



Parents as donors and community members

Universities have to balance their outreach to parents. On the one hand, they want parents to feel welcome, and to be members of the university community, so they willingly pay tuition, so that they spread good will for the university in their own communities, and so that they feel comfortable talking to the university about their children if difficulties occur. Universities want to engage parents so that they support university activities (sports teams, cultural activities, educational initiatives), both politically and economically – as spectators, attendees, voters, advocates, consumers, donors and sometimes volunteers. When parents are enthusiastic and loyal supporters of a university, it can go a long way towards modeling that behavior in their children, the future alumni. At the same time, universities do not want to be too welcoming, because they do not want the parents visiting too often, interfering with students' lives as they grow up. And once students graduate, the university wants there to be a difference between an alumnus/a, and a non-alumni parent of a former student.

Fundraising and the Parents Fund. The development offices of many universities actively seek donations from parents of current and former students. Examples include the Yale University Parents Fund (<http://www.giftguide.yale.edu/opportunity/show/648>) and the Harvard University Parents Fund (<http://alumni.harvard.edu/college/college-giving/parents>). In some universities, parents may become a member of a special committee or parents' advisory board with its own networking events or advisory role. Sometimes this may be tied to a leadership gift from the parents.

Parent oriented activities. Many universities in the U.S. have special activities for parents several times during the year. These may include participation in "preview weekend" when accepted students visit the university, orientation weekend when parents accompany their child to start university, or on a designated family weekend in the fall semester. Universities may nominally declare parents to be part of a Parents Association without dues. These non-fundraising activities are designed to bolster parent support, foster parent-child-family support, and ease transition of high school students into the university community. Universities keep in touch with parents while their children are students, through special newsletters or copies of the alumni magazine. Parents are invited to attend events when on campus. Parents who are celebrated in their field of endeavor may be asked to give talks or presentations about it.

Active Parent Associations. Some universities have Parent Associations which provide opportunities for parents to help with preview weekend, orientation weekend or family weekend, and at other times during the year. The extent of the volunteering, networking opportunities and independence of the Parent Association varies. Parent Association volunteers may be involved with outreach, such as contacting parents of newly admitted students to answer questions, or hosting receptions in their home town for new students about to attend the university. Links to some specific university volunteer opportunities.

Stanford Parents Club: web.stanford.edu/group/parentsclub/

MIT Parents Association: <http://parents.mit.edu/> and their "Parent Connectors" http://adminlb.imodules.com/s/1314/images/gid31/editor_documents/mit_parent_connectors_job_description_2013.pdf.

Johns Hopkins University: <http://parents.jhu.edu/volunteer/index.html> (volunteering opportunities) and <http://parents.jhu.edu/pin/index.html> (Parents Internship Network, parents offering internships for students.)

Vanderbilt University: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/families/association/>

George Washington University in Wash., D.C.: <http://parents.gwu.edu/get-involved>

Dues. Some Parent Associations have membership fees or dues, with benefits such as discounts on merchandise with the university logo or better access to tickets to university sporting events. (See Texas Parents, of the University of Texas, Austin: http://www.texasparents.org/membership_fouryears.php.)

Interface with the University Alumni Association. Some universities invite parents to regional association events, including family events. Others allow parents to join their alumni association while the child is at university. The University of Michigan has such a membership turn into a lifetime membership for the child when the child graduates: <http://alumni.umich.edu/join-the-alumni-association/parent>. At least one university (University of Michigan) has a family camp in which parents and children can participate together. Camp Michigania is exclusive for members of the alumni association, but including parent non-alumni members: <http://alumni.umich.edu/connect/michigania>.