Utilizing Parent Communications to Land the Helicopter

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Evolution of Parent and Family Relations

- Is Parent Involvement at Ohio State new?
  - Parent Associations with paid memberships
  - Mom’s clubs” dating to the 1920s
- Parent Association
  - Began in the late 1990’s
  - Enhanced communication, discounts, and programming at a cost.
Parent and Family Relations

Our Mission: We are committed to engaging parents as key stakeholders in The Ohio State University through enhanced communications, involvement in programming, and through leadership and support of fundraising initiatives.

Parent and Family Relations Emerges

- Collaborative Advancement office between Student Life and University Advancement
- Four full time staff members and four student employees
- “Opt-out” model
- No additional fees for increased services
How We Meet Our Parents’ Needs

Communications

• Dedicated Phone line and email address
• Regular Email Communications
  – Buckeye Net News for Parents and Families
    • Weekly communications that provides information about campus resources and events
  – Buckeye Parent
    • Monthly communication that provides resources but also highlights successes of Ohio State
  – Buck-i-Brief
    • Campus Safety Information
    • Other Campus Updates
Today’s Parent: Is the “Helicopter” Fair?

Image of today’s parents:

- Overly involved
- Intrusive
- Manipulative
- Smothering
- Helicopters
- Lawn mowers
- Stealth bombers
- Submarines
Today’s Parent:  
Is the “Helicopter” Fair?

Reality of today’s parent

- Parents are asked to be involved from an early age
- No Child Left Behind
- Technology makes communications easy
- Students initiate involvement
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid – Family Contribution
- The Cost of Education
- For many families, outside of their home, their child’s education will be the most expensive thing they own!!!
How Involved are Ohio State Parents?

2010 Survey regarding parent communication styles and preferences

Communication:
- 32% communicate with their students daily
- 41% 3-5 times per week
- 22% once per week
How Do Ohio State Parents Communicate?

How they communicate:
• 98% by phone
• 84% by text message
• 75% by email
• 45% by care packages or letters
• 24% via Facebook, Twitter or other social media

But what do parents actually do with the information we share?
What is in the Literature?

• How they communicate:
    • While overprotective parenting is not new, the ease of communication through technology can intensify the overprotective behavior of "helicopter parents."

• Academic Involvement:
    • This paper investigates parental engagement in college students' academic lives, the mode and frequency of student-parent communications

• Middle School/High School Communication:
    • The article focuses on the benefits offered by using newsletters as a communication means between teachers and students
What is in the Literature (cont.)?

• Communications as a means of assurance:
    • Student Affairs professionals must use purposeful messages to educate and reassure the parents of college students on topics such as the culture of higher education, address parents’ misconceptions about students' out-of-class opportunities and expectations, educate parents about the resources that are available, etc.

• Reinforcing Student Messages by Utilizing Parents
    • Varying amounts of hard copy communications sent to both students and parents. Follow-up survey examined retention of information, accuracy of recognition about content, and extent of communication about these topics.
Overview of Survey

- Done in conjunction with Center for the Student of Student Life (D’Arcy Oaks and Emily Slager) and Dr. Susan Kline, Associate Professor and Associate Director for Undergraduate Studies in the School of Communications
- Surveyed 2500 parents and students using SNAP
  - Random sample of those parents for whom we had email contact information
- Response rate
  - n= 291 Parents
  - n= 219 Students
- Unique questions for each group
- Questions focused on topical areas:
  - Safety, Health/Wellness, Career, Involvement, Academics
Overview of Survey - Student

• Survey question focus:
  – How much information they know about topical areas
  – How much information their parents know about topical areas
  – Their perception of how their parents acquire this information
Overview of Survey (cont.) - Student

- Survey question focus:
  - How often they have conversations with parents about these topics
    - Most of the information that my parents know about Ohio State comes from?
  - Have they taken any action based upon these conversations
    - In part because of a conversation with my parents, I am more aware of programs and events on campus.
Overview of Survey - Parent

• Survey question focus:
  – How much information they know about topical areas?
  – How often they have conversations with their student on this area?
  – From what sources they gather information?
  – Has their student taken any action based upon these conversations
    • In part because I initiated a conversation with my student, they became more
      aware of a program or events on campus.
  – How valuable do they believe the office communications are?
    • Because of communications, I am more motivated to talk to my student about
      these topics.
    • Because of conversations, I believe my child is less likely to drop out of school.
Findings

- **Student Survey**
  - As it relates to topical areas, about half of students believe their parents know little
    - 47% believe their parents know “a little” or less about Health and Wellness
  - Most often discuss academics (54% weekly) and involvement (32%) w/parents
    - Safety is the lowest (6.1%) weekly and the less frequent overall
  - Because of conversations, 43% agree or strongly agree they know more about dates and deadlines at OSU
  - Because of conversations, has a student taken action?
    - 74.6% believe they have made a wiser decision at least once
    - 46.1% have attended a campus program they otherwise would not have attended
    - 60% have acted upon a date or deadline they otherwise would not have known about.
Findings (cont.)

- Parent Survey
  - As it relates to topical areas, parents were in the 75%-91% range for “some” or “a lot”.
    - 82.8% believe they “some” or “a lot” about their students Health and Wellness
    - Know the most about academics (90.1%)
  - 76.8% feel a part of the OSU community (agree or strongly agree)
  - Have the most conversations with students about academics (45.7% weekly) and career (26.9%)
Findings (cont.)

- Parent Survey
  - 55.9% of parents believe that most of the information they get about services information and events on campus is from PFR
    - 31.5% say it's from their students (contrast that to 68% of students who believe the opposite)
  - In part because parents initiate conversations, between 53% and 60% believe their student is more aware of dates, deadlines, events, and issues on campus.
Findings (cont.)

• Parent Survey
  – In part because of parents initiating conversations, 73.8% believe their student attended a program they otherwise would not have attended (at least once).
    • 67.2% say they hit a deadline they would have missed
    • 69.6% they used a campus service they otherwise would not have used
  – Only 31.8% believe that communications help them discuss topics that are difficult in nature to talk about
  – 5.9% of parents believe that most of the information they get about services information and events on campus is from PFR
    • 31.5% say its from their students (contrast that to 68% of students who believe the opposite)
Statistical Analysis

- Parent Survey - Cross Tabulations and Chi Square Analysis
  - Gender
    - More females (93.9%) than males inform their students of important dates and deadlines
    - Females communicate more over email, males communicate more face-to-face

- Parent Survey - Correlations (r is ≥ .7)
  - As a result of the regular communications, there is a strong positive correlation between feeling a part of the OSU community and feeling that Ohio State cares about the success of the student/child.
  - There is also a strong positive correlation between students making a wiser decision in part because the parent initiated conversations about them and acting on an important date or deadline.
Statistical Analysis (cont.)

• Other Observations (correlation is $\geq .5$ but $\leq .7$)
  – Positive relationship between parents thinking that the communication helps them and better discussions with their child and their motivation level to talk with their child and to bring up topics in nature that are difficult to talk about
  – Positive relationship between parents reading to keep informed and parents who follow up with their student in order to educate them about topics covered in the communications
  – In general, there is a positive relationship when parents read and have discussions with their child about safety, health/wellness, career, involvement and academic and their child learning about and acting on those services, events, and resources
Survey Limitations

- Demographics of respondents
  - 76.2% from Ohio
  - 69.7% female
  - 84.7% Caucasian

- Sample size
- Selection bias
  - sample from parents who already receive the parent communications

- Bias from the email survey—already prefer email communication

- Cannot link students to parents
  - different questions, different data

- Though defined, different idea of the topical areas?
- “From what I tell them” – is that really the case?

Not everything can be linked back directly to our communications
Implications of Findings

- Inform students about our office and what we do for parents
- Market more events to parents
  - Reach out to various student organizations
    OUAB, USG, Ohio Staters, Inc., etc. in order to inform parents
- Communications are important and relevant
  - Continue to include information about academics, involvement, career, health/wellness and safety
- Connect parents with faculty members
- Parents are using social media
  - Incorporate more social media with office’s communications
Contact Information

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