changing Majors and Possible Internships
- Study Abroad Opportunities
- Spring Break Expectations
- Relationships
- Reentry Transition
- Home for the Summer

The back of the calendar is a list of resources for parents and family. A list of books is provided pertaining to the topic of students entering college and the transition that will occur. A list of websites is supplied that contains helpful university websites. University phone numbers are also offered. Every office from Admissions to the Career Center to Student Legal Services is provided.

After the calendar, there are several more pages with information. One page is titled “Resources for Concerned Parents and Families” and presents types of concern a parent or family member may encounter. Mild concern may be if the student performed poorly on an exam or has excessive absences. Moderate concern may be disruptive behavior or dramatic weight loss or gain, and significant concern may be threatening behavior, hopelessness, or substance use/abuse.

“Helping Your Student Transition through the Academic Years” is a page describing the issues a “typical” college student faces. For the most part, student affairs



practitioners discussed the freshman experience and sometimes the sophomore experience, Colorado State chose to present this information by dividing it into the experience of each class – freshman through senior – and offers how the parent or family member can assist through whatever issue may arise. For example, in the senior experience an issue is “The Fifth Year (or beyond)” and stated, “some students don’t finish in four years! Communication with your student will help you understand and cope if your student does not finish in four years.”

The final page of the handbook/calendar at Colorado State is called the “RAMFAM Association Business Directory.” The parents and family members in the RAMFAM Association assembled a list of local businesses they believed were quality companies with which to work, and they sought to share that information with other parents and family members. The list of businesses includes hotels, mechanics, restaurants, home maintenance, and more. Contact information is also provided in the business directory.

A bi-annual survey is sent to the parents and family members at Colorado State, where according to Kacee, they “ask them every question under the sun about what they would want to know about CSU.” This past year over a thousand parents and families responded to the survey. Kacee stated, “We used Wordle to sift through some of the themes to figure out what is most important to families.” The information received from the survey serves as a guide to the content that is placed in the calendar as well as the information they discuss at the RAMFAM Association meetings. Once a month, the RAMFAM Association meets on a Saturday from 10-12. The meetings are broadcast live on the Colorado State University website, so parents who are not able to physically be at

the meeting have the option to use Skype and participate. One RAMFAM meeting held this academic year covered safety. A tour of Colorado State University's police department was given, so parents could see the dispatch center and visit with several of the police officers on campus.

Presentations during campus wide programs like Orientation are a frequent occurrence for Jody and Kacee. Colorado State holds 19 orientation sessions for incoming freshmen and seven or eight sessions for transfer students. Jody and Kacee present at each of the orientation sessions to the parents and family members in attendance.

Other services provided to parents include the Parent and Family Programs website, which has a link from the Colorado State University homepage and is updated frequently. A Facebook page has been created and currently has around 100 members who are parents and family members. Jody indicated that they make themselves available as a service to the parents and family members, as they receive daily phone calls and emails with questions and comments.

### **Anecdotal stories.**

A main initiative of a Parent and Family Relations Office is to assist parents, families and their students. Jody and Kacee were able to convey stories of specific students and exactly how they helped them during their time of need.

Kacee related a story about a mother who had contacted the office via Facebook to say that Jody and Kacee really helped her. The mother's student had a roommate who passed away. Jody said,

“...when the student found his roommate dead, he called his mom first. His mom said hang up the phone and call 911...we immediately touched base with

her...over the weekend, we had our student case manager call him and excuse him from classes for the week...talk with him about does he want to go back to that residence hall room when he comes back? Does he want a different one?"

Based on the student's response, Colorado State had met the student's needs. Jody mentioned that "it's just the care and attention..." that the staff at Colorado State provided to the student that truly made the difference. The student's mother told Jody and Kacee that everything Colorado State had said they do is what they did.

Jody recalled helping a student and his family about eight years ago. The student was an Olympic cyclist who was hit by a car. Jody said, "He was in ICU. So his family came...we ended up supporting not just the student, but the mother and then the father and siblings who were also here." When the family found out about the accident, they rushed to the hospital, but the mother had to be hospitalized while they were there due to the emotional stress. The student "ended up going to rehab for a semester, and then, when he came back, he wanted to start all over as a first year student, so he moved into the residence halls." The student was able to ride a bike again and helped lead the cycling club at Colorado State when he came back to school. The cycling club gave Jody a jersey with all of their signatures on it as a way of showing their appreciation to the help provided to the student.

In a similar story, a Colorado State student jumped out of a tree into a pile of leaves and was completely paralyzed. Jody talked about how

the whole family pulled together and when he came back he was an RA. He did study abroad. I mean, this family was incredible. They supported him and we just rallied around and worked with Collin and his family to help him be successful.

Another incident involved a mother who contacted Jody in the summer prior to her son's plan to attend Colorado State in the fall. His older brother had planned to attend

as well, but he had just passed away from cancer. Instead of attending college together, the youngest son was now going to school without his older brother. The mother simply wanted to know if Jody, Kacee, and staff at Colorado State could watch out for him. In this instance, the residence hall staff and student case manager were alerted about the situation.

Jody and Kacee both talked about how they interact with students and their families who are going through a tragedy, but they also are contacted every day with less intense requests. Kacee stated, “We get all the time students that come into our office and say ‘I set up an appointment because my mom said I had to...my mom said I needed to talk to you’.” An example in this instance was when an appointment surfaced on Kacee’s calendar. A mother had called the Parent and Family office to set up an appointment for her son because she was extremely concerned about him. The mother and son came to see Kacee at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. Kacee recalled seeing “someone walking up in the front...and he’s using his hands and he’s talking to her and he’s very worked up about things.” The student, to Kacee, was obviously very distraught. The student began to tell Kacee how he knew what he had done wrong. He hadn’t gone to class or studied the way he should have, and he had more fun socially than he should have had as well. She said,

He was stressed. His mom was stressing him out even more. The situation he’d gotten himself into was stressing him out...we talked about ‘you need to be able to, over winter break, define exactly what went wrong and be able to talk to your family members about...the concrete things that I’m going to change that are going to help me be successful next semester’.

Kacee mentioned at the beginning of this past spring semester the student came to visit her again, and she could see a visible change in him. According to Kacee, “[the student had] been meeting with his advisor on a weekly basis and he’s been trying to go through

the retroactive withdrawal process.” The student had gotten an official mentor. He had been visiting a counselor at the CSU Health Network, and he created a schedule so he can see when he has class, when he needs to study, and when he has free time.

Another issue Kacee recently encountered involved a mother who lived out-of-state. The mother had heard there was a fire south of Fort Collins and wanted to make sure her daughter was safe and did not need to be evacuated. Kacee recalled,

...for about a week, we had a daily touch base to see if I could see the smoke or does she need to evacuate her daughter? How do you get to I-25? Do I need to safeguard her apartment? Every day I was like, no, there’s a lake between the fire and us, so I think nature has put a pretty good barrier in place. Nope, can’t see smoke. Can’t smell smoke. We’re good. But every day for about a week she just needed that touch base

Kacee said she did not mind being the contact person for that mother because in that mother’s mind the fire was in Colorado where her daughter was living.

In reflection over the incidents that had just been discussed, Jody said, “I think families just want to know that there’s somebody that they can send their student to.” Families have been in contact with Jody and Kacee to say thank you for sending information to them “so they don’t have to bug their student.” Jody expressed, “...that’s the whole point of partnering with parents. If it gets the message to the student...that’s our goal anyway.”

#### **Advice to institutions.**

Colorado State University has successfully grown their parent and family programs over the last decade. A goal of this research was to provide advice and knowledge to other institutions that are thinking about starting parent and family programs on their campus. Each institution is different and unique in their needs, but the advice expressed by Jody and Kacee has worked at Colorado State and has the potential

to assist in the beginning phases of implementing a Parent and Family Relations Office on any campus.

Jody's first thought about advice to institutions was, "If you build it, they will come...you have to be playful, because they'll overwhelm a person...know what you're getting into would be number one."

Kacee specified before the announcement of the office and programs there has to be communication between staff and faculty so everyone at the institution knows what the function of the office will be from the beginning. She listed to (a) think about the institutional message and how that message will be conveyed to parents and family members, (b) how the office will work with parents and family members, and (c) how open the line of communication will be. Kacee mentioned, "We wouldn't get very far at all if our president and vice president didn't support what we were doing, at all."

Location is vital to the success of the office. Jody offered the following thoughts about location,

Parents and families will go to the top. So you need to put the office somewhere that it appears that it's at the top...if it's buried in Housing, buried in Orientation, they're still going to call the President's Office...We'd love to have our office in the student center because then we'd be around students. It needs to be near the administration, so then if there is an issue, you can go right to them. You've built the relationships. The President's Office, whenever they get a call, they just forward it to us. They don't try and answer the call. They don't start doing research about what's going on with the roommate conflict. They just hand it back to us, but the reason they do that is because we've developed a relationship and trust.

Jody commented that she felt the office would be more successful with at least one "seasoned" staff member. She said, "I think that when you look young and aren't a parent, you get immediately discounted." At a parent and family session during an

Admitted Student Day, Kacee started the presentation by saying, “I may not have any children, let alone children who are college-aged, but I do have parents.”

Relationships across campus are an integral part of success. Jody stated,

...the person has to have relationships across campus. You have to know Housing inside and out. You have to know conduct inside and out. You have to know the financial aid people... You have to have good relationships with campus safety because these are the concerns parents are going to call you on.

Part of establishing and maintaining those relationships across campus involves trust between departments. Jody commented they never reverse a decision made in another department. For example, “When a parent is upset about a roommate conflict or upset about conduct, we don’t get into whether it was a good decision. We always support whatever the decision is because they know that we aren’t involved.” They do, however, talk to parents about the process of the decision and how the people in those other departments have been through training and are good people.

Being clear about the type of parent and family programs you will offer was another piece of advice from Kacee. She said to have discussions with practitioners on the campus who will be implementing the office about if the office will be more developmental and if the reason to instigate the office is solely for money. She said, “Is it going to be kind of a development base...is the whole point to raise money? So what does that feel like and what does it look like? And what are the things that you’re going to go after if you look at it as a development model?” Another option would be the public relations model. Some institutions want to send information out to the parents and family members of their students, but the feedback is not something that they necessarily want to receive. According to Jody, there are multiple universities who are developing parent and family programs, but they are creating them for development purposes “because parents

and families are the untapped market.” A large push to work with the out-of-state parents and families is currently happening since they are already sending their students to another state to school and have the most capacity to give money to the college. Jody and Kacee spoke of leadership councils and advisory councils being developed to attract the wealthiest families to be involved at the institution. However, according to Jody, “...that indirectly helps the institution because that’s getting money, but it’s not really about serving parents and families...but there’s a lot of schools that are doing that.”

Colorado State University does have a Parent Association, RAMFAM; however, they have chosen to stay away from the executive committee style of a parent association. The association initially began with a leadership structure and the officers, but the parents and family members at Colorado State did not have an interest in that type of organization. Jody said, “We found our families don’t really want responsibility. They just want to come and talk about their student. They want to learn the resources...so it works for us.”

In addition to the advice Jody and Kacee gave regarding their own Parent and Family office, Kacee also mentioned research completed by NASPA. NASPA listed the top five services that all parent and family offices should provide:

1. Orientation Session
2. A handbook
3. Parent and family website
4. Newsletter
5. Parent and family association



In closing, Jody stressed that the program has to fit the institution and the institutional mission. Colorado State is a land grant institution, so their mission is to serve all families. Jody said, “If we worked at a different school, maybe we’d think otherwise, but we probably wouldn’t work there.”

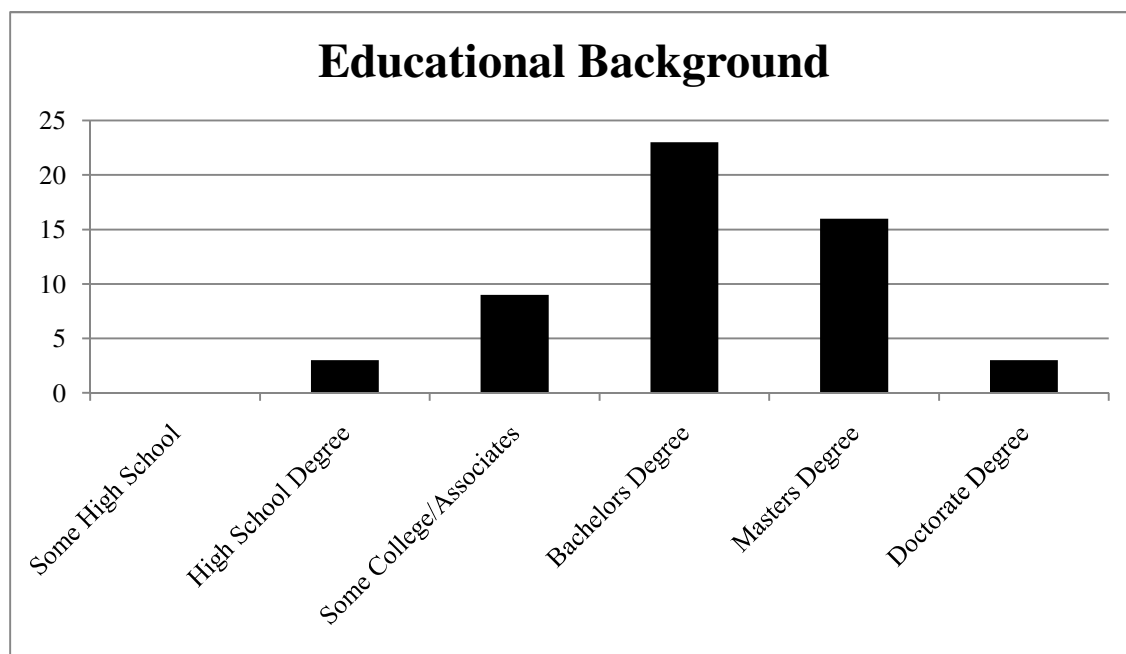
### **Results from the Survey to University of Nebraska-Lincoln Parents and Families**

This survey went sent to members of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Parents Association. The purpose was to determine the needs of the parents and family members of the student body at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The survey was sent to 300 families, of which 54 responded, resulting in an 18% response rate. The parents appeared honest and did not withhold information from this survey. The data collected should be taken into consideration to make improvements on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s campus and with relations between the university and parents and families.

#### **Demographics.**

Questions seven through ten addressed demographical information pertaining to each individual family who responded to the survey. Of the 54 respondents, 49 (98%) indicated their racial status as white/Caucasian. Only one (2%) said they were Hispanic/Latino, and four respondents chose to pass over this question.

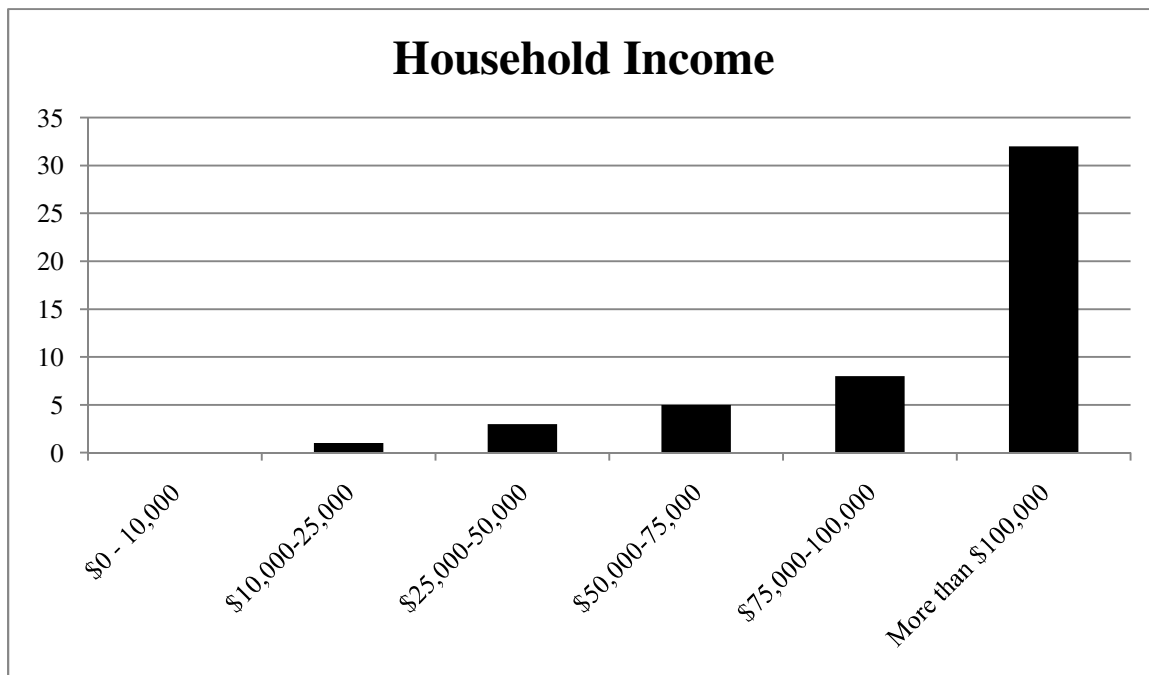
Educational background was another area of demographical information collected. All 54 of the respondents answered this question. The results are represented in the table below.



*Figure 1.* Educational background.

The largest percentage of respondents had received a bachelor's degree with 23 out of 54 (42.6%) showing this answer in the survey. The second highest percentage was 16 (29.6%) receiving a master's degree, followed by 9 (16.7%) with some college or an associate's degree. Three (5.6%) received a high school degree and three (5.6%) received a doctorate degree.

Household income yielded the following results. Overwhelmingly, 32 (65.3%) specified their household made more than \$100,000. The answers are represented in the table below.



*Figure 2.* Household income.

Thirteen (26.5) respondents made \$50,000-100,000, and four (8.1%) less than \$50,000.

Five of the respondents chose to skip this question.

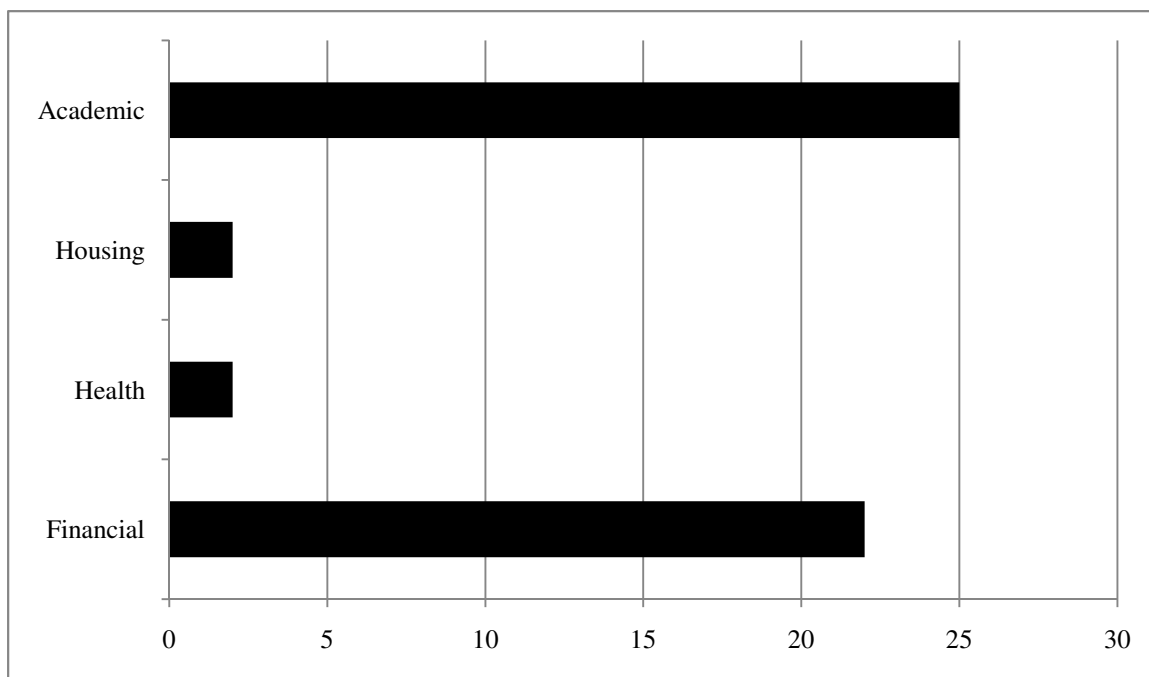
The last question dealing with demographics asked for the parent or family member to indicate whether their student was classified as an in-state student or out-of-state student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. All 54 answered this question.

Twenty-nine (53.7%) said their student was an in-state student, and 25 (46.3%) reported their student to be an out-of-state student.

### **Survey Questions.**

The first six questions of the survey sent to parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students asked questions about (a) receiving information from the university, (b) interactions they have had with university staff and faculty, and (c) their thoughts about a Parent and Family Relations Office.

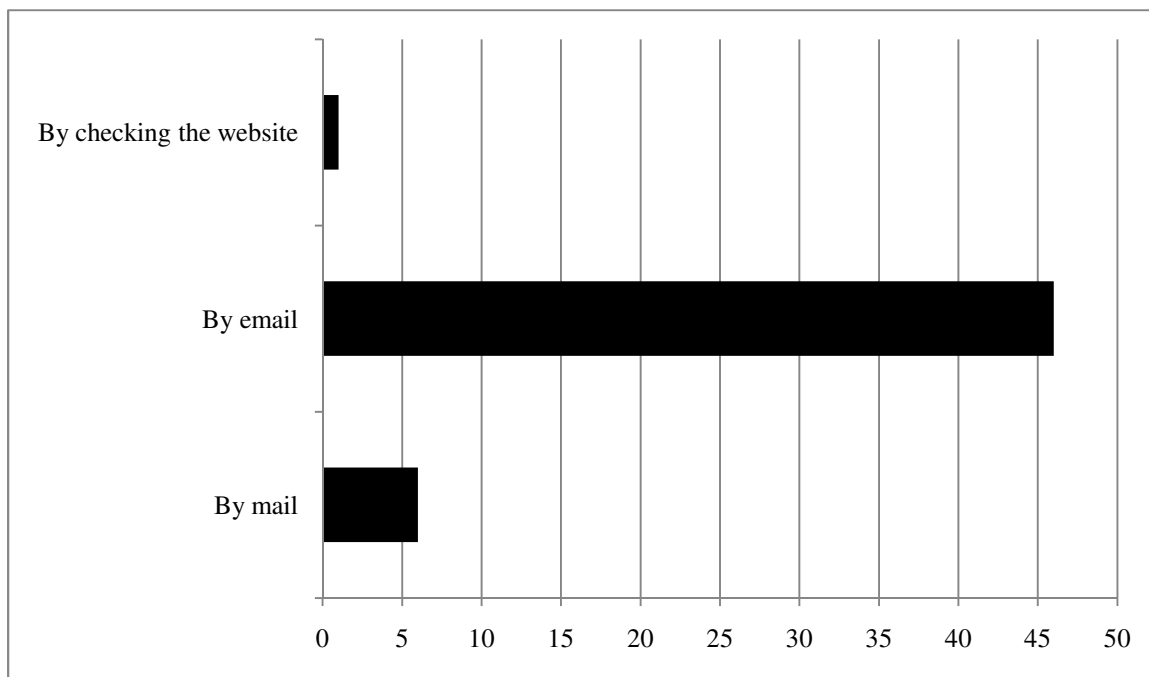
***Question 1: What type of information do you most expect to receive from the university?***



*Figure 3.* Question 1: What type of information do you most expect to receive from the university?

Twenty-five (49%) reported having academic information specific to their student as the information they most expected to receive from the university. Financial information was the second highest answer; 22 (43.1%) said financial information was what they hoped to receive. Health and housing information had 2 (3.9%) responses. In addition to the four responses listed, there was an option for the participant to write a comment. Some of the comments for this question suggested receiving information in the areas of: security issues, faculty additions, new programs, grants that have been received, future tuition costs, and updates on when a balance is due on their student's account.

***Question 2: How would you most prefer to receive information from the university?***

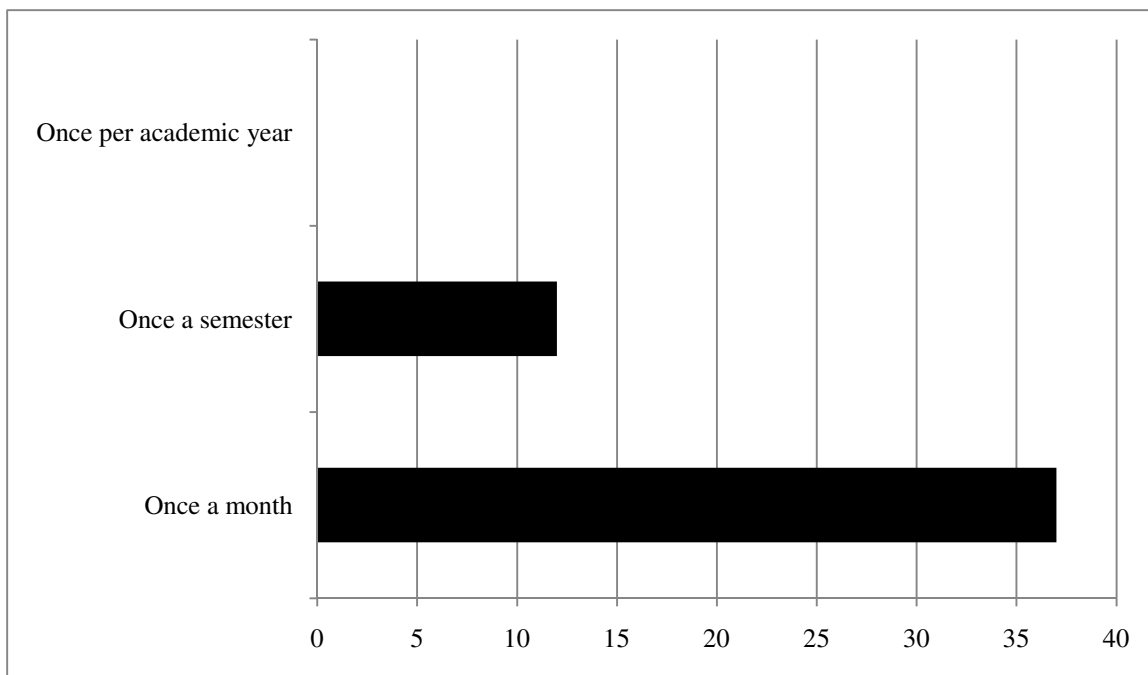


*Figure 4.* Question 2: How would you most prefer to receive information from the university?

The largest percentage of participants, 46 (86.8%), agreed they would most prefer for the university to email information to them. Six (11.3%) chose having information sent by mail was the method they most preferred, and one (1.9%) simply wanted to check the website for updates on information. As with question one, there was an opportunity for participants to write in a comment about this question. One respondent stated,

“I so have to comment on UNL’s website. It is difficult to maneuver. (Clemson University’s website is easy to maneuver) UNL’s website can be frustrating.”

**Question 3: How often would you like to receive information from the university?**



*Figure 5.* Question 3: How often would you like to receive information from the university?

As one might posit, zero of the respondents only wanted information from the university once per academic year. Twelve (24.5%) indicated “once a semester” would satisfy them for receiving information, but 37 (75.5%) specified that “once a month” was how often they hoped to receive university information. Other comments on this question were,

“Once a week, if kept short and concise, would be all right, too.”

“Beginning, middle, & end of each semester.”

“Only as necessary. As I said my daughter is the adult and wishes to be treated as such. 😊”

“One month may be too often, but once a semester is not often enough.”

“Actually every other month would be good. We should have been informed about the issue of bomb scares and the people with guns on

campus. I found out about it when my daughter text me and said “I’m OK”...I called UNL (we are out of state) and the person who answered the phone did admit that there was an issue with someone having a gun...he didn’t present the information with confidence to make me feel good...I am not confident that UNL has a solid policy in place. I would have liked to have seen something on the website about how things were being handled.”

***Question 4: Please describe a time when you have had a positive experience with a university staff member or faculty member.***

As the responses were reviewed, it became evident that there were similar themes among the answers. Therefore, the responses to this question have been divided into similar categories. The categories are: (a) general positive comments, (b) faculty and staff, (c) departments and (d) programs.

*General positive comments.*

The general responses were answers that did not mention a faculty or staff member, department, or program specifically. These were comments from the participants that were general in nature and spoke of the university as a whole. Responses in the general category included:

“Any time I have called with questions I have had a positive experience..everyone is helpful and friendly.”

“Two of my children are UNL grads & at the time they were in school my husband was a Univ. Regent – so we had positive experiences then. The student that we have at UNL at this time is a grandson whom we have raised since he was 8yrs. old. However, we are still friends with some university staff members as well as administrative people.”

“I have never seen or visited with a UNL Staff or Faculty member and my son is a sophomore this year,...It is MY fault that I haven’t!!!”

“I loved being able to access my son’s financial and grade information last year. The software they used then enabled me, as a parent, to access a portal with his information. I felt informed.”

“Most, not all, of the communication I have had with UNL has been positive and very helpful. Since I live in Texas all of my communicating is done by phone when I call regarding financial assistance, student loans, or paying a bill. I would welcome monthly updates regarding my son, his academic progress, actually anything regarding him.”

*Faculty and staff.*

Many of the comments from this question directly mentioned a faculty or staff member. Highlighting the positives on a campus is something that may get overlooked, and knowing that there are people who appreciate what the faculty and staff do on campus is a crucial component to realizing one person can make a difference. Comments in this category were:

“Dr. Scott Anderson was more than [accommodating] and basically the reason our student is attending UNL. It was such a positive experience.”

“MANY times with many faculty! As President of UNL Parents I had numerous opportunities to work directly with Dr. Franco, Dr. Tim Alvarez, and Tonda Humphress in Student Affairs. They are all very professional and totally committed to our students having positive experiences at UNL. Dr. Mendenhall at the Alumni Wick Center is another UNL “Star” Faculty person that is supportive and eager to acknowledge and utilize the talents and efforts of alumni.”

“I can say that my entire experience with the University of Nebraska, Lincoln has been excellent!! The UNL parent association, Tonda in particular, has been excellent at keeping me up to date and informed.”

“Meeting custodial and food services staff in Abel Hall on Parents Weekend 2010. What wonderful and caring people. I felt loads better knowing that my daughter had taken time to know them, and they her.”

“I have had many favorable experiences with Lyla in the UNL Student Accounts office. She has helped me to process simultaneous scholarships from UNL and the Michigan Education Trust.”

“My daughter was sick & unable to attend class for two days. As a student in the CASNR, my daughter was very thankful that the CASNR “Mom” staff member was able to contact her professors by email to inform them of my daughter’s illness so her absences would be excused & she would be able to make up the exam she missed during the illness.”



“Enjoyed the frequent emails sent out by Karen Kalin who was our daughter’s Admissions “advisor” regarding school activities and reminders regarding items to complete.”

“I’ve had many positive experiences with staff members. Kirk Kluver comes to mind. A couple of great experiences with faculty members in Journalism/Advertising as well. But my favorite is Tonda Humphress and the work that she does with the parents association.”

“At NSE the Engineering professors had lunch with the students and parents.”

“I really haven’t had any experiences except at Red Letter day. We were very impressed with the faculty member from the Journalism college. He was very knowledgeable and persuasive in our daughter making her choice to attend UNL.”

#### *Departments.*

Specific departments were addressed in the positive interactions that were described by University of Nebraska-Lincoln parents and family members. Recognizing departments as a whole makes a great statement, in that the parent may have contacted the department several times and each time has spoken with a different representative and had a great experience. Departmental comments were as follows:

“Whenever I have asked a question of housing, I have received very quick responses.”

“Our son’s freshmen roommate was arrested on a drug charge near the beginning of the school year. We spoke with several people in the housing department and were advised of his rights and things he should be aware of to prevent his possible association with the crime...”

“Financial Aid Office. They made a mistake on our bill and rectified it as soon as I notified them.”

“I have been very impressed with the University staff from the first time we visited UNL...Everyone there was very cordial and kind...The students who lead the tours are so outgoing and put everyone at ease. New student days during the summer was VERY impressive! It really helped assure me as a parent that she was going to a great place. My daughter is almost done with her first year and loves being there! If she’s happy, we are happy!”

“I have always had positive experiences with Financial Aid staff.”

“My daughter has had numerous wonderful experiences attending UNL. She has made wonderful friends, she has great, supportive instructors, and she loves her major. I can’t imagine getting a better education than she is receiving at Nebraska. My expectations were high, but her experience in the Johnny Carson Film School has well exceeded my expectations as far as educational experience. She is being well-prepared for a future in film.”

“I have always had excellent interaction with the VC of Student Affairs Office. I have found them to be very helpful and concerned with parental involvement through the Parent’s Association.”

“My child had an injury that required stitches. She was supported by the RAs on the floor, the staff at the front desk and the staff at University Health. We were very impressed.”

*Programs.*

Finally, the fourth category that was represented in this question was programs.

The university hosts programs throughout the year that parents and family members are invited to attend. Several have made outstanding impressions among the parents and family members of the students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

“The visit when we first looked at UNL was good. That is probably the only one.”

“I attended UNL’s parent’s day as I am from Texas. I had so much fun! The staff gave us great information and I had time to visit with my son.”

“Sad to say, I don’t know any university staff, there has never been an issue with my kids, and they do very well at school. The Parent’s Weekend in 2003 and 2009 were very nice and informative and fun.”

“When I have requested information from various people about scholarship ideas, they have been helpful. The orientation sessions were helpful, and could be expanded. That would clear up more questions for parents.”

Forty-two participants responded to Question 4, and 12 chose to skip documenting their answer. Unfortunately, out of the 42 who did respond there were three participants who indicated they had not had a positive interaction with a faculty or staff member at the university. This answer could be interpreted several ways. The first being

those participants have truly not had a positive interaction with faculty or staff members they have contacted; however, the second interpretation could be they have not had the chance to interact with faculty or staff at all. Therefore, they have not had the opportunity to have a positive or negative encounter.

***Question 5: Please describe a time when you have had a frustrating experience with a university staff or faculty member.***

As with the answers to the positive experiences with faculty and staff on campus, the experiences listed as frustrating had similar reportings. While some comments from this question are difficult to read as a university administrator, staff, or faculty member, these are the comments that assist in reflection and present the opportunity for growth. The categories represented in this question are: (a) money issues, (b) housing, and (c) academics.

*Money issues.*

Within the category of money issues there were comments ranging from billing to financial aid. The most frustration seemed to occur for most of the participants when there was a lack of communication.

“...trying to get information about scholarship money. According to her SAT/ACT & GPA, she was supposed to receive a lot more money. When in reality, it never surfaced. We are now told that when she gets into the school of education, she will receive scholarship money, but I don’t know who to believe. The school made it appealing for an out of state student, but for some reason that we could never get a straight answer on, the costs have been much higher than expected.”

“Billing issues have been frustrating. Students are supposed to be learning to advocate for themselves and get issues settled on their own. However, we’ve discovered that frequently the only way to get things moving sometimes is if we get on the phone and call the billing office ourselves. We’ve even been told by staff members that the only way an issue “gets moved to the top of the pile” is when a parent calls...”

“The financial aid office is our biggest challenge. It is embarrassing anyways to have to need assistance but you feel even worse when talking with most of them.”

“I am sometimes not aware of a balance due because the notices are sent to the student. I am frustrated about late payment charges when I never received notice of the payment being due.”

“The new billing system this year had many flaws which was very frustrating and took too much of my time. When communicating with other parents they too had the same problems. The system went to parents a year too early.”

### *Housing.*

Housing was an area of concern for the parents and family members who participated in this survey. Communication, again, was a part of the issue at hand, as well as safety concerns. Parents and family members want to know their child is living in a safe place, especially if they are an out-of-state family, and the message the University of Nebraska-Lincoln sends should reflect one of safety and a welcoming place of residence.

“Our daughter has been put in the lottery for 3 different housing halls (after a couple of weeks, found out that she has been selected for Knoll). She is way down on the list for housing. This is very frustrating since there is very few safe off-campus housing available at UNL, and we as parents do not feel comfortable with our 19 year old living far off campus...The cost for the Knoll residence hall is very high...that along with out of state tuition has been an issue.”

“My opinion is that the resident director at Knoll Hall is burned out with his job. He doesn't seem to counsel kids when they need it. If someone wanted to appeal something, he said they better not, or he'd see to it that the punishment would be worse.”

“I have found the housing office to sometimes be insulated in their interactions with other university functions. There is a high degree of segmentation in the way that functional areas operate within the university, not much of a team atmosphere.”

“Freshman year...with housing...trying to move to a different housing at semester break time...done with finals and have to move by noon...but they didn't have the UNL floor person there...had to wait, wait, and wait until some knew what was going on so my daughter could move to a new place on campus...we couldn't get into [the new room] until 7pm that night because the person in that room was not moved out yet...the UNL floor person was not there for that floor (Schram

Hall). There was no one from UNL staff to help or assist us with this...we called...and they told us that the RA had already left for break and we were on our own...finally the girl moved out...the room had to be cleaned so my daughter and I cleaned it before she could move into it. No one checked it out...It was very frustrating...Thanks UNL!!”

*Academics.*

A third area that parents and family members mentioned as a frustrating experience dealt with the area of academics. Some of the comments were directed towards academic advising, while others were concerned with professors and their teaching methods.

“...the advisor seemed lost as far as knowing what she needed to take. Our daughter was told that she has satisfied a lot of the classes with AP (in her first semester?!). Therefore, she took choir to be able to get a full 12 units. The money we spend per credit hour cannot and should not have to be spent on filler classes especially as a freshmen...I thought this was very frustrating. We’re hoping that this will not be a problem in the future...”

“My grandson had some difficulty with a couple of professors both his freshman year & this year. One of my frustrations is the number of professors who speak little or no English – and are not at all willing to work with students...I feel that if one is going [to] teach in an American university—they should be required to be able to speak English fluently.”

“...our student has also had an issue with one of his classes where the computer failed in the middle of his taking a test IN CLASS, and when he tried to resume taking the test, the system wouldn’t let him back in saying he’d already completed the test. That blip caused him to fail the class...through NO FAULT OF HIS OWN. He appealed it through the University system and took it as far as he could go, to no avail. When I tried to get some answers re: the situation, I was informed very bluntly that he (as the student) needed to deal with it.”

“When my daughter was a freshman, she had difficulty with understanding a professor. I tried to get assistance from the University but they said she should get with someone else from the class and use their notes. She ended up taking the class pass/fail and changing her major. It was very upsetting to get so little help.”

“The frustrating experience is NOT having contact with/from faculty members. I understand that our children are now considered adults but it would be interesting to perhaps get an occasional group email regarding what was happening in our childrens’ classes or colleges.”

“My son was struggling with a class and teacher and didn’t know where to go for help. When I called UNL to find out what his options were, who he could turn to for help at UNL, I was pretty much told that it was his business not mine because he is an adult now.”

Responses that did not fall into one of these categories were,

“The process for getting transcripts for grad school applications is dark ages.”

“The biggest frustration is the lack of regular communication involving changes on the academic side of things pertaining to our student’s department. It was also very disappointing to attend Parent’s Weekend – it was quite a waste of time. Nothing of substance was presented which made us feel that our time and resources were not well-spent for the weekend or for our child’s education.”

“Financial aid, registering for classes but more importantly not receiving safety notifications when I have signed up for them.”

“This year, I cannot access my son’s information at all because, in order for me to see his grades or financial statements, he would have to give me his password. He doesn’t mind my having the information but is, understandably, reluctant to give me the password. There is no parent portal, so I am totally out of the loop.”

While these comments may appear harsh, it is important to note that 33 participants answered this question, which means that 21 participants skipped this question. Of the 33 who answered, 12 answered that they had not had a frustrating experience or one could not come to mind.

***Question 6: If the university your student attends had a parent & family relations office, would you utilize this office? If yes, please explain the main purpose you feel this office should serve.***

The purpose of this question was to gauge the interest that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln parents and family members had in a Parent & Family Relations Office. A description of the functions of this kind of office was sent to them in the body of the email with the survey. Responses to this question were mixed. Forty-four participants responded to this question, and eight said they did not have a need for this

kind of office. Statements behind not having an office of this kind on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus consisted of some parents simply saying “no”. Others however, commented,

“No. There are too many offices at UNL. There is an overabundance of administrators making high salaries. Good parent relations should already be a part of the basic knowledge and training within a taxpayer-supported university of this type.”

“Probably not, I have a great relationship with my daughter and don’t really find a need for this.”

“NO, just another waste of tax payer money.”

“Right now I’d say no. There isn’t anything University staff and faculty have not provided me with what I’ve talked to anyone about. That being said...what would a P & F Relations Office do for me that staff & faculty aren’t already doing?”

“The university does not need to add more offices. The money we spend at the university is unbelievable.”

Thirteen of the participants responded with an answer that suggested they could possibly benefit from having a Parent and Family Relations Office. Most mentioned they would need more information about the office before making an informed decision, while some said they thought the office would be helpful especially if it would be a place that could give guidance and assistance with MyRed.

“Not sure. I don’t have many concerns and the ones I do I expect my daughter to take care of it. One area that might be helpful would [be] one to help navigate around the website My Red.”

“Perhaps. Would the office serve as an Ombudsman of sorts? I could see some value in that because it would have been nice to have some recourse or someone to talk to re: the frustrating situations noted above. But...I also think kids need to learn to become their own advocates...and the university years are a good time to learn those skills. However, universities need to respect students and provide them with answers when they need them...”

“Don’t think we would have any need for this. Might be positive for out of state families who are new to the area to learn more about places their child might need

to know about – doctors, hospitals, churches, places to get haircuts, grocery stores...”

“Perhaps to address ways to improve the student environment.”

“I don’t know if an office would help, but it would definitely be helpful to have a voice when decisions such as the software issue are being considered. Most of the time, we pay the bills. If we can’t even see the bills, this creates a problem and a potential tense family situation.”

“Perhaps. I guess it should be a go-between for parents & the University, providing help for parents who have a problem & need to know who to contact & how to reach them.”

“Not sure. If they could get me game tickets, sure.”

Most of the parents and family members who responded to this final question had positive comments about having a Parent and Family Relations Office for them to contact with questions. Twenty-three of the 44 indicated that they would in fact utilize this office if it was made available to them at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Several noted they may not need an entire office. Simply having a person, one person, for them to contact is sufficient.

“This would be an extension of the current Student Affairs dept. I would assume. Interesting idea – may get more parents involved if the “name” of the office included them!”

“Yes. This would have been very helpful especially for the parents of Freshmen students...to have a place for parents to ask questions would be wonderful. As long as it is not a place for parents to overstep their boundaries and do everything for their student...”

“I think that it would give students an opportunity to field problems that they may be having with people who are willing & able to see situations from the student’s point of view – and provide ways to solve the problem & at the same time be helpful to the parents of said student by showing that the University really cares about their student.”

“I would hope that perhaps there would be more help for parents to help their kids. I know she is an adult but she still looks to me for guidance and I found no help at the University.”



“Yes I would utilize it!,...The main purpose should be to keep me updated...”

“The parent site at the university of Nebraska was a useful tool until they replaced their student information system. Parent information is not quite as detailed and easy to get at as before. I think I may have used this office to assist me in getting information.”

“I think such an office would be beneficial, given that the university is a big place. Some guidance to parents is always appreciated!”

“Yes. Hopefully, it would let me better understand how my child is doing in college, and how he/she can prepare for life after college. Sometimes, your children just forget to inform you of some of the important things...especially academics.”

“This office should act as a liaison between the parents and the student’s college/faculty/greek house. It would serve as a general clearing house for questions regarding issues between the interested parties. I could also envision a newsletter that would regularly be sent out to the families informing them of group activities on campus, creating a more secure feeling for especially those families who, because of distance, may not have the opportunity to travel to visit campus regularly.”

“Yes, as a resource to answer questions. As a first time college parent, we learned a lot of things by trial and error. If I had a resource to direct these questions, we could have avoided a lot of mistakes.”

“Absolutely, as a parent I understand that legally at 18 our children are adults. However, until they are 100% on their own...we are still very much involved in their lives. It is frustrating when I know that my child is 600 miles away and needs help, has exhausted all his avenues at UNL and doesn’t know who to turn to so he calls home. As a parent I have no one at UNL that I can turn to for that help or advice. The Parent Association is nice but it is all about social events. We parents need a liaison/friendly face at UNL that we can rely on when we need advice or answers.”

With the responses above in mind, in chapter five I recommend should be put in place at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to most effectively address the needs of parents and family members of the student body.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains conclusions and recommendations that I have reached as a result of conducting this research study. The conclusions I came to were based upon the interactions with Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard Jarnot at Colorado State University through the interview and observing them during an Admitted Student Day. Conclusions were also drawn by reviewing the survey results from the parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students. I discuss recommendations pertaining to those institutions that may want to implement a Parent and Family Relations Office on their campus and institutions who may want to conduct further research in the area of parent and family relations in a higher education setting.

#### **Conclusions**

I answered the main research question and two sub-questions below.

#### **What is the role of either having or not having a parent and family relations office in the interactions between parents, family members and universities?**

Throughout this research study this question has been on the forefront of my mind, as the institutions involved with this study handle parents and families in different manners. After hearing from populations at both the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Colorado State University, I have reached the conclusion that if an actual Parent and Family Relations Office is not possible, the institution needs a similar solution. The role of this office on a university campus is crucial and affects the entire campus, possibly retention as well. By thinking about sub-questions to this main question, I was able to reach more concrete recommendations which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

**How do parents and family members of current university of Nebraska-Lincoln students view their communication with the university?**

The survey sent to the members of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Parent's Association came back with many positive comments. For the most part, the parents and family members reported that the communication they have had with university staff and faculty members has been helpful and encouraging. They reported that the staff and faculty were friendly and easy to work with, which is a comment most people always associate with Nebraskans in general. The programs that the parents of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln students attend, mainly Parent's Weekend and the initial visit when the student is choosing a college, were cited as wonderful experiences where the parents and families were able to learn about the campus that their students attended.

According to the survey results, the parents and family members wanted more communication sent to them. Many commented they understand there are regulations as to what can be sent, but they expected more from the university, especially when they are paying the student's tuition bill. Not only do parents and families expect more information, but they also would like to receive that information more often throughout the year.

The issues of money, housing, and academics were topics most commented on in the survey as frustrating experiences. Parents and families expected the university to be able to answer questions about the new information system. They wanted housing to be more accommodating and patient with their questions. Concerning academics, the majority of parents understood their students to be "adults" by university standards. They wanted faculty to be empathetic towards their students and help them when they need

help. Parents who are requesting their students' grades need more education about FERPA and the regulations associated with higher education.

Lastly, parents and family members require a liaison. They stated that having one person and one office that they know they could rely on to always be helpful is something they would enjoy and utilize.

**What are the benefits of implementing a parent & family relations office on campus, according to parents and family members and university officials?**

Through both phases of this research study, the survey with parents and family members and the interviews with Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard Jarnot of Colorado State University, the benefits of having a Parent and Family Relations Office were mentioned. Each population had reasons that were both different and similar for why this office belongs on a university campus.

The benefits of implementing a Parent and Family Relations Office according to the parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students included having a familiar and friendly face they knew they could contact and from whom they could receive answers. Another benefit from the parent perspective was being able to recommend students visit the Parent and Family Relations Office if they needed assistance. Parents and families mentioned they would utilize this office as a source of information, especially when their students were incoming freshmen.

According to Jody Donovan and Kacee Collard Jarnot, the benefits to having this office on their campus are numerous. The parents and family members of Colorado State students are now contacting Jody and Kacee to thank them and say how grateful they are this resource exists for them. The RAMFAM Association meetings that are webcast live would be a significant benefit. Being able to broadcast from the Internet allowed parents

and families who live out of state or out of the country to participate in the parent “club” and stay active in their students’ college life without disturbing the students’ college life at all. A third benefit discussed in the interviews was the relationships built across campus. Faculty and staff across the Colorado State University campus know the functions of the parent and family office. They have participated in training and are able to lead students to this office if they need support. A final benefit, according to Jody and Kacee, were the gaps that this office filled. The Parent and Family Relations Office is the connector on campus, and the place parents and families go to and are sent to with their problems and concerns.

### **Recommendations**

After completing this research study, I have determined there are areas of parent and family relations yet to be explored and further research should be done on this population. Colorado State University was the model institution in this study; therefore, the recommendations put forth are for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to consider. The first recommendation is to examine all programs and services the parents and families are directly involved with (Parent’s Weekend, campus visits, Parent’s Association, etc.) to determine if these programs and services are assisting parents with their questions and concerns in the best way possible. They should not be reorganized to mirror Colorado State’s programs, because the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is not Colorado State; however, they are both land grant institutions and serve a similar purpose.

If a Parent and Family Relations Office is not possible, a second recommendation is to designate one person on campus as the parent liaison. Whomever that person is they

should be patient, understanding, and organized. This liaison should be pictured on admissions material and other publications sent to parents and family members, as well as featured on the website with contact information. This person needs to be someone the parents and family members trust and can easily access when they have questions.

Providing training to faculty and staff across campus about the needs and concerns of parents and family members is a third recommendation. Parents of college students today are from a different generation than those with whom university officials are used to working, which makes their needs different. The university is constantly searching for ways to connect students to the university due to the fact that students change over the years. The same goes for the families of the students. Training on how to talk to a parent or family member needs to be offered and strongly encouraged. Many parents and families know about FERPA and understand there are certain aspects of their student's academic life they will not have access to, but faculty and staff need to learn to be empathetic and find a way to assist the parents without simply saying, "I can't help you. Have your student call me."

Overall, customer service is the key. Parents and family members are important to the students on a university campus today, and they should be important to the university as well.

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**APPENDIX A**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**



March 22, 2011

Amanda Ronen  
Department of Educational Administration  
3043 Fletcher Ave Apt 237 Lincoln, NE 68504-1006

Barbara LaCost  
Department of Educational Administration  
127 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20110311609 EX  
Project ID: 11609  
Project Title: Exploring the Parent and Family Relations Office in Higher Education

Dear Amanda:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 03/22/2011.

1. The approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with -Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this form to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.
2. Please include the IRB approval number (IRB# 20110311609 EX) in the emails to students. Please email a copy of these messages to [irb@unl.edu](mailto:irb@unl.edu) for our records. If you need to make changes to the messages please submit the revised messages to the IRB for review and approval prior to using them.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- \* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- \* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- \* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- \* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- \* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP  
for the IRB



**Appendix B**

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY CONTACT EMAILS**

Hi Jody!

I'm currently in the process of finishing my IRB for my thesis. I'm not sure if you remember, but I decided to do my thesis on the topic of Parent & Family Relations. I'm going to be looking at a university which currently has a Parent & Family Relations Office (hopefully CSU if that is okay with you!) and will be interviewing that university to find out some things about how they run their office, issues if there are any, how they got started...those kinds of things. The second part of my thesis involves surveying parents and family members whose student attends a university without such an office (UNL parents) to assess their needs and how they would utilize this office if it existed.

What I need to know is if it's okay to use Colorado State for the first part of my thesis. How do I go about getting permission for this? Is there a letter of consent? Any help you can provide me would be greatly appreciated! You really inspired me to research more about this topic, so I'm hoping that I can use your university!

Mandy

Mandy Ronen  
Graduate Assistant  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Hi Kacee,

I am writing my masters thesis on Parent and Family Relations and would love your help in the first part of this process. I am hoping to interview you and Jody to learn more about the Parent and Family Relations Office at CSU. Would you be interested in sharing experiences, lessons you've learned, and areas you think could use improvement? Please let me know at your earliest convenience. Thanks, and I hope you are having a great year!

Mandy

Mandy Ronen  
Graduate Assistant  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
(402) 472-1877

**Appendix C**

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY APPROVAL LETTER**



Office of the Vice President  
for Student Affairs  
201 Administration Building  
8004 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-8004  
(970) 491-5312; Fax: (970) 491-7025

December 1, 2010

Mandy Ronen  
Graduate Assistant  
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Office  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
106 Canfield Administration Building  
P.O. Box 880423  
Lincoln, NE 68588-0423

Dear Mandy,

Thank you for sharing your thesis proposal and request to examine our successful parent and family program at Colorado State University and subsequent exploration of the needs, expectations and desires of parents and family members of University of Nebraska-Lincoln undergraduate students. I am fully supportive of this research project and am interested to participate in your project and ultimately learn about your findings.

I shared your proposal with the Office of the General Counsel at Colorado State University and they are fully supportive of your research project, the use of Colorado State University's name and any program identifier.

Best wishes for much success and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jody Donovan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Jody Donovan, Ph.D.  
Interim Dean of Students/  
Executive Director of Parent & Family Programs

**Appendix D**

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. In what year was the Parent & Family Relations Office at Colorado State University implemented, and what were the leading factors that led to the implementation?
2. What information do you give to parents and family members?
3. What is an area that you are most proud of within your office?
4. What is an area that your office could improve upon?
5. How do you assess that what your office is doing something that the parents & family members appreciate and utilize?
6. What steps had to occur in order for this office to be approved?
7. Do you have examples that come to mind where this office has assisted in the communication between parents, family members and the university?
8. If an institution is considering starting an office like this, what words of wisdom would you give them?

**Appendix E**

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN  
PARENT AND FAMILY CONTACT EMAIL**

Greetings, UNL parents and family members!

My name is Mandy Ronen, and I am currently a graduate student in the Higher Education Administration program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am conducting a research project looking into the relationship between parents, family members, and the university. There are several universities across the United States that have started a Parent & Family Relations Office, and the purpose of this survey is to find out if you, as a parent or family member of a current college student, would utilize an office like this.

Please take a moment to answer the questions in this survey.  
[The link to the survey will be here.]

Through research projects such as this one, university administrators can learn how to assist parents, family members, and of course, your students! So, I appreciate your assistance and look forward to reading your stories and responses.

Attached is a description of the purpose of the study and an explanation of your rights and responsibilities.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to email me at [mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu) or you may email my advisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost, at [blacost1@unl.edu](mailto:blacost1@unl.edu).

Thank you!

Mandy Ronen  
Graduate Assistant  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
(402) 472-1877  
[mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu)

Dr. Barbara LaCost  
Faculty in Educational Administration  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
(402) 472-0988  
[blacost1@unl.edu](mailto:blacost1@unl.edu)

## Description of Study: Purpose, Rights, and Responsibilities

Title of Project: Exploring the Parent & Family Relations Office in Higher Education

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Amanda Ronen, masters student in the Student Affairs program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The purpose of this study is to examine a university with an operating Parent & Family Relations Office to understand how the office communicates with parents and family members of their students. The second objective of this study is to survey the parents and family members of students who do not attend a university with a Parent & Family Relations Office to see if they would utilize an office of this kind. Ultimately, I am interested learning about ways in which to assist parents and family members during the years their student is attending college.

If you decide to participate, you are asked to fill out a survey and return it. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete and will be completed as an online survey through SurveyMonkey. There are no known risks. To safe guard information, only the primary and secondary researcher will have access to the survey results. The benefit to the higher education community will be the gained knowledge about a Parent & Family Relations Office. Additionally, the benefit to you is the opportunity to reflect on your child's college experience.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be destroyed after the survey analysis. There will be no compensation or extra costs associated with this study for you or your institution.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with the investigators or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The return of the survey implies consent to the research study. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has reviewed and approved the present research.

If you have any questions, please contact Mandy Ronen at (402) 472-1877 or [mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost, at (402) 472-0988 or [blacost1@unl.edu](mailto:blacost1@unl.edu).

Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, (402) 472-6965.

**YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. BY COMPLETING AND RETURNING THE SURVEY YOUR CONSENT IS IMPLIED. YOU SHOULD PRINT A COPY OF THIS PAGE FOR YOUR RECORDS.**

Mandy Ronen  
Graduate Assistant  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
(402) 472-1877  
[mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:mronen@unlnotes.unl.edu)

Dr. Barbara LaCost  
Faculty in Educational Administration  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
(402) 472-0988  
[blacost1@unl.edu](mailto:blacost1@unl.edu)

**Appendix F**

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN SURVEY**

## UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN SURVEY

1. What type of information do you most expect to receive from the University?
  - A. Financial Information
  - B. Health Information
  - C. Housing Information
  - D. Academic Information specific to your student
  - E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How would you most prefer to receive information from the University?
  - A. By mail
  - B. By e-mail
  - C. By checking the website
  - D. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How often would you like to receive information from the University?
  - A. Once a month
  - B. Once a semester
  - C. Once per academic year
  - D. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Please describe a time when you have had a positive experience with a University staff member or faculty member.
  
5. Please describe a time when you have had a frustrating experience with a University staff member or faculty member.
  
6. If the University your student attends had a Parent & Family Relations Office, would you utilize this office? If yes, please explain the main purpose you feel this office should serve.

### *Demographic Information*

7. Please check the appropriate box:
 

Hispanic/Latino	White/Caucasian
African-American	Native American
Asian	Other: _____
  
8. Please list the highest level of education you have completed:
 

Some high school	High School Degree
Some college	Associates Degree
Bachelors Degree	Masters Degree
Doctorate Degree	

9. Please select the level of income for your household.

\$0.00 - 10,000

\$10,000-25,000

\$25,000-50,000

\$50,000-75,000

\$75,000-100,000

More than \$100,000

10. Is your student classified as an in-state student or an out-of-state student?