

2010

Study of Parents: How They Evaluate Colleges and Influence Enrollment

A Co-Sponsored Study Conducted By



Enrollment Management
Product Solutions

Introduction

It is an established fact that parents are the strongest influences in their child's selection of the college. Now, more than ever before, one or more parents are actively engaging with colleges (secretly or otherwise) on behalf of their child as part of the college selection process.

This study was designed to explore the consumer behavior of parents as it relates to the selection of a college, and how their established behavior ultimately influences the child.

The study explored a host of issues, including: how parents research and absorb information about colleges; most effective channels of communication (i.e., print, electronic, personal contact); most effective marketing messages; household economic issues that will impact enrollment decisions; how, when and to what degree their influence on the child's decision is exerted; and more.

The resulting data will enable co-sponsoring institutions to understand and react to the unique needs, preferences and perceptions of parents. It will clearly define how parents process and act on the information they receive from and about colleges, and how much they influence the student's decisions.

A Co-Sponsored Study

Public and private institutions throughout the United States participated in this co-sponsored study. Collectively, the participating institutions contributed over 9,000 names of students who are likely to enroll in college in the Fall of 2010. The combined list included students from all 50 states, and households from a full range of socio-economic and demographic strata.

Methodology

The survey instrument (attached at the conclusion of this report) contained 27 questions and captured 102 data points ranging from demographic and socioeconomic information to buying behavior and parenting styles.

In addition to quantitative data, several survey questions captured qualitative data relating to topics such as: Campus visits, what colleges do that adds or relieves stress, how parents guide children toward or away from colleges, and more.

The survey was mailed to households in December 2009 and addressed to, "The Parents Of..." the college-bound student.

About Longmire and Company

Longmire and Company is a 22 year old marketing, research and consulting company that has worked with over 200 public and private four-year institutions throughout the United States. Our work centers on providing enrollment managers with the tools and information they need to grow and control enrollment, as well as retain the students they have.

If you need additional information or have questions, please contact Bob Longmire, President, Longmire and Company, Inc. at (913) 492-1265.

Customer service is key.

Parents are more experienced, discriminating, and demanding consumers than their children. They expect a high level of customer service and will reject a relationship with any vendor, supplier or service organization that does not provide it. This study reveals how true this fact is for higher education, as well.

Parents expect a high level of service from the first point of contact with a college and beyond. If they do not receive it, any interest they initially expressed in the institution will evaporate and they will actively persuade their child to look elsewhere.

Conversely, obtaining a high level of service throughout the selection process greatly strengthens their interest in the institution and they will actively lobby for that college with their child.

Too many institutions, unfortunately, are losing the interest of parents and their children simply because of poor performance in areas such as responsiveness from the admissions and financial aid offices, burdensome processes, disorganization, perceived lack of interest in the student and family, and so on.

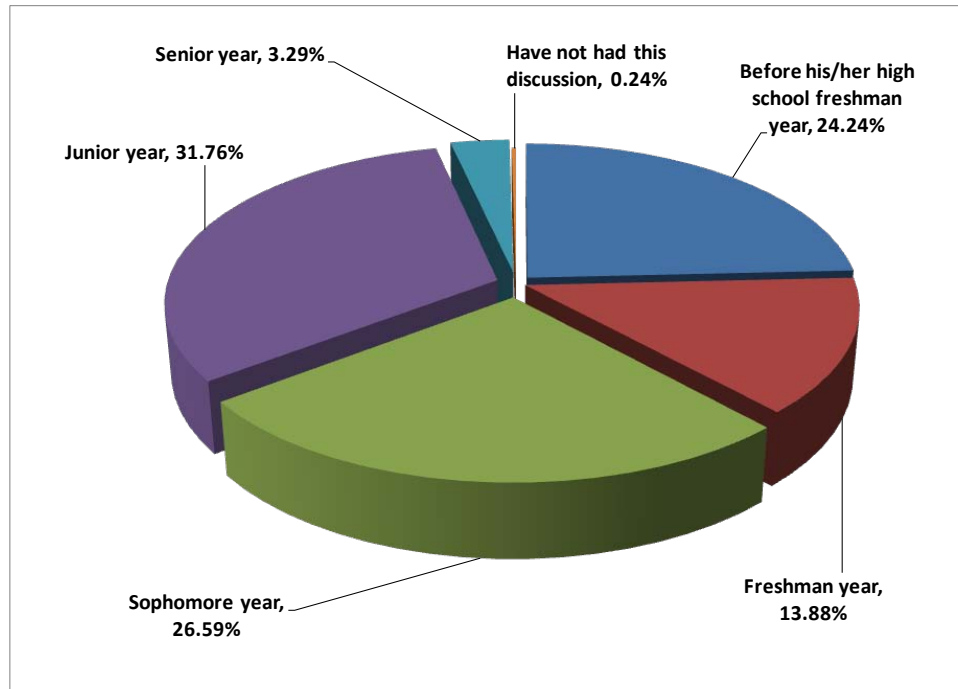
It's clear from the data revealed in this study that parents develop their own set of college selection criteria based on a wide array of factors that extend far beyond the most basic issues of cost, programs and academic quality.

Parents start talking about specific colleges early.

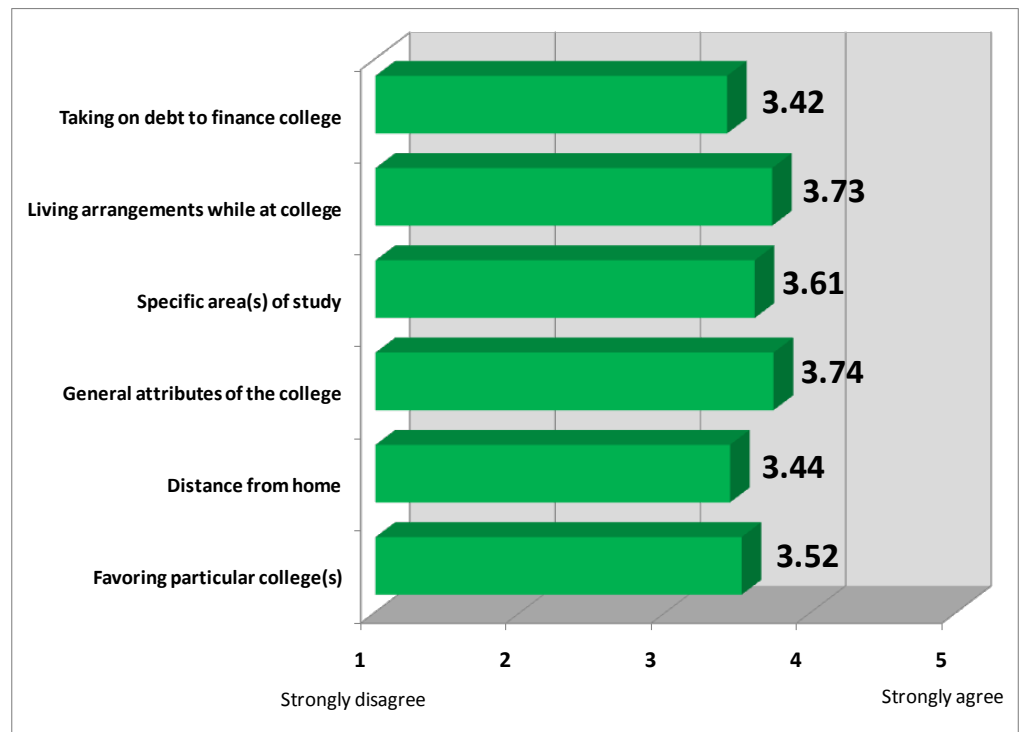
For nearly one quarter of the parents surveyed, discussions about attending specific colleges began prior to the child's freshman year in high school. By the end of their junior year, nearly all college bound students had this discussion with one or more parents.

Parents and their child are in moderate agreement on key issues relating to college. They agree most strongly on the general attributes of the desired institution and least strongly on issues related to taking on debt and distance of the college from home.

Timeline of initial parent/student discussion about college selection



Level of agreement between parent and child on key issues relating to college



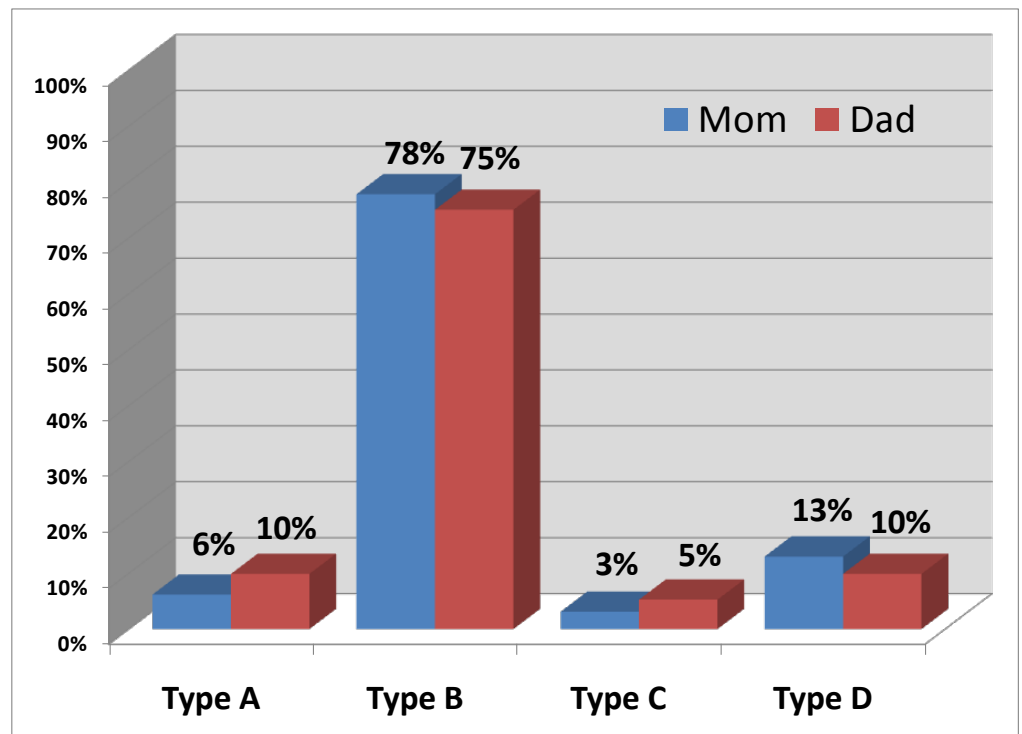
Parents are willing to modify their position.

Past research (based on the theories of Diana Baumrind, later expanded by Maccoby and Martin) suggests that parents typically fall into one of four parenting styles. It is our belief that the mix of styles exhibited by the parents correlates to the amount of flexibility the child is afforded in making the college selection decision.

For the purposes of this study, the Type A parent allows the child to make his or her own decisions with little or no interference, demands, or involvement from the parent. For Type B, the parent expects the child to follow rules and guidelines yet is willing to listen to the child's point of view and potentially modify the rules if the child's reasoning is sound. For Type C, the child is expected to follow rules and guidelines without questioning them. In Type D, the parent is more responsive to the child than commanding, and the relationship between them is more like a friendship than a parent/child relationship.

The data for this study reveals that most parents are willing to listen to the child's reasoning and accept it if it is deemed sound.

Prevailing parenting styles



Fathers tend to be less involved or interfering in their child's decision making as do mothers, but not by much. Mothers have a slightly stronger propensity to forge a less demanding relationship with their child, but not by much.

Parent(s) Most Influential On Key Issues

	Mother	Father	Equally	Neither
Curriculum choices at school	35%	13%	42%	10%
Sports and recreational choices	19%	16%	40%	25%
Meeting deadlines	50%	11%	33%	6%
Health and safety issues	44%	5%	48%	3%
Financial issues	24%	25%	48%	2%
Advice on personal growth	41%	9%	47%	3%
Selecting colleges to visit	40%	12%	40%	7%
Selecting a college to attend	23%	6%	59%	12%

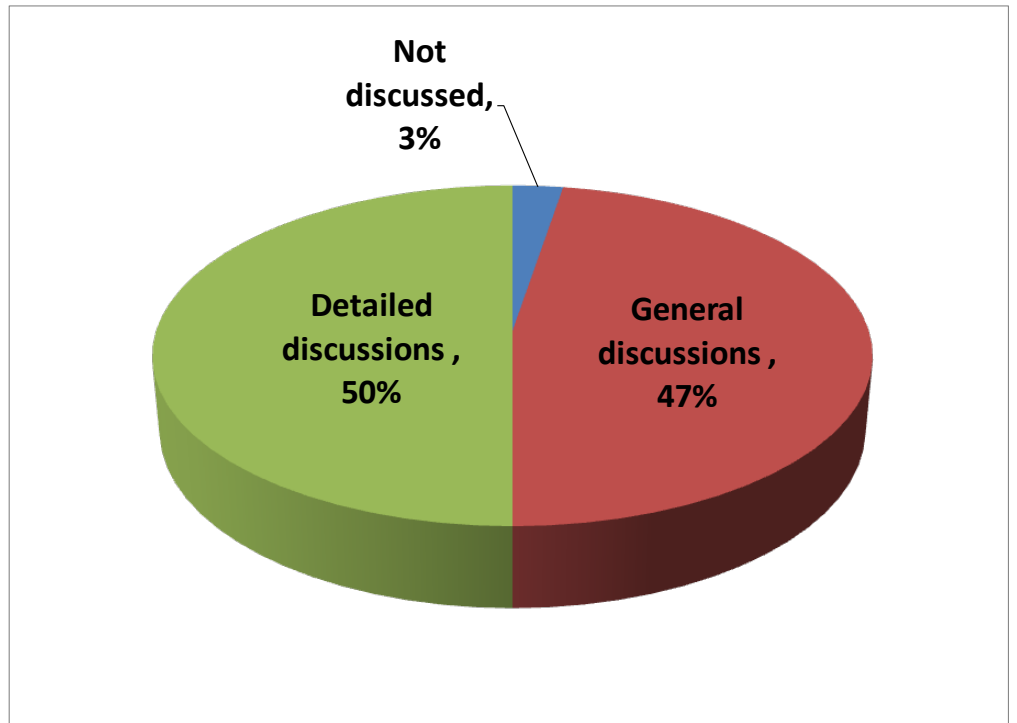
Mothers and fathers share equal influence on most issues.

For eight key issues of influence in their child's lives measured for this study, mothers and fathers are equally involved and influential in all but one area (meeting deadlines). Where one parent is dominant, it is the mother, except for issues related to finance.

Discussions of money happen late or not much at all.

Regarding the all-important issue of paying for college, only half of parents have discussed this issue in detail with their child prior to January of the year of enrollment. Nearly half have had only general discussions with their child on this topic.

Level of parent/child discussion about paying for college



Parent and child prefer similar channels of communication with colleges.

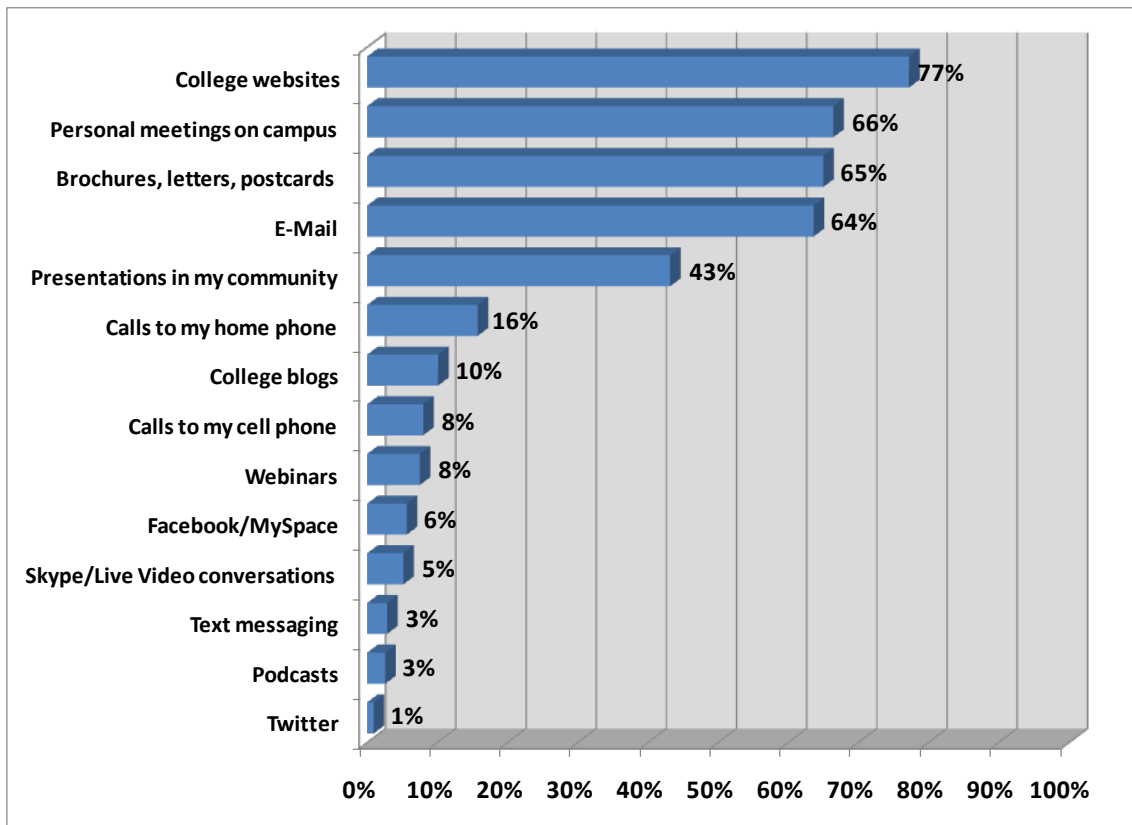
On the issue of how they prefer to obtain information and interact with colleges, parent and child share similar preferences with regard to channels of communication.

The four most preferred methods of communication include visiting college websites, scheduling personal meetings with

college representatives on campus, receiving brochures, letters and postcards in the mail, and communication via e-mail.

In Longmire and Company's 2009 study on the use of electronic communications and college recruiting, Fall 2009 enrolling students reflected preferences for the same top four channels.

Desired channels of communication between parent and college



Cost and funding.

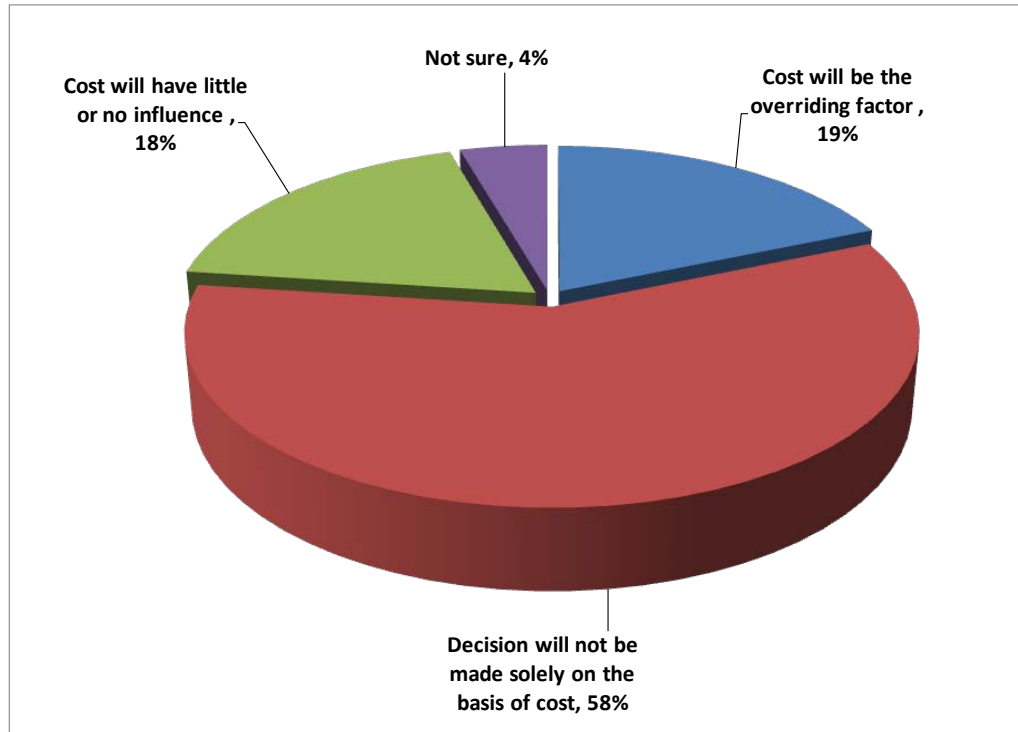
For nearly 60% of parents, the cost of attending a specific college will play a major role in their decision to enroll but the decision will not be made solely on the basis of cost.

For nearly 20% of families, cost will have little or no influence on their college selection decision.

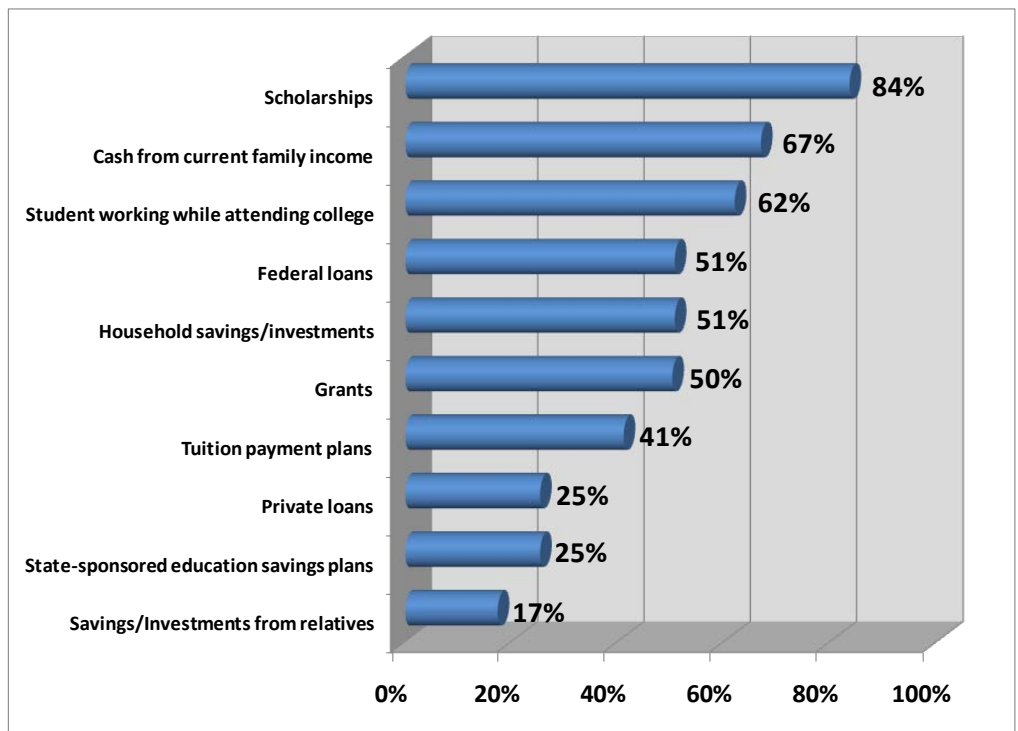
Over 8 in 10 families will seek scholarships to help pay for college. Nearly two thirds expect that their child will work while in school to help pay college expenses.

A little over one half will use savings or investments to pay for college.

Role of cost in college selection



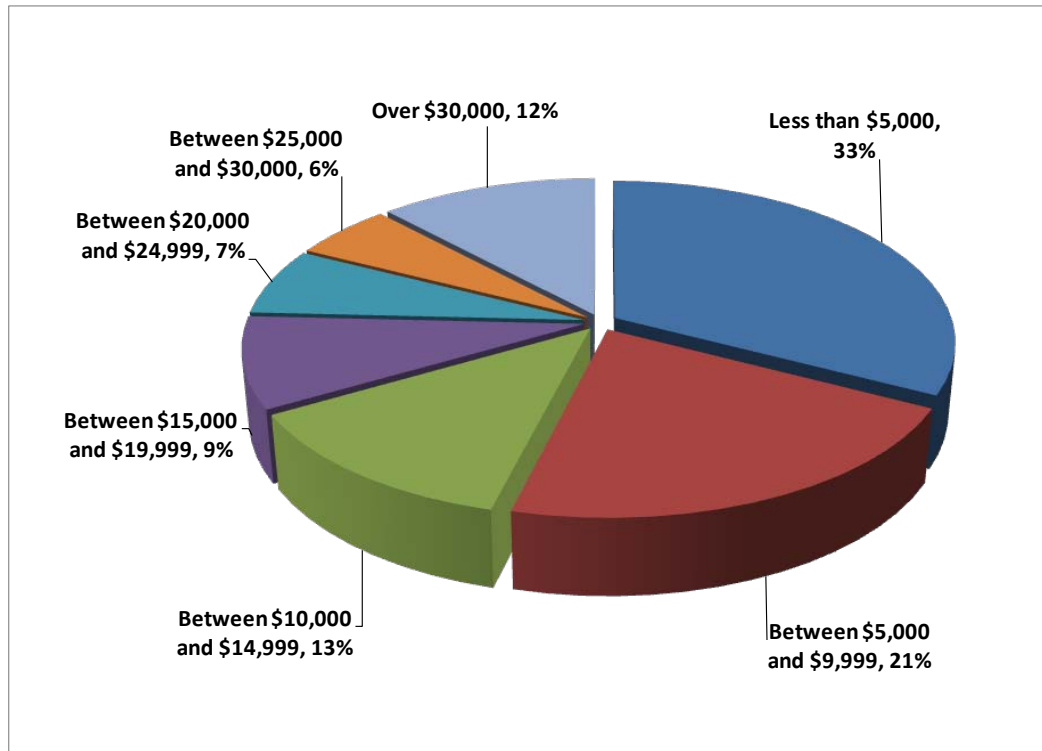
Sources of funding for college



Maximum affordable annual out-of-pocket expense for college

For one third of families, the maximum affordable annual out-of-pocket expense for college is less than \$5,000.

For less than one-quarter of families, the maximum affordable out-of-pocket expense is between \$5,000 and \$9,999.



Scholarship help.

In the survey, parents were given an opportunity to suggest ways in which colleges could help them plan and fund the cost of a college education. Over 75% of survey respondents took advantage of this opportunity by making one or more suggestions.

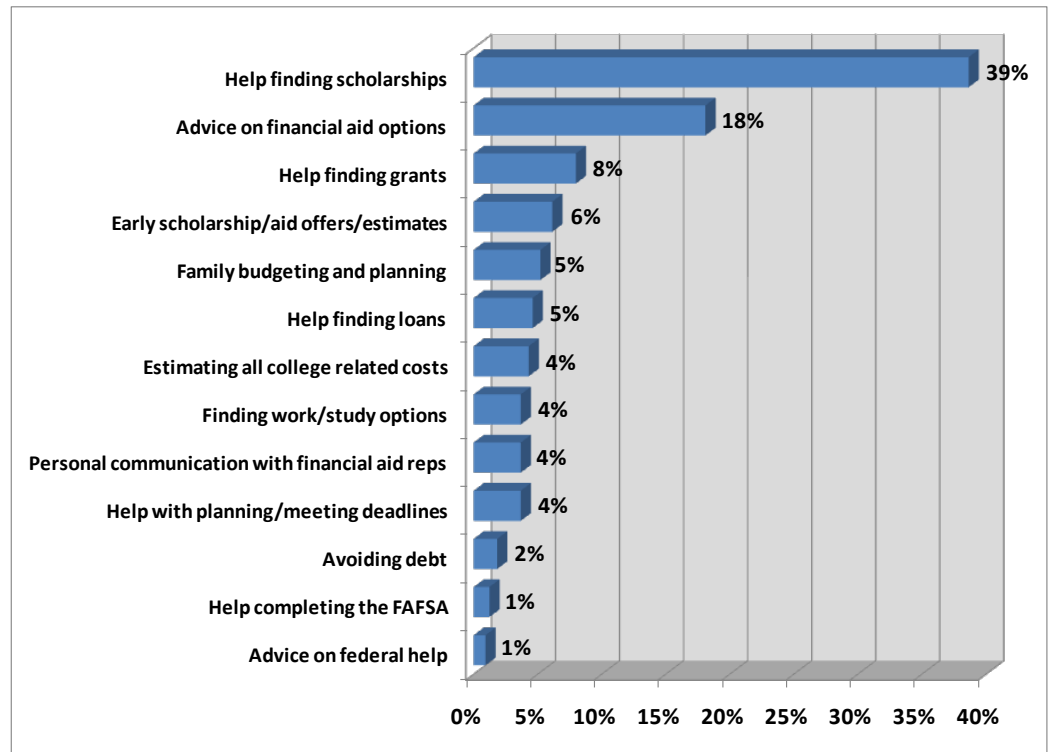
The most common suggestion involved scholarships.

In this study, as in Longmire and Company's 2009 study on the impact of the economy on enrollment, families are clearly asking for help from college financial aid offices in finding scholarships to help pay for college.

Parents believe that there are more scholarships available beyond what college financial aid offices routinely list.

They seek help in not only finding these scholarship opportunities but also obtaining help and guidance in applying for and acquiring these scholarships.

Advice and counsel desired by parents about paying for college



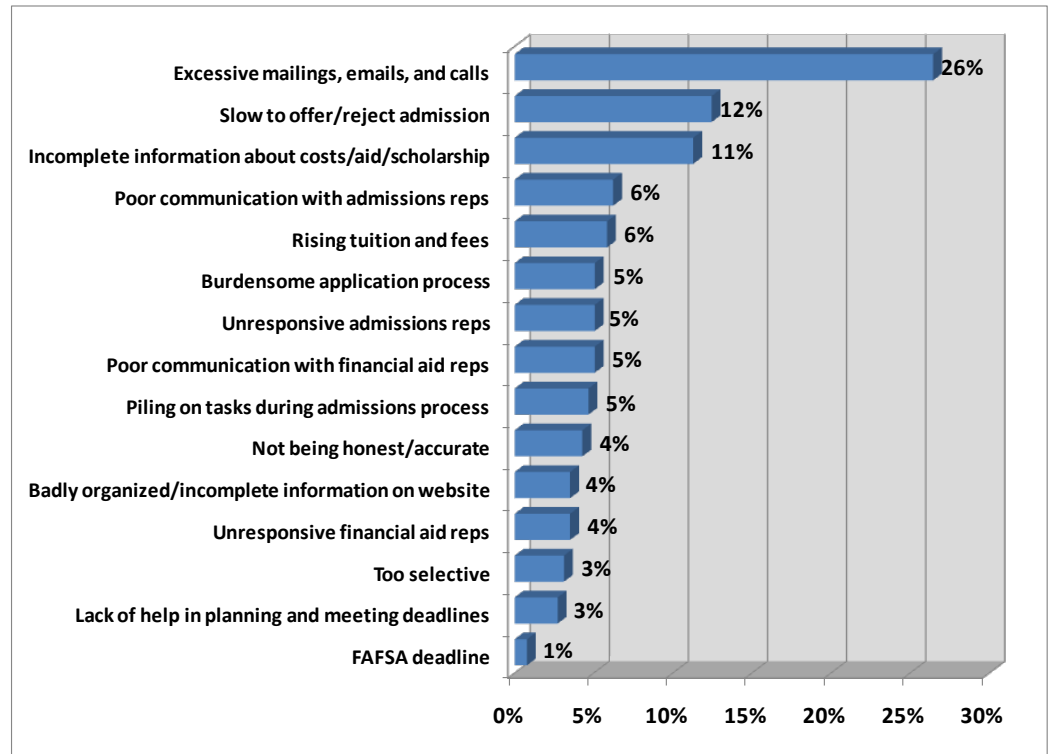
Customer service!

In the survey, parents were given an opportunity to indicate whether, and how, colleges add stress to the college selection process. Over 80% indicated that colleges indeed add stress to the process, most commonly by providing poor service.

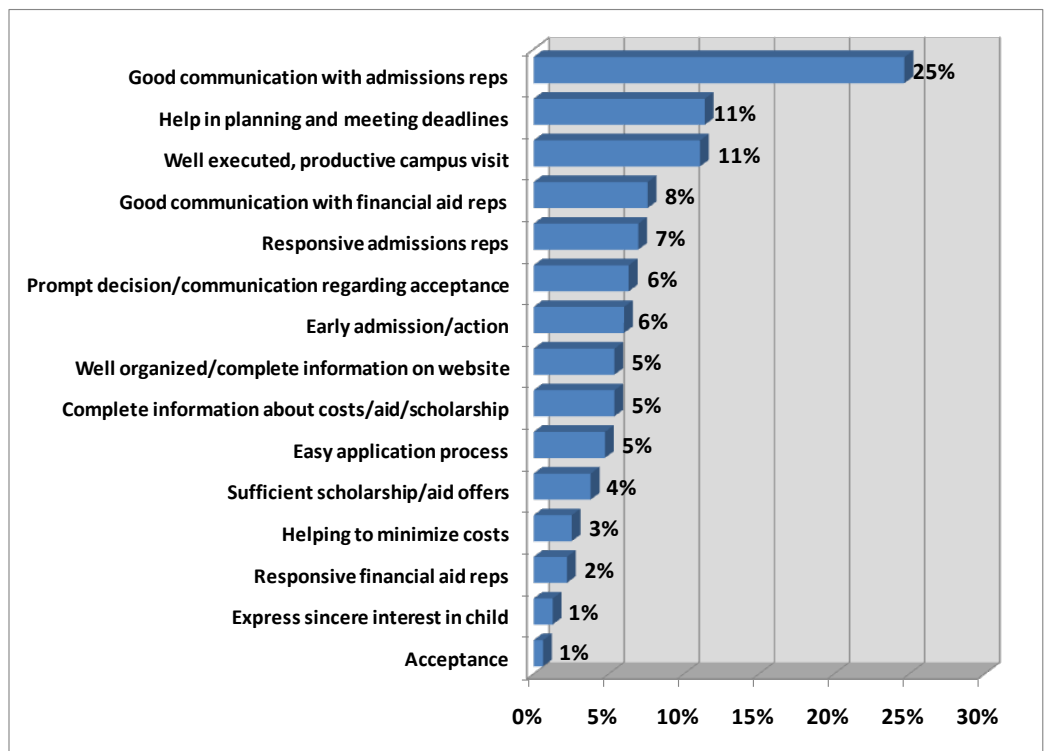
The highest incidence of poor service comes in the form of non-personalized mailings, e-mails and calls. Communications are targeted to students and families without regard to their individual needs and preferences.

Five of the top ten stress-adding complaints relate to poor communication and lack of responsiveness from admissions and financial aid personnel.

How colleges add stress to the college selection process



How colleges relieve stress from the college selection process

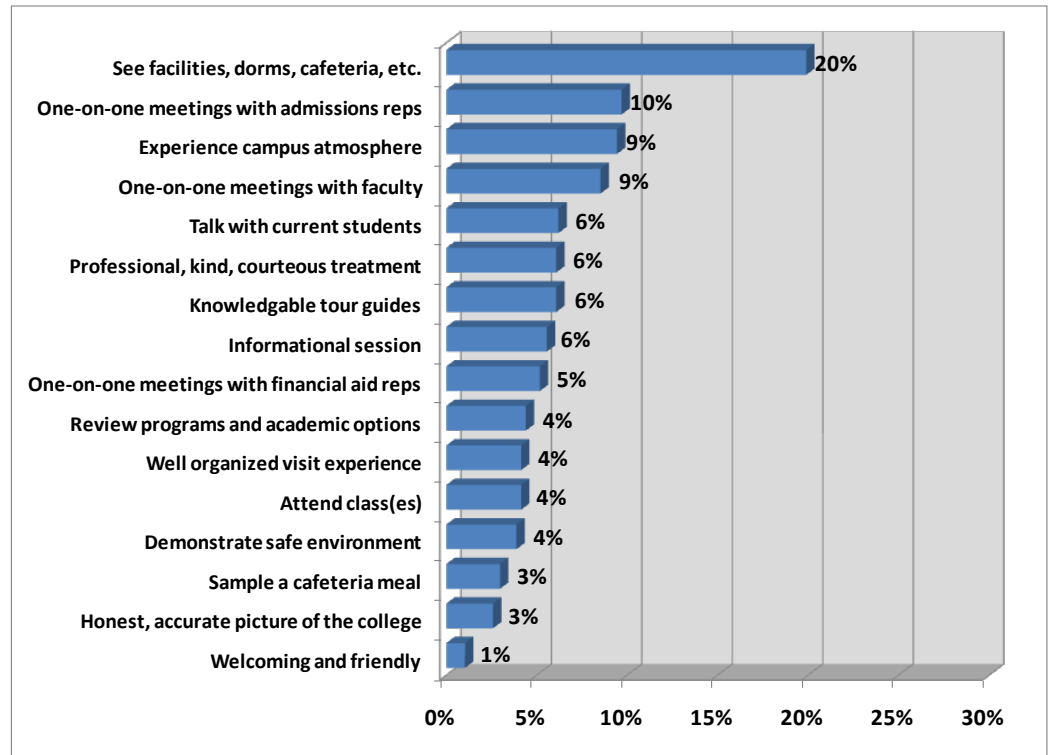


For a parent and prospective student, the level of customer service that can be anticipated after enrollment is on display during a campus visit.

The most common expectation of a visiting parent or student is to adequately examine buildings, facilities, housing, cafeterias, classrooms, and so on. Beyond that, however, visitor expectations relate directly to the personal interactions they have with members of the admissions staff, financial aid, faculty, current students, bookstore staff, tour guides, and all others with whom they have personal contact.

All of these interactions combine to provide the visitor with a picture of what they are investing their time and money in.

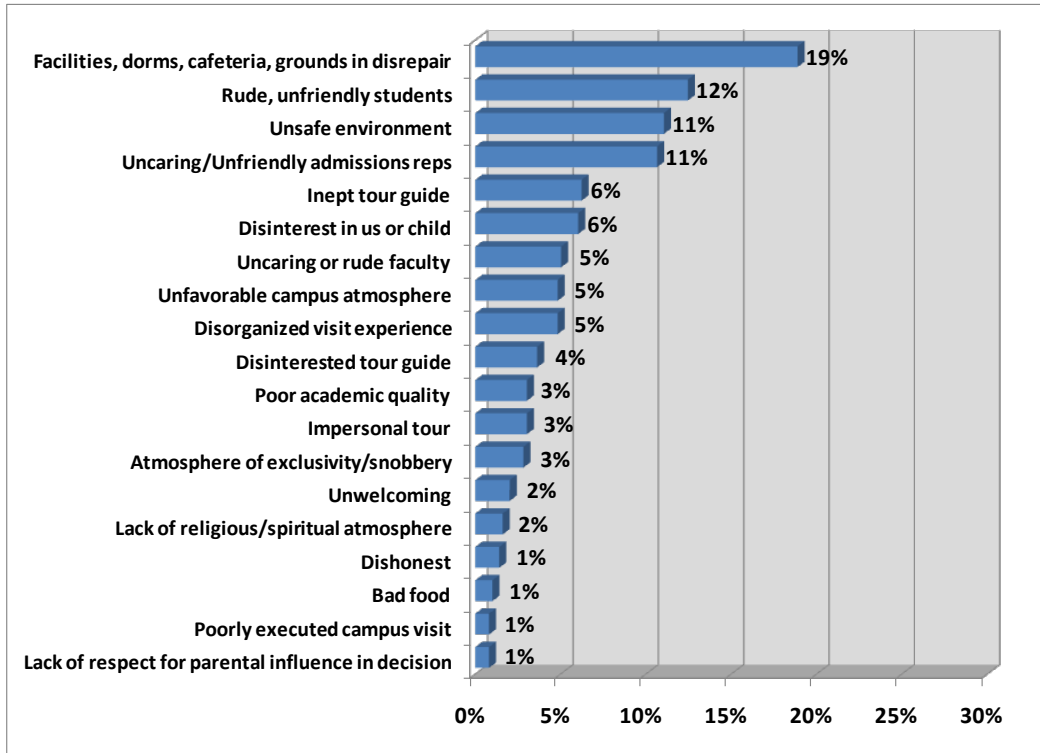
Expectations when visiting a campus



Can academic reputation and institutional prestige outweigh deficiencies in the human interaction that visitors may experience on a campus visit? According to other data collected in this study, probably not. Students, and especially parents, will immediately reject an institution on the basis of these interactions and observations.

In the survey, parents were given an opportunity to list anything that would cause them to immediately reject a college as a result of a campus visit experience. Over 85% of parents responded to this open ended question.

Factors that cause immediate rejection of a college



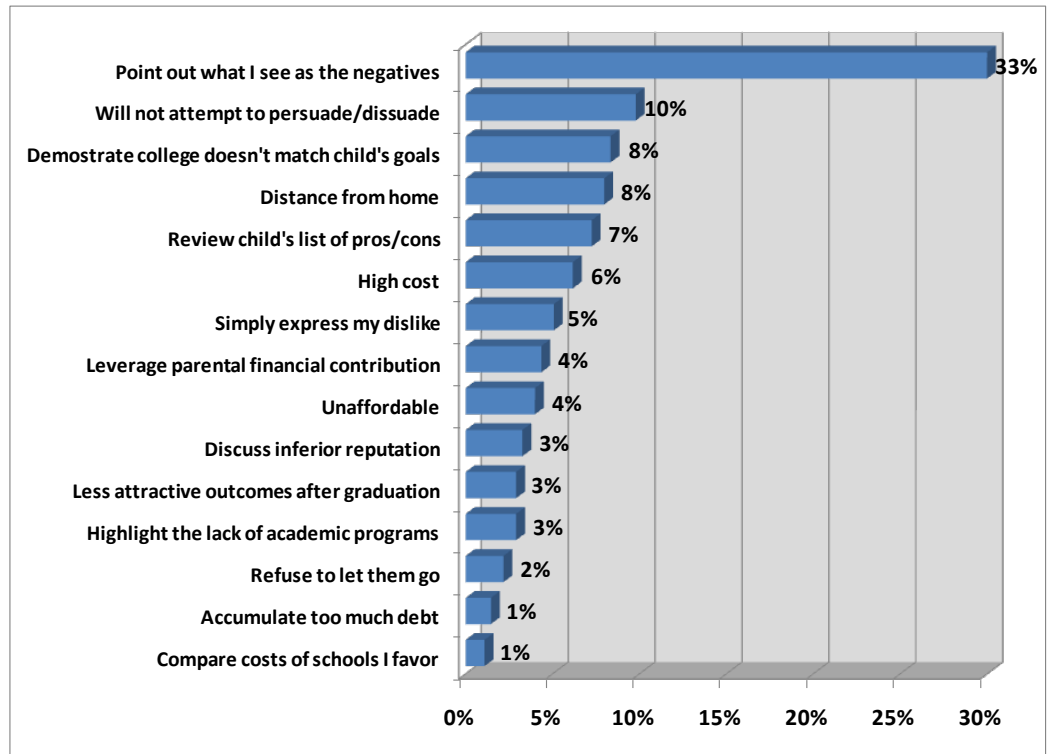
The most common answer, not surprisingly, related to disrepair of buildings, housing, grounds and eating facilities. However, 8 of the top 10 factors mentioned relate directly to "customer service" issues involving rude or uncaring admissions representatives, faculty, and students, inept or disinterested tour guides, disorganized or poorly executed campus visit, impersonal reception, and so on.

When provided with an opportunity in the survey to indicate whether, and how, the parent attempts to guide the child away from a disfavored college, over 75% of respondents indicated employing one or more tactics.

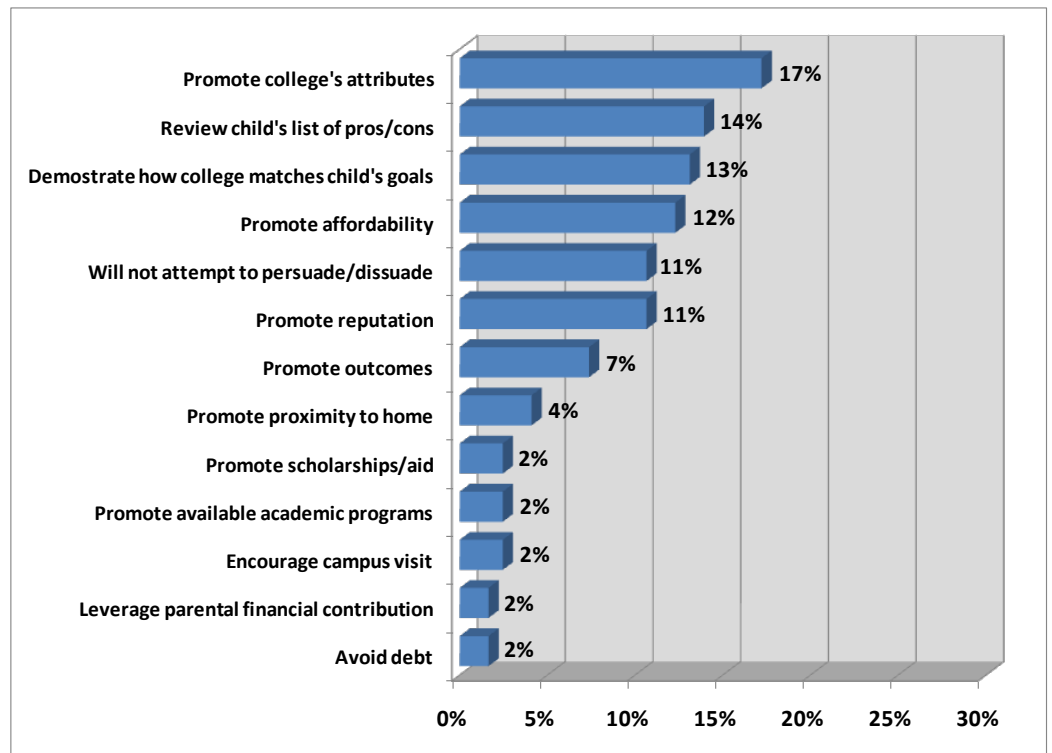
The most common tactic involves the parent simply pointing out what they perceive to be negative characteristics of the institution.

Only 10% of parents said that they would not attempt to persuade or dissuade their child in the process of selecting a college.

How parent guides child away from a disfavored college

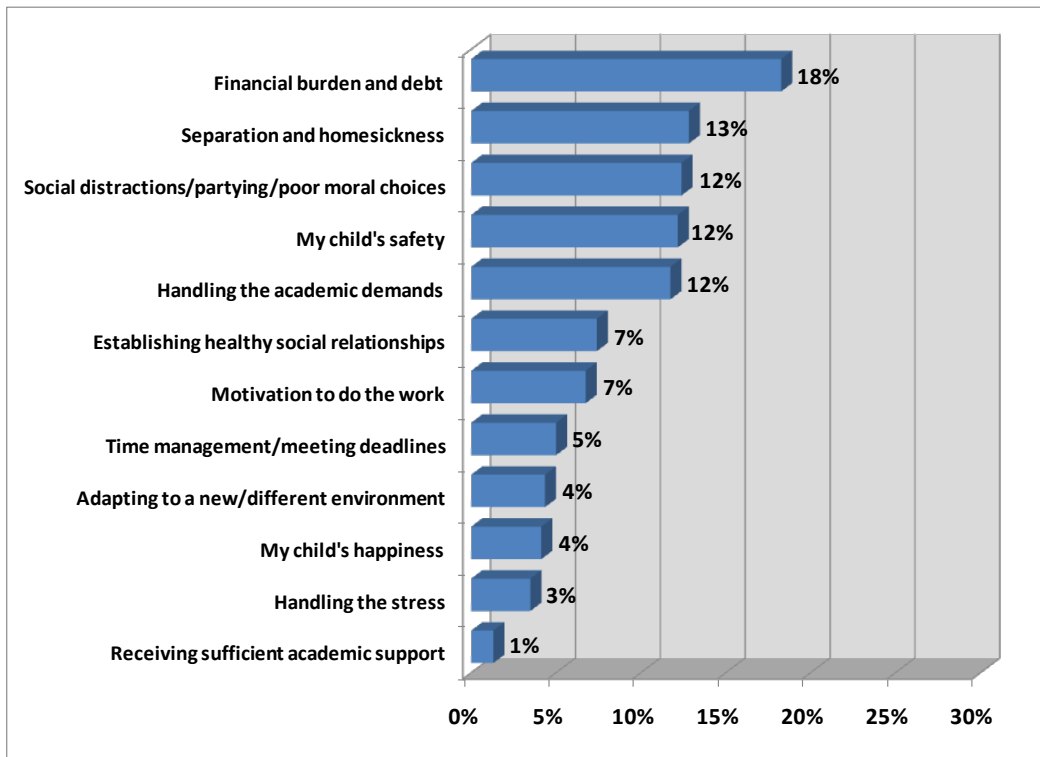


How parent guides child toward a favored college



When parents were asked to describe what is most worrisome as they send their child off to college, the most common answer involved the financial burden of paying for college and potential debt load after graduation.

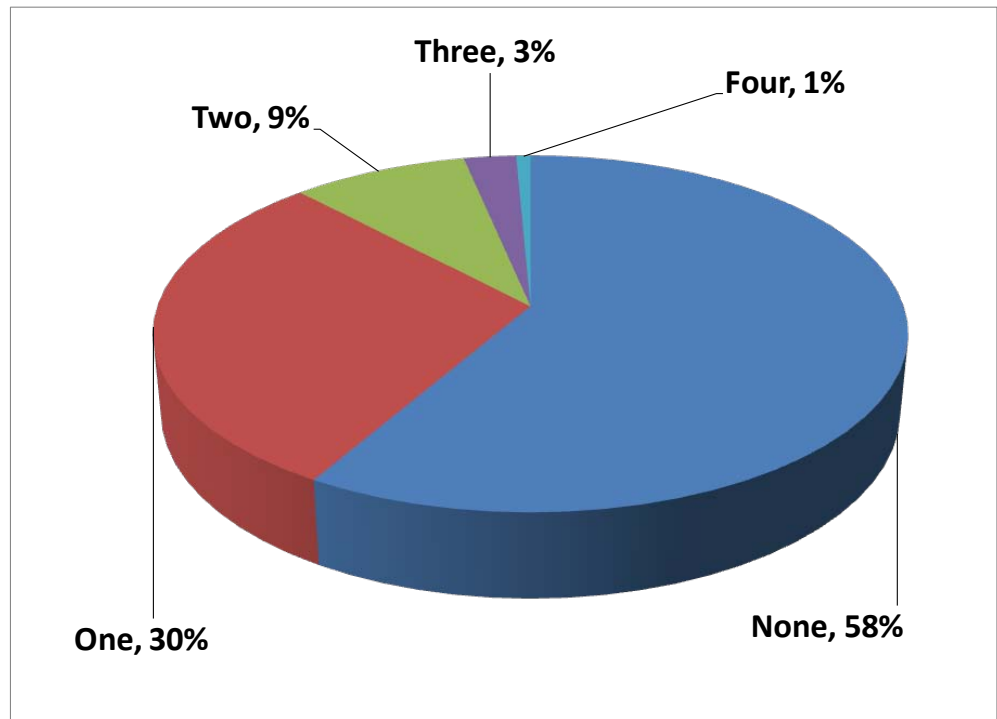
Most prominent worries about child at college



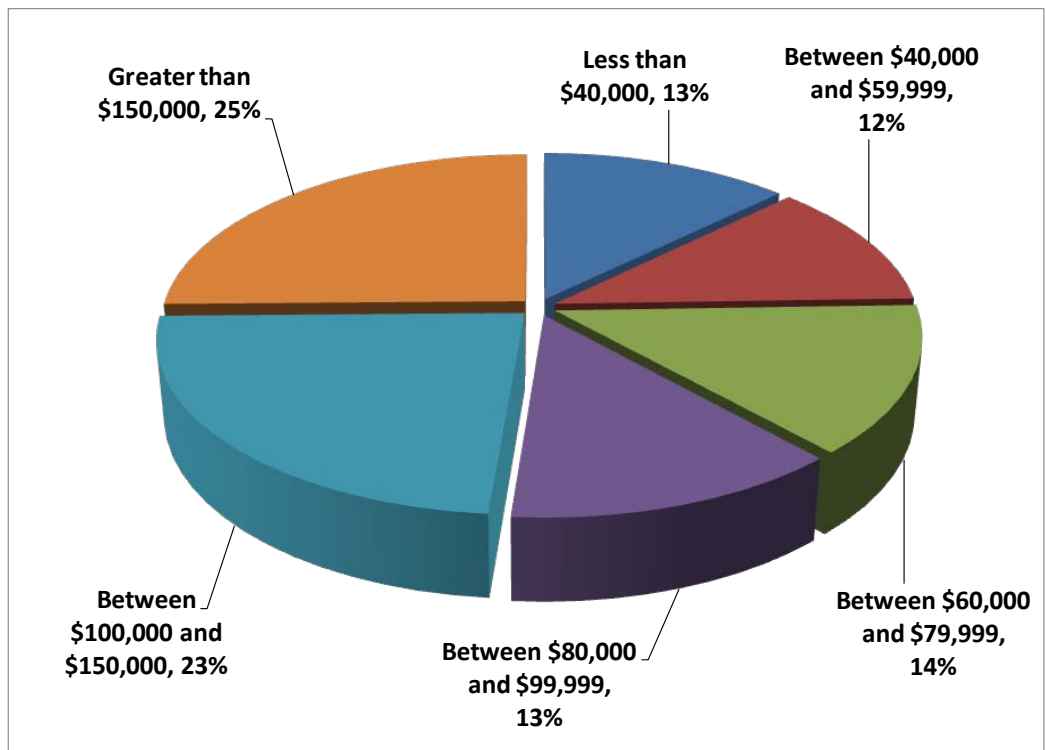
Beyond financial issues and general anxiety about the child's safety, this open ended question yielded responses that fell into one of two categories: Performing the academic work required, and enjoying a happy, responsible and fulfilling social life.

Demographics

Number of children currently enrolled in college



Annual household income



Survey

Please complete the survey and mail in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

General Information

1) When will your child enroll in college?

- ¹ Fall 2010 ³ Fall 2012 ⁵ Other (specify) _____
² Fall 2011 ⁴ Not sure

2) When did you begin having discussions with your child about where your child might attend college?

- ¹ Before his/her high school freshman year. ⁴ Junior year.
² Freshman year. ⁵ Senior year.
³ Sophomore year. ⁶ Have not had this discussion.

3) How many children in your family are currently enrolled in college? _____

4) Have you previously helped another child through the process of college selection?

- ¹ Yes ² No

4a) If yes, what did you learn from that experience that will help you manage your current college selection process?

College Choice

5) Which type of institution do you most prefer your child attend?

- ¹ Four-year private ² Four-year public ³ Two-year community ⁴ No preference

6) In the spaces provided, please write in the names of the colleges that you favor your child attending. Please write them in order of your preference.

Please write in the name of your:

Check if you and your child agree

First choice college: _____
(full college name and location)

¹

Second choice college: _____
(full college name and location)

²

Third choice college: _____
(full college name and location)

³

7) How will you know that a particular college is best suited to your child's needs and aspirations?

Paying For College

8) After all loans, scholarships, grants and discounts, what is the maximum annual out-of-pocket expense your family can afford for tuition, fees and living expenses?

- ¹ Less than \$5,000 ⁴ Between \$15,000 and \$19,999 ⁷ Over \$30,000
² Between \$5,000 and \$9,999 ⁵ Between \$20,000 and \$24,999
³ Between \$10,000 and \$14,999 ⁶ Between \$25,000 and \$30,000

9) Which of the following sources will be used to pay for college? (Check all that apply.)

- ¹ Cash from current family income. ⁶ Scholarships.
² Student working while attending college. ⁷ Federal loans.
³ Household savings/investments. ⁸ Private loans.
⁴ Savings/Investments from relatives. ⁹ Grants.
⁵ State-sponsored education savings plans. ¹⁰ Tuition payment plans.

10) What role will cost play in your ultimate decision of where your child will attend college?

- ¹ Cost will be the overriding factor in college selection decision.
- ² Cost will play a major role but our decision will not be made solely on the basis of cost.
- ³ Cost will have little or no influence over which college is selected.
- ⁴ Not sure.

11) What advice and counsel could a college provide you that would be particularly helpful with regard to finding ways to pay for college?

12) Which of the following statements best characterizes the discussion you have had with your child regarding how their college education will be paid for?

- ¹ Up to this point we have not discussed issues about paying for college.
- ² We have had only general discussions about paying for college.
- ³ We have had detailed discussions about paying for college.
- ⁴ Not sure/Don't remember.

Communicating With Colleges

13) How do you wish to obtain information from colleges? (Check all that apply.)

- ¹ Facebook/MySpace
- ² Text messaging
- ³ Twitter
- ⁴ E-Mail
- ⁵ Calls to my home phone
- ⁶ Calls to my cell phone
- ⁷ Webinars
- ⁸ Brochures, letters, postcards mailed to me
- ⁹ Skype/Live Video conversations with admissions/financial aid reps
- ¹⁰ College websites
- ¹¹ Podcasts
- ¹² College blogs
- ¹³ Personal meetings on campus
- ¹⁴ College presentations in my community

14) What do colleges do that ... adds stress to the selection process? (Please explain.)

relieves stress from the selection process? (Please explain.)

The Campus Visit

15) As a parent, what are your expectations when visiting a campus?

16) What, if anything, would cause you to reject a college as a result of a campus visit?

17) What factors must be present for you to agree to drive over 5 hours or fly to visit a campus?

Parent/Child Decision-Making

18) Circle the number that reflects how much you and your child agree on key issues relating to college.

	Not at all in agreement	Disagree somewhat	Neither agree or disagree	Agree somewhat	Strongly agree	Check if unknown
a) Favoring particular college(s)	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Distance from home.....	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) General attributes of the college	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Specific area(s) of study	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Living arrangements while at college	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Taking on debt to finance college	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>

19) Which parent is most influential to the child on the following issues?

- a) Curriculum choices at school 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither
- b) Sports and recreational choices 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither
- c) Meeting deadlines 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither
- d) Health and safety issues..... 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither
- e) Financial issues 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither
- f) Advice on personal growth 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither
- g) Selecting colleges to visit..... 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither
- h) Selecting a college to attend..... 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Equally 4 Neither

20) Among the following list of common parenting styles, please indicate which style best describes each parent in the household. Please check only one style per parent.

- | | Describes
Mother | Describes
Father |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a) The child is allowed to make his or her own decisions with little or no interference, 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| demands or involvement from the parent. | | |
| b) The parent expects the child to follow rules and guidelines yet is willing to listen to 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| the child's point of view and potentially modify the rules if the child's reasoning is sound. | | |
| c) The child is expected to follow rules and guidelines without questioning them. 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) The parent is more responsive to the child than demanding and the relationship between 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| parent/child could be described more like a friendship than a parent/child relationship. | | |

21) What might you do or say to guide your child ...

toward a college you favor? _____

away from a college you don't favor? _____

22) What are your biggest worries as your child begins college?

Demographics

23) What is the highest level of education that either parent has attained?

- 1 High school 2 Some college 3 College undergraduate degree 4 College graduate degree

24) What is the age of the eldest parent? _____

25) Which of the following best reflects your family's combined household income?

- 1 Less than \$40,000 4 Between \$80,000 and \$99,999
 2 Between \$40,000 and \$59,999 5 Between \$100,000 and \$150,000
 3 Between \$60,000 and \$79,999 6 Greater than \$150,000

26) To which ethnic group do you belong?

- 1 White/Caucasian 3 American Indian/Alaskan 5 Hispanic/Latino
 2 Black/African American 4 Asian/Pacific Islander 6 Multi-ethnic

27) Please tell us who you are.

- 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Student 4 Other (specify) _____



Enrollment Management Product Solutions • Lenexa, KS • (913) 492-1265
www.longmire-co.com
