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Many students of the Millennial generation have parents who are very involved in their lives. The parents who are involved are continuing their involvement into higher education. While positive interactions with parents exist, there are times when student affairs professionals find themselves involved in a situation that becomes negative. The negative interactions with parents tend to have more of an impact on the professional because they take more time and energy. This study used interviews and a questionnaire to further explore the issue of negative parent interaction. It examined the prevalence and severity of negative parent interactions and the student affairs professional's response to this issue.

The results of this study found that parent contact with student affairs professionals was prevalent on today's college campuses. It also found that many student affairs professionals have had a negative parent interaction, particularly those who are Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs and those who work in Housing and Residence Life. This study found negative parent interactions ranged from receiving mean-spirited correspondence to physical assault and were found to be precipitated by a number of factors. These factors included Federal policies, campus policies/procedures, and student conduct issues.

The study also found that student affairs professionals experienced stress, frustration and related issues based on these negative interactions. However, the data clearly indicated that student affairs professionals have developed strategies to cope with

negative parent interaction. In addition, the data of this study indicated that student affairs professionals are satisfied with the support they received from their institutions when negative parent interactions occurred. Recommendations for research in the areas of the impact of parent involvement on student development, student perceptions, the student affairs profession, and best practices are presented.

NEGATIVE PARENTAL INTERACTION AND
THE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL

by

Sandra A. Rouse

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To my family and friends who have encouraged and supported me throughout this entire journey in so many ways. To my mother, who has been the source of enduring love and strength, I thank you for always believing in me. To my friends, Donyell and Janelle, without you, I would not have completed this process--Thank you for everything!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Millennial generation, born between 1982 and 2002, is the largest and most racially and ethnically diverse generation in America's history (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000). This current generation of students also has parents who are more involved in their students' lives than previous generations (DeBard, 2004). In the early years of colleges and universities, parents had limited contact with the institution's faculty and staff (Rudolph, 1990). Families turned their young students over to the institutions of higher learning to be molded and shaped into adult professionals. As this generation of students has arrived on college and university campuses, campuses have had to deal with "intrusive parents" (DeBard, 2004, p. 35; Lowery, 2001; Shapiro, 2002). At the college level, today's family involvement starts with the admissions process and continues through commencement and into the job market (DeBard, 2004). While parent involvement in primary and secondary education is prevalent and encouraged, this has not been the case for post-secondary education until recent years. With this rise in parent involvement, colleges and universities have created programs and staff positions to address their needs; there are now offices of parent services, parent hotlines, newsletters, and parent orientations (Lum, 2006).

Today's traditional-age college students belong to the millennial generation and many have family members who have been very involved in their lives (Coomes, 2004;

DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Although parental involvement can be helpful to students in providing support and sharing values, parental involvement can also create difficulties for the student and for the institution (Taub, 2008; Sells, 2002). When parents get involved, problems can become more complicated. There are numerous anecdotes from student affairs professionals and administrators about negative experiences with a parent (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001).

Because they are “significant contributors” to their students financially, parents are partners in the higher education process (Carney-Hall, 2008, p. 6). The introduction of parents to the college environment begins in admissions and financial aid offices. Because of the competition for students due to shifting demographics and limited resources, the admissions process has become more competitive in nature. Parents, who want the best for their students, closely examine admissions requirements and make comparisons based on their student’s admissions criteria. At times, admissions and financial aid professionals have been placed in awkward situations when parents question admission decisions and financial aid packages (Lange & Stone, 2001). With increased access to information due to advances in technology, parents have gained knowledge about the admissions and financial aid processes and often will pit one college against another in order to get the best deal. The informed parent and the pressure to get the student into “the right college” have caused some uneasy interactions between parents and professionals (Lange & Stone, 2001; Toor, 2000).

Problems surrounding parents also have arisen in student housing. In housing, parents are expecting modern facilities with amenities and an almost stress-free living

environment (Conneely, Good, & Perryman, 2001). In an attempt to create the best living situation for their students, parents have gotten involved in issues ranging from housing placement to roommate selection and roommate conflicts. Parents have made roommate requests for their students based on their own prejudices related to race, sexual orientation, religion, cultural background, and disability (Conneely et al., 2001). These concerns have expanded into other areas as well.

Because parents are often paying a board fee along with housing, dining services have been challenged by parents. Parents have questioned meal plans and have asked for changes in plans based on their student's dietary needs. Parents have also questioned dining services when their students complain about the quality of food (Conneely et al., 2001).

In this age of limitless information, parents are also seeking to limit computer usage time and access to the Internet (Conneely et al., 2001). Because of increasing dependence on the Internet and access to unsavory sites, parents have sought institutional limits to the Internet (Reisberg, 2000). This has become a challenge for colleges and universities who wish to assist their students in their development and at the same time respect the wishes of the parents. Some colleges and universities have chosen to limit access, while others have not (Reisberg, 2000).

With recent campus tragedies and common campus incidents such as binge drinking and date rape, parents are requesting answers related to campus safety and security. While the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (better known as the Clery Act) require campuses to provide information and warnings on campus crime,

they do not provide parents with information on a campus' safety features and crisis management plan (Sells, 2002). Particularly with the recent well-publicized shootings at Virginia Tech, Delaware State University, Louisiana Technical College and Northern Illinois University, campus safety officers are being forced to examine critically their areas and find ways to address parent concerns and ease anxieties.

In addition, there are federal, state, and campus policies that impact the involvement of parents. When it comes to higher education, there are policies that can impede communication between administrators and parents. Though created to protect the privacy of the student, today's more involved parents and campus administrators are finding these difficult to navigate.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) was signed into law by President Ford on August 21, 1974. FERPA applies to all public and private educational agencies and institutions that receive federal funding and was designed to protect the rights of students regarding privacy and disclosure of their educational records (O'Donnell, 2003). FERPA rights are granted to parents until a student reaches the age of 18; then these rights transfer to the student. Parents cannot access their college student's education records without the student's consent, regardless of who is paying the tuition (Weeks, 2001). FERPA allows for the release of directory information without the student's permission. Directory information includes: the student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, dates of attendance at educational institutions, and degree(s) awarded. Since 1974, FERPA has been amended nine times (Family Policy Compliance Office, 2002). Through amendments, FERPA now allows parents who claim

their students as dependents on their income taxes to have some access to their students' information. Institutions can also release some information to parents if students, under the age of 21, are involved in a disciplinary violation involving alcohol and/or drugs. Another amendment allows for the notification to parents and selected others if there is a health or safety emergency of the student or others. Though a federal policy, one of the challenges with FERPA is that individual campuses enforce the aspects of FERPA policy in varying degrees (Ramirez, 2004). One reason for this is a failure of campuses to provide on-going training for faculty and staff. Lack of training has led to individual interpretations and inconsistencies among institutions of higher education and even on individual campuses (Bernstein, 2007; Ramirez, 2004). Parents are becoming aware of inconsistencies on campuses and are calling various offices in attempts to get answers to any questions.

Another policy that impacts communication between institutions and parents is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). HIPAA was signed into law in 1996. The primary reason for HIPAA was health insurance portability. It was originally designed to give employees the option of continued medical insurance coverage if they changed jobs (Scaraglino, 2003). Other provisions of HIPAA addressed healthcare fraud and abuse and the privacy of medical records. HIPAA protects individually identifiable health information (PHI). PHI is defined as "any information maintained or transmitted by any media relating to an individual's past, present, or future physical or mental condition (including the payment or provision of health care with respect to the individual), [any information] that identifies or may reasonably lead to the

identification of the individual . . .” (Scaraglino, 2003, p. 535). Essentially, it protects the privacy of medical records, which include mental health, therapy and counseling records. Therefore, if a parent has a question about their student’s health or mental state, this information cannot be released without the student’s written consent. With current litigation, there are on-going debates as to when a student’s right to privacy outweighs the threats to his/her well-being.

With parents more involved in higher education, the lines of privacy and disclosure of educational information have become more blurred. Because of the need to enforce policies related to federal laws, such as FERPA and HIPAA, and institutional policies and procedures, there are many times when open discussions with parents about students are limited.

Student affairs professionals are active participants when it comes to students and their lives on the campuses of today’s colleges and universities. Because of this, they are often the first to be informed when there is a problem with a student. Student affairs professionals are the ones who receive calls from parents seeking information, and they must try to explain why they cannot release information to a concerned parent. At times, this inability to release information leads to angry parents and difficult situations.

The role and interactions of parents of primary and secondary school-age children with school officials have been studied (Brand, 1996; Epstein, 1995; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). However, the research on college student and parents has focused primarily on parental attachment and the development of the student (Kenny, 1990; Lapsley, Rice, & FitzGerald, 1990; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994) and not on

parental involvement. Current research has been limited and has only reported on programs available to and for parents (Coburn, 2006; “Dual Orientations,” 2004; “Tailor Your Parent Program,” 2005; Wills, 2005).

With this said, this is an area in which research is lacking. There is a lack of literature and evidence on the impact of this increased parental involvement on student affairs professionals and the profession. No studies have investigated or addressed the type and severity of negative experiences that student affairs professional staff members face with parents. Nor have there been studies focused on how student affairs professionals are coping with increased parent involvement. Learning about how the profession and professionals are affected and how they are coping can lead to more education and training and have a positive impact on the profession.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence and severity of the negative interactions student affairs professionals experienced with parents as a part of their careers. It also examined how professionals responded to the negative situations in which they were involved and how they coped with these situations. Further examination was conducted based on area of responsibility, years in the profession, institution type, and gender.

Conceptual Framework

Today's student affairs professionals spend a significant amount of time in conversations with parents. Limited parental involvement in higher education has given way to significant involvement. Although well-meaning parents contact student affairs professionals to assist their student, there are times when these contacts become negative, even confrontational. In an effort to try to ease feelings, to maintain one's job and to follow institutional policies, student affairs professionals have a challenge in maintaining their composure when a situation turns negative. The professional can feel disrespected, unappreciated and unmotivated in his/her position. This is especially true when the institution sides with the parent.

Burnout and propensity to leave the profession have been common in student affairs (Ward, 1995). The increase in parent involvement may be further impacting the student affairs professional in his/her role. In order to learn what coping strategies professionals employ and what actions are taken in response to negative parent interaction, research is needed. Data was gathered through interviews and surveys to explore the impact of negative parent involvement has on the student affairs professional and the field as a whole.

Definition of Key Terms

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) – FERPA is a federal law that “protects the privacy rights of students by prohibiting universities from releasing any ‘personally identifiable information’ from student ‘education records’ without the student’s prior written consent” (Khatcheressian, 2003, p. 477). “Education records” has

come to include “those records, files, documents, and other materials which: (i) contain information directly related to a student; and (ii) are maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution” (O’Donnell, 2003, p. 690).

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) – HIPAA is another federal law governing the privacy of records, in this case health records.

In loco parentis – Literally translated ‘in lieu of the parents.’ In the case of *Gott vs. Berea College* (1913), the court held that college’s stand *in loco parentis*. The final decision states that “College authorities stand *in loco parentis* concerning the physical and moral welfare and mental training of the pupils, and they may make any rule or regulation for the government or betterment of their pupils that a parent could for the same purpose” (*Gott vs. Berea College*, 1913).

Mid-Level – For this study, the term mid-level will be used to describe a student affairs professional with 3-10 years of experience.

Parents – For this study, the term parent will be used to describe any parent, family member or guardian who acts as a representative for a student.

Student Affairs – Student Affairs is the division of a higher education institution responsible for outside-the-classroom aspects of student life. Areas of Student Affairs include but are not limited to: Career Services, Counseling, Judicial Affairs, Multicultural Affairs, Orientation, Residence Life, Student Health, and Student Activities (Mackinnon & Associates, 2004).

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was: What is the prevalence and severity of negative parental interaction in student affairs and how do professionals cope when these interactions occur? The following questions were the specific ones that provided data to answer the primary question:

1. What is the level of incidence of negative parental interactions in the student affairs profession?
2. What are the forms of negative parental interactions?
3. What are the levels of severity of these interactions?
4. How have student affairs professionals responded to these incidents?
5. What were the issues that contributed to the negative parental response?
6. How do these negative interactions vary based on (a) the professional's area of responsibility, (b) the number of years in the profession, (c) the gender of the professional, and (d) the type of institution?
7. What coping strategies do student affairs professionals employ when they encounter a negative parent interaction?
8. How satisfied are student affairs professionals with the support they receive from their institution when a negative parent interaction occurs?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To establish a conceptual basis for this research, this literature review includes an overview of Millennial students, involvement of parents in education, literature related to parents and the college student, policies that can impact the relationship between student affairs professionals and parents, and job satisfaction in the student affairs profession. The information presented will be synthesized to give an overview of the evolution of students and parental involvement in higher education.

Millennial Students

According to Howe and Strauss (2000), each generation is created and influenced by the generations that precede it and the major historical events that occur during that generation. Each generation ultimately distinguishes itself from previous generations and creates its own personality.

The current generation of students, the Millennials, were born between 1982 and 2002 and are the largest generation since the Baby Boomers (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000). They are also a racially and ethnically diverse group.

According to the 2000 U.S. census, 39.1 percent of people under eighteen are people of color (Asian; Black; Hispanic, who may be of any race; or Native American), as compared to 28.02 percent of people eighteen and over. (Broido, 2004, p. 73)

Additionally, they are increasingly more likely than earlier generations to be multicultural, speak languages other than English at home, have a parent who is an immigrant, and have a non-traditional family structure (Broido, 2004). The Millennials currently make up the traditional aged student population on college campuses and will continue to do so until 2023 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). With higher educational ambitions than past generations, the commonality of attending college and alternatives to traditional higher education, they are projected to attend college in percentages unforeseen in the past (Sax, 2003). Currently, about 62% of high school graduates go on to higher education compared to 58% ten years earlier (The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, n. d.).

While no single description defines every member of a group, Howe and Strauss (2000) have described seven traits that define this generation. These seven traits are: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional. They also describe the Millennials as optimistic, smart, and accepting of authority.

They are special because they have been made to feel this way by their parents and society around them. This is the generation of the *Baby on Board* signs and the rise of political awareness of issues related to children (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Parents have focused an enormous amount of time and energy on their Millennial children and have told their children that they were special from birth (DeBard, 2004). “Raised by highly communicative, participation-oriented parents, the Millennials have been included in major family decisions since they were old enough to point” (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. 31).

The Millennials are also sheltered. This generation is “the most watched over generation in memory” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 9). The parents of Millennials have planned and supervised the majority of the aspects of their children’s lives. The Millennials have lived very structured lives. With the addition of the cellular phone in their lives, their families have almost unlimited contact. Therefore, the Millennial is always in reach and can be contacted anytime and anywhere by their parents.

Because they have been made to feel special and have been watched over and rewarded, the Millennials are a confident generation. They believe in themselves and feel that the American Dream is an attainable goal (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They are capable and advanced in the use of technology (Holliday & Li, 2004). The Millennials believe that the future is bright and that they can make a difference in it.

Millennials are also conventional. Because of their upbringing, they believe in the values and rules established by their parents. They look up to their parents and readily seek their advice and assistance in matters. This conventional characteristic has been encouraged and supported by parents. Since parents “have the power and resources to support,” they encourage conventional behavior “. . . by supporting those who follow convention” (DeBard, 2004, p. 36). Millennials have learned that, when abiding by the rules, they will benefit more than by breaking them.

This generation of students is unlike the previous generation, Generation X, in that they are team-oriented. DeBard (2004) said that Millennials prefer to work in groups and share and expand upon the ideas of others. Because they have been more exposed to “different kinds of people through travel, day care [school], technology and the media,”

they have an appreciation of diversity unseen in previous generations (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. 30). Because they have lived in structured environments, they like to have structure to their teamwork. If the structure is not there, teamwork can be an added stressor for the Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Due to their belief in themselves and the future and the support of their families, the Millennials are an achieving generation. Most college age and many high school age Millennials tend to hold part-time jobs and are consumers, spending \$140 billion annually (Holliday & Li, 2004). They look forward to college and meaningful employment. They also look forward to voting and making the world a better place. They have the firm belief that they can do it (DeBard, 2004).

With the positive traits come ones that could have a negative impact on this generation. The Millennials feel a great deal of pressure. Because of the presence and support of their parents, they feel pressure to achieve and please. Newton (2000) found this group is more anxious and sadly, due to stress-related disorders, more medicated than any other generation. Millennials have the desire to be the best and change the world, but the pressure to achieve and please impacts their lives (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Though they may experience pressure, Millennial students have more positive relationships with their parents and the parents are strong influences in their children's lives (Hicks & Hicks, 1999). Therefore, the Millennials "trend toward relying more [than previous generations] on their family as a sanctuary against the difficulties of life" (Hicks & Hicks, 1999, p. 271). While positive, this reliance on family has implications for institutions of higher education and the college student.

Parental Involvement

Parent involvement begins in elementary school and continues through college. This involvement is constantly evolving as law, policies, and generations change. For some Millennials, parent involvement in higher education is significant. Due to rising tuition, consumerism, and the use of technology, parents are more intimately involved in the college process from admission to graduation. Some studies suggest that student development is hampered by the increased involvement of parents (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Lopez, 1987; Lopez, Melendez, & Rice, 2000). Others suggest that parent involvement eases college adjustment and aids in student development (Lapsley et al., 1990; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994).

Parent involvement in education is prevalent at the elementary and secondary school levels. Researchers Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) found that parental involvement is critical at the elementary level for the student's overall development. Parent involvement with elementary school children has been studied and shown to increase student academic success (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999); literacy development (Dodici, Draper, & Peterson, 2003); and increase school performance (Hill & Craft, 2003). While parent involvement is encouraged at the secondary level, it is said to decrease due to student independence and difficulty of subject area (Eccles & Harold, 1996). At both the elementary and secondary levels, parental involvement is appreciated, expected, and encouraged. This has not been the case in post-secondary educational settings (Daniel et al., 2001).

For many years colleges and universities acted “*in loco parentis*,” in place of parents. The principle of *in loco parentis* was established in the legal case of *Gott v. Berea College* (1913), though its origins trace back to English common law. Gott, a restaurateur, sued Berea College because the college prohibited students from patronizing his and other businesses in the area. The college felt that it, as a private institution, had the right to set forth rules and regulations for the student body and had the right to dismiss any student who failed to abide by the set rules and regulations. Gott sued because he felt this rule adversely affected his business. The Court held that the college authorities stand *in loco parentis*. The final decision stated that “College authorities stand *in loco parentis* concerning the physical and moral welfare and mental training of the pupils, and they may make any rule or regulation for the government or betterment of their pupils that a parent could for the same purpose” (*Gott v. Berea College*, 1913).

Parents would leave the responsibility of care and safety of their student in the hands of the institution. The institution in turn would provide an environment focused on religious training and academic excellence (Rudolph, 1990). The relationship between the institution and students was unidirectional. The institutions would create policies and procedures and the students would follow them. There were times when students protested and rioted but the institution still remained in control (Rudolph, 1990). The legal status of the institution’s relationship with students changed beginning with the social movements of the 1960s.

The civil rights case of *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961) aided in the fall of *in loco parentis*. In this case, institutions were using the doctrine of *in loco*

parentis to punish students for participating in civil rights activities without due process. The court found this to be unlawful and a violation of students' rights. As a result, campuses are required to give notice and a hearing prior to issuing sanctions to students.

Prior to 1970, the age of majority was 21 years in most States. During the Vietnam War, many protested the fact that, while able to be drafted at 18, young men were not able to vote until the age of 21. In 1971, the 26th Amendment to the Constitution lowered the age of majority to 18 years, thereby recognizing the age of 18 as adulthood (U. S. Constitution, 2009).

The implementation of FERPA in 1974 had a significant impact on higher education and parent involvement. FERPA transferred the rights to privacy and educational records from parent to student at age eighteen. Parents were, in essence, excluded from accessing information on their student unless the student granted access to the parent. As a result of this and court cases in the late 1970s and early 1980s, courts decided that "since students had fought hard for the right to be considered adults, . . . they should be considered solely responsible for their own behavior and thus freed from institutional oversight and protection" (Forbes, 2001, p. 13).

Ironically, those students who fought hard to be considered adults are now the parents of today's college students. "The same baby boomers who fought to end these [*in loco parentis*] restrictions want to bring them back, perhaps out of dismay that their own children may have to make some of the same mistakes that they did" (Shapiro, 2002).

The parents of Millennials have come to personify the idea of parental involvement. After watching over and planning their children's lives from birth, the

parents of Millennials are continuing their involvement into the college years (Sandeem & Barr, 2006). Institutions of higher education have found that “. . . one of the ancillary aspects of serving Millennial students is dealing constructively with their intrusive parents” (DeBard, 2004, p. 35). A new term has emerged in the literature to describe this involved parent. They are called “helicopter parents” because they hover over the student and the institution (Wills, 2005). In an interview Strauss stated:

Colleges and universities should know that they are not just getting a kid but they are also getting a parent. The college decision is a co-purchase decision more than ever before. More than Gen Xers at that age, today’s teens get along with their parents, they rely on their parents, [and] they share their parents’ attitudes and values . . . (Lowery, 2001, p. 8)

Parent involvement in college begins prior to their student being admitted. Lange and Stone (2001) found parent involvement has increased in the admissions process due to the trends of consumerism in college selection and the use of technology. Parents want the best value for their money and want the best education and services possible. With the majority of information about institutions at their fingertips and because a large percentage of them are college educated, parents are more savvy about what colleges have to offer. Therefore, they are actively involved in the admissions process from helping their student complete applications to making phone calls to admissions offices demanding answers to questions (Lange & Stone, 2001).

Strange (2004) stated that due to rising tuition costs and “. . . expectations for the diligence, commitment, and excellence of all service providers on campus” (p. 55), campuses have the added burden of not only pleasing students but their parents as well.

Campuses have tried to accommodate parents and assist with the process of “letting go.” Some examples are that campuses have scheduled shared orientations, developed parents programs, and created information portals, just for parents (Wills, 2005). Some campuses have gone as far as creating offices of parent relations (Wilson, 2004). On a national level, organizations such as College Parents of America (2007) have been created to assist parents with academic processes. Annual conferences are now being held to serve as resources for both parents and university administrators. However, parental involvement has become increasingly more challenging for colleges and universities as they try to educate their students in and outside of the classroom. Contrary to institutional response, Johnson and Schelhas-Miller (2000) believe that colleges and universities are not responding appropriately to the demands of parents.

There are two major challenges that have evolved due to increased parental involvement. One challenge is that the number of lawsuits is increasing. “Growing litigation has tested the boundaries of [colleges and universities] relationships with students—to the point that considerable tension exists between student freedom and institution authority. When you add parents to the mix, things really get complicated” (Johnson, 2004, p. B11). Another challenge with increased parental involvement is that parental involvement may interfere with a college student’s development and rights. College is usually a time when students leave home and grow into themselves as individuals. Chickering found that students develop in seven different dimensions while in college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). But this may be shifting with the Millennials; “. . . just as their children attain legal adult status; parents are demanding more and more

involvement” (Johnson, 2004, p. B11). Due to this fact, there is a growing concern over the long-term impact of parent involvement on college student’s development and how this may affect their future (Daniel et al., 2001).

Parents and aspects of their lives have an impact on college student development. Research related to parents and college students has focused on attachment, adjustment, parental marital status, and academic performance. In a study by Lapsley et al. (1990), college student adjustment was found to be positively associated with attachment to parents. In their study, Lapsley et al. (1990) studied 130 college freshmen and 123 college juniors and seniors at a private, Catholic university in the Midwest. Although the upperclassmen were found to be better adjusted to college, there were no real differences in level of attachment to parents. This study found attachment was an important predictor of personal and social identity (Lapsley et al., 1990). However, Lopez et al. (2000) studied parent-child bonds and compared racial/ethnic groups among 487 diverse undergraduate students at large state universities in the Southwest and Midwest. They found that attachment to parents increased the stress level and slowed the development of college students. The study also found that White students had greater attachment to their parents than Black or Hispanic/Latino students.

A review of literature of parental marital status and college student adjustment by Lopez (1987) found that parental divorce had an impact on the college student. Specifically, this review found students with divorced parents had development and adjustment difficulties (Lopez, 1987). These difficulties may stem from unresolved issues with one or both parents and can manifest themselves academically and socially. Lopez

(1987) also stated students of divorced parents were more independent than those of non-divorced parents.

Hoffman and Weiss (1987) studied 190 single, White students (83 male and 107 female) at a large southeastern university. They found that adjustment of college students was negatively affected by conflicting relationships of parents. They further found that parental conflict impacts students whether they are at home or on campus and that women were more sensitive to parental conflicts than men. Findings also indicated that students were more negatively affected when they were more dependent on their parents.

A subsequent study by Lopez (1991) with 554 students (222 male, 332 female) from a similar demographic, both supported and contradicted the findings of Hoffman and Weiss (1987). In addition to examining parental conflict and its impact on student adjustment, this study examined gender differences and level of closeness to the mother, father, neither, or both. It found that academic adjustment was more impacted when the student was dependent on both parents. It also found no significant differences based on gender, which conflicts with the findings of Hoffman and Weiss.

Schultheiss and Blustein (1994) studied the role of student-parent relationships in college student development and adjustment. They studied 73 female and 66 male undergraduate students at a northeastern state university from diverse ethnic groups. The participants were all from two-parent families. They found a positive relationship between college student development and college student adjustment. For women, they found similar beliefs as parents had a positive impact on college student development but

not with adjustment. However, for men, they found no significance between parents, development and adjustment.

A study by Mattanah et al. (2004) supports previous research findings that positive attachment has a positive impact on students academically, socially, and emotionally. Mattanah et al. (2004) studied 404 male and female college students at a mid-sized public university in the northeastern United States. The data for this study were collected over a three-year period. This study was different in that it sought to examine separation-individuation as well. It found that becoming independent was supported rather than impeded by attachment to others. This would support continued attachment to parents through the college years. Therefore, parents and their involvement with their college students can impact the student in a number of ways.

Although studies have explored the impact that parental involvement may have upon college student success, adjustment, and development, no studies have explored the impact that parental involvement may have upon those who work with their college students.

Job Satisfaction in Student Affairs

Job satisfaction has been defined as the “degree to which an individual enjoys his or her work” (Brewer, 1998, p. 27). Herzberg, Mausuer, and Snyderman (1959) developed a two-factor theory of job satisfaction. This theory, both widely supported and widely criticized, found job satisfaction to be characterized by the intrinsic and extrinsic components of a job (Maidani, 1991). The intrinsic factors include achievement, advancement, responsibility, recognition and the work itself. The extrinsic factors include

salary, supervision, company policies and administration, and the conditions of one's work (Herzberg et al., 1959). A subsequent study of 486 professionals in public and private organizations in Florida tested Herzberg's theory (Maidani, 1991). The findings of this study supported Herzberg's theory in that it found those who were satisfied with their jobs had both higher intrinsic and extrinsic measures than those who were dissatisfied. In comparing those working in the public sector versus the private sector, this study found those working in the public sector were more satisfied with their jobs than those working in the private sector.

A study by Volkwein, Malik and Napierski-Prancl (1998) of 995 higher education administrators at 100 public universities examined job satisfaction and factors related to high levels of job satisfaction. They found that higher education professionals' job satisfaction comes from interaction and connection with students and others related to higher education. A subsequent comparison study by Volkwein and Parmley (2000) of university administrators at 120 public and private universities found only one significant difference among professionals by type of university. This study found that professionals at private institutions were more satisfied with salary, benefits, and promotion opportunities than professionals at public institutions. This study also found teamwork and lack of interpersonal conflict were major factors with a positive effect on job satisfaction. This directly contradicts the study by Maidani (1991) but suggests that specific factors may have an impact on job satisfaction.

There have been numerous studies related to job satisfaction, inter-role conflict, stress, and burnout among student affairs administrators (Anderson, 1998; Anderson,

Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998; Schonwetter, Bond, & Perry, 1993; Steward et al., 1995).

One area of research examines the differences in job satisfaction related to gender and institution size and type.

A national study of 218 senior student affairs officers found job satisfaction in student affairs to be related to age, marital status, level of position, type of institution, and gender (Anderson, 1998). Those who were older, married, male, in senior-level positions and at public institutions were more satisfied in the student affairs profession. Anderson (1998) also found that women, especially those in senior-level positions, experienced more inter-role conflict because many felt the need to sacrifice family life for their careers. For those in student affairs, the desire for a career and a life outside of work factored into overall job satisfaction.

In a pilot study examining interpersonal style based on work environment and level of job satisfaction, men have also been found to have a higher level of job satisfaction than women, and professionals at private institutions were more satisfied in their positions (Steward et al., 1995). Schonwetter et al. (1993) conducted Stage 1 of a longitudinal study of 150 male and female university academic and career administrators who were participants in a course offered by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development. The administrators reported job dissatisfaction, competitiveness and time urgency related to age, background and gender and how these influence the aforementioned variables. Schonwetter et al. (1993) found that professionals with doctorates have a greater level of job satisfaction than those with lesser degrees. This

study also found that younger professionals had a greater level of dissatisfaction than middle or senior-level professionals. In essence, this study found job satisfaction to be directly related to gender, degree, and age.

Stress plays a significant role in job satisfaction among student affairs professionals. In higher education studies, stress has been found to be the highest contributor to low job satisfaction and is a factor in the decision to change careers (Penn, 1990; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006; Volkwein et al., 1998; Ward, 1995). A specific type of stress called role stress has been found to contribute to many new professionals leaving the field shortly after entering it (Tull, 2006). Role stress is created when a professional's expectations are unclear and when standards of behavior are in conflict with an individual's values and ideals (Moore & Twonsley, 1990; Ward, 1995). Ward (1995) conducted a study of 158 new student affairs professionals of varying gender, race, institution type and who worked in various specialty areas. He found that role stress, role ambiguity and inter-role conflict lead to job dissatisfaction and the propensity of student affairs professionals to leave the field of student affairs.

A study of 344 full-time student affairs professionals employed at 4 year institutions enrolling 10,000 or fewer students found that, although both men and women experience stress, women were more prone to emotional exhaustion, to burnout, and to leave the profession than men (Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998). This propensity of women to leave the profession has been attributed to juggling multiple roles. The fact that more women leave the profession may contribute to the lack of women in senior-level administrative positions (Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998).

Tull (2006) surveyed 435 members of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) with less than five years of experience in the field to determine level of supervision, job satisfaction and intention to turnover. The study found role stress could be reduced through proper supervision and guidance for those new in positions, thereby increasing job satisfaction. Changes to one's role and conflicts that may arise due to it impact job satisfaction for student affairs professionals.

It has been found that stress contributes significantly to low job satisfaction and the decision to change careers. No study has explored the interaction with parents and how this may impact the professional. This is important particularly if stressful parental interactions were not in a professional's expectations of the job. This could create role-stress, which may lead to dissatisfaction and premature departure from the field.

Summary

The college student body evolves with each passing generation. The Millennial generation has placed new demands on higher education and the professionals employed at today's colleges and universities. Parents have gotten more involved and have forced institutions to cater to their needs as well as the needs of their adult children. Adding to the challenges are federal laws and policies that prohibit communication between college and university officials and parents.

While stress and other factors have been studied, the role of parents and their interaction with student affairs professionals have not been studied. Given that student affairs professionals are an important aspect of the college and university and that parental involvement is increasing, this study will focus on the nature and extent of

negative parental interactions and how student affairs professionals are coping with this aspect of their careers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design Introduction

A mixed methods research design was used for this study. Mixed methods research was used so that the data from one method “can help develop or inform the other method” (Creswell, 2003, pp. 15-16). A specific variation of the mixed methods design called the sequential procedures method was used for this study. Sequential procedures “seeks to elaborate on or expand the findings of one method with another method” (Creswell, 2003, p. 16). This design sequentially used both interview and survey research methods. In this case, interviews were used as a basis to explore the problem and for developing a questionnaire that was administered to a larger sample. This strategy was used to get an in-depth view and to expand upon the problem of this study.

The rationale for using both the interview and survey methods was that each method would supply different kinds of information. Because no instrument existed to measure the prevalence and severity of negative interactions between parents and student affairs professionals, the researcher needed to develop the instrument to be used. The interviews provided the necessary information about parental interaction and the coping strategies of the student affairs professional and permitted the design of a survey instrument that was used to gather information from a larger sample related to parents, negative incidents, and its impact on the professional. Interviews were the best way to

explore the experiences of professionals and to discover how they have coped with negative parental interaction. The survey addressed the issue with a larger sample in order to describe the prevalence and severity of the negative interactions and examine the response of the professional.

Participants

For the interview portion of the study, respondents were 10 mid-level student affairs professionals working in South Carolina who had at least five years of experience in the student affairs profession and who had at least one negative professional interaction with a parent of a college student. In order to compare current experiences with past experiences, it was important that the professionals have experience in the profession.

For the survey portion of this study, members of the Southern Association for College Students Affairs (SACSA) were used as the participants. With approximately 400 members, SACSA exists to “advance all aspects of College Student Affairs” (SACSA, 2005). SACSA provides support for the student affairs profession, contributes to continuing education of student affairs professionals, and offers networking opportunities for its members. SACSA covers the Southern region of the country: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The members include student affairs professionals in the areas of activities, career development, counseling, financial aid, student advising, orientation, and residence life among others.

Instrumentation

The interview phase of this study used questions developed, based on the results of the literature review and personal correspondence with student affairs professionals, to gain knowledge from interview participants. This phase answered questions related to the type and severity of incidents with parents and the response of the student affairs professional. See Appendix A for the interview questions.

Data from the interviews were used as a basis to generate questions for the second phase of this study. The second phase was the survey portion. The survey phase of the study explored two domains: interaction with parents and coping strategies of the professional. Demographic information was also collected from participants. The questionnaire used to create the second phase of this study was entitled: The Parent Interaction Questionnaire (PIQ).

Parent Interaction Questionnaire (PIQ)

Interaction with parents were measured by the PIQ, which was developed by the researcher based on the interview responses obtained in phase one of the study. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Respondents were asked demographic information, frequency of parent contact, forms of negative interaction, the factors that contributed to the negative parent response, actions in response, satisfaction with institutional support and coping strategies. Before administration to study participants, this questionnaire was pilot tested with other Student Affairs professionals. The student affairs professionals who were part of the pilot test had experience ranging from four to twenty-two years in the field. The respondents were

professional colleagues of the researcher and were asked to complete the questionnaire and to note any questions or ambiguities they may encounter. Their feedback was used to make any necessary changes to the instrument for clarity and completeness. See Appendix B for a copy of the PIQ.

Chronbach's alpha measures how well an individual item/question relates to other items in a scale (Mertens, 1998). It is a measure of internal consistency. Chronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for internal consistency of the PIQ was .7920.

Content validity measures the degree to which test items represent the aspect being measured. Typically, a panel of experts in the field is used to verify content validity (Mertens, 1998). Content validity of the PIQ was established by having a panel of three experts on student affairs review the PIQ. These experts were student affairs professionals, with at least ten years experience. Each panel member was asked to examine the questions related to item relevance and clarity. Open-ended comments were asked for improvements to the PIQ.

The information gathering during the interviews, along with the responses to the questionnaire, became the data for this study.

Procedures

Interview

Interviews were conducted to learn more about the problem—in this case, negative interactions that student affairs professionals have with the parents of college students. This study used a structured, open-ended interview approach. This type of

interview asked the interviewee a number of predetermined questions but allows the respondent the freedom and flexibility of response.

Participants for the interviews were selected from the membership list of the South Carolina College Personnel Association (SCCPA). The researcher sought 10 mid-level professionals with at least five years of experience in the profession who had at least one negative interaction with a parent. The membership list of SCCPA contained the title, level of position, and institution. To find whether the professional has had a least one negative interaction with a parent, the participants were asked this information in the initial phone call to set up the interview. The participants were selected randomly from those who met the initial criteria. A matrix was used to select a diversity of participants based on the factors of gender, institution type, institution size and functional area (see Table 1).

One-on-one, face-to-face interviews were arranged with ten mid-level student affairs professionals. The interviews were tape-recorded and notes were taken. Eight of the ten interviews were transcribed. The last two interviews were not transcribed due to a recording mechanical defect. The notes taken were used to capture the data from these interviews. Each professional was interviewed only once (see Appendix A for interview questions). The interviews lasted no longer than one hour. Professionals were interviewed in the place of their choice. In order to have greater reliability, there was only one interviewer, with consistent questions, and in an environment chosen by the interviewee.

Table 1***Participant Matrix***

Participants	Female	Male	Public	Private	Functional Area	Size
1. Participant #1	X		X		Orientation	Med.
2. Participant #2		X		X	Residence Life	Small
3. Participant #3	X			X	Residence Life	Small
4. Participant #4		X		X	Residence Life	Small
5. Participant #5	X			X	Judicial & Greek Life	Med.
6. Participant #6	X		X		Judicial Affairs	Large
7. Participant #7		X	X		Residence Life	Large
8. Participant #8		X		X	Career Services and Orientation	Small
9. Participant #9	X		X		Disability Services	Med.
10. Participant #10		X		X	Student Activities & Greek Life	Med.

For SCCPA participants, campus size is defined as follows: Small \leq 4000; Medium – 4000-11,999; Large \geq 12,000

The data were coded to generate “categories and themes” that evolved during the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 155). The interviews were analyzed to discover patterns that existed among professionals and within the profession. From these interviews and literature on the subject, the PIQ was developed.

Survey

The sample used for the second phase of the study—the survey phase—was drawn from the SACS membership list. Those who were in academic affairs, graduate students, faculty members, and vendors were removed from the list yielding a population of 284. All other individuals were sent a letter of introduction to the study via e-mail with

a link to a website where the questionnaire can be completed. (See Appendix C for a copy of the letter of invitation.)

The questionnaire was “self-administered” through the use of the World Wide Web. Web surveys “combine the accuracy of a written survey with the flexibility of an interview” (Nesbary, 2000, p. 42). The questionnaire was hosted on SurveyMonkey.com.

SurveyMonkey.com was started in 1999 and designed to enable people to create surveys quickly and easily. Some amenities of SurveyMonkey are that it collects responses via weblink; it validates survey responses; and it downloads data into a database. The site employs multiple layers of security using the “latest firewall and intrusion prevention technology” (SurveyMonkey, 2007).

Respondents were informed about the study and their rights as participants. They were then invited to complete and submit the questionnaire via the website. The respondents were given the contact information of the researcher in the event that they had additional questions. After the initial letter of introduction, the questionnaire was available on the World Wide Web for a two week time period.

Analyses

The data from the website were stored in database format by the SurveyMonkey program. Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed for possible themes and relationships related to the questions and problems of the study. This analysis began by first reading the data and coding each sentence or portion thereof into pre-determined or new categories based on the research questions. Then the categories were reviewed and further narrowed into key factors as additional data emerged for each category. The data

was uploaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for ease of viewing and manipulation. The data from any closed-ended questions were downloaded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 16.0 (SPSS 16.0) for analysis. The initial statistical analysis was descriptive in nature. Table 2 displays graphically the data collection and analysis used for each research question.

An analysis of themes and patterns were used to analyze data collected from the personal interview and questionnaire for Questions 1-5; 7-8. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), which tests for differences between three or more mean scores, were used to analyze data from the questionnaire for Question 6 (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). The significance level for this data was set at .05.

The data from the survey were analyzed to discover prevalence, patterns that may exist among professionals and within the profession, severity of the problem, and the coping strategies of student affairs professionals.

Conclusion

This study sought to describe the patterns, prevalence, and severity of negative incidents student affairs professionals experience with parents. The professional response to the negative interactions was also examined. A mixed methods research approach was used to gather data and it was analyzed. This study was significant because the involvement of parents is increasing at higher education institutions and this involvement could have a significant impact on the professionals and field of student affairs.

Table 2***Research Question: Data Collection and Analysis***

Research Question	Data Collection	Analysis
1. What is the level of incidence of negative parental interactions in the student affairs profession?	Personal Interview Questionnaire	CODED: Common Themes & Patterns
2. What are the forms of negative parental interactions?	Personal Interview Questionnaire	CODED: Common Themes & Patterns
3. What are the levels of severity of these interactions?	Personal Interview Questionnaire	CODED: Common Themes & Patterns
4. How have student affairs professionals responded to these incidents?	Personal Interview Questionnaire	CODED: Common Themes & Patterns
5. What were the issues that contributed to the negative parental response?	Personal Interview Questionnaire	CODED: Common Themes & Patterns
6. How do these negative interactions vary based on (a) the professional's area of responsibility, (b) the number of years in the profession, (c) the gender of the professional, and (d) the type of institution?	Questionnaire	ANOVA
7. What coping strategies do student affairs professionals employ when they encounter a negative parent interaction?	Personal Interview Questionnaire	CODED: Common Themes & Patterns
8. How satisfied are student affairs professionals with the support they receive from their institution when a negative parent interaction occurs?	Personal Interview Questionnaire	CODED: Common Themes & Patterns

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The researcher examined the prevalence and severity of the negative interactions student affairs professionals experience with parents. The study also examined how professionals respond to the negative situations and how institutions may be more supportive of the professional. Further examination was conducted based on area of responsibility, years in the profession, institution type, and gender. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for this study.

A total of 10 student affairs professionals participated in interviews that consisted of 11 questions. Five female and five male student affairs professionals representing both public and private and various size institutions were interviewed in the location of their choice. The interviews were conducted in one state over the course of a three week time period. The professionals were asked to discuss negative parent interaction, the type of interactions that occurred, frequency of interaction, and personal impact of the interaction. The researcher read through each statement and determined the category and key factors of the statement. Each category was added to a list to assist in determining the questions for the next phase of the study. Each factor became a subset of a specific category and was entered into a code category. Each subsequent factor was coded into an existing or new category. Table 3 shows the categories that emerged as a result of analyzing the interview data.

Table 3*Topics from Interview Data*

Emerging Categories
Mode of Contact with Parent
Frequency of Interaction with Parents
Frequency of Negative Interaction with Parents
Type of Negative Interaction
Causes for Negative Interaction
Contributing Factors to Negative Parent Interaction
Involvement of other campus officials
Action taken in response
Impact on the Professional
Coping Strategies
Preparation
Institutional Support

The categories that emerged were used to create the survey questions. The factors found were used to determine multiple choice responses to the questions. Based on the interview findings, a questionnaire was created, *The Parent Interaction Questionnaire (PIQ)*. The PIQ was subsequently added to the SurveyMonkey.com website. The population used for this phase of the study was made up of members of SACSA.

The SACSA member list contained 390 members. After review and removal of selected members due to scope of position being outside of student affairs, those with faculty and graduate student status, those without a position title, those who were vendors, and those without a listed e-mail address, the population for this study was N=284. A letter of invitation was sent to the selected members via e-mail inviting them to

complete the questionnaire on SurveyMonkey.com. Of the 284 e-mails sent, 14 were returned undeliverable. Ultimately, 270 total e-mails were sent to potential participants. As a result of the two-week post on the website, 86 questionnaires were returned yielding a rate of 32%. All the questionnaire responses were deemed useable.

Of the 86 completed questionnaires, 61.6% (53 responses) were from public, 4-year institutions, 30.2% (26 responses) were from private, 4-year institutions, and 8.1% (7 responses) were from public, 2 year institutions.

Table 4 shows the response rate by institution size. Professionals at institutions with 2,000 to 9,999 students returned the most questionnaires (26 responses, 30.2%) followed closely by those at institutions with 10,000 to 19,999 students (24 responses, 27.9%).

Table 5 shows the response by gender. Females had the most responses at 52 or 60.5%, followed by males at 33 or 38.4% and transgender at 1 or 1.2%.

Table 6 shows the wide range of current student affairs areas of the respondents. The majority of respondents were administrators of student affairs departments. Twenty-four or 27.9% of the responders were Deans of Students or Vice Presidents of Student Affairs. Following closely were Housing and Residence Life professionals at 22 or 25.6%, then Student Activities at 10 or 11.6%

Table 7 shows the response rate by years in the profession. The largest group of responders had 0-5 years in the profession (25 responses, 29.1%). The next largest group had 6-10 years in the profession (20 responses, 23.3%). The third largest group had 11-15 years in the profession (15 responses, 17.4%).

Table 4***Number and Percentage Returned by Institution Size (PIQ Item 2)***

Size	<i>N</i>	Response %
1,999 & under	14	16.3%
2,000 to 9,999	26	30.2%
10,000 to 19,999	24	27.9%
20,000 to 29,999	13	15.1%
30,000 to 39,999	4	4.7%
40,000 & over	5	5.8%
Totals	86	100.0%

Due to population size, SACSA institution size was divided into six categories.

Table 5***Number and Percentage Returned by Gender (PIQ Item 3)***

Institution Size	<i>N</i>	Response %
Female	52	60.5%
Male	33	38.4%
Transgender	1	1.2%
Totals	86	100.0%

Table 6*Number and Percentage Returned by Student Affairs Area (PIQ item 4)*

Student Affairs Area	N	Response %
Dean of Students/VP of Student Affairs	24	27.9%
Housing and Residence Life	22	25.6%
Student Activities	10	11.6%
Judicial Affairs	6	7.0%
Student Success/Advising	5	5.8%
Combination Positions (two areas)	5	5.8%
Career Planning and Placement	4	4.7%
Multicultural Affairs	2	2.3%
Orientation	2	2.3%
Alcohol & Drugs	1	1.2%
Counseling	1	1.2%
Leadership	1	1.2%
Parent Services	1	1.2%
Student Health	1	1.2%
Student Publications	1	1.2%
Totals	86	100.0%

Table 7*Number and Percentage Returned by Years in the Profession (PIQ Item 5)*

Number of Years	N	Response %
0-5	25	29.1%
6-10	20	23.3%
11-15	15	17.4%
16-20	8	9.3%
21-25	11	12.8%
26+	7	8.1%
Totals	86	100.0%

Table 8 shows the frequency of contact student affairs professionals have with the parents of college students. The largest group of responders had weekly contact with parents (23 responses, 26.7%). Following weekly contact, respondent reported monthly contact with parents as the next most frequent (14 responses, 16.3%). The third largest group had daily contact with parents (11 responses, 12.8%).

Table 8

Frequency of Contact with Parents of College Students (PIQ item 6)

Frequency of Contact	N	Response %
Weekly	23	26.7%
Monthly	14	16.3%
Daily	11	12.8%
Every other day	9	10.5%
Every two weeks	9	10.5%
Every 2-3 months	7	8.1%
Every 6 months	6	7.0%
Once per year	5	5.8%
No contact	2	2.3%
Totals	86	100.0%

Table 9 shows the method of contact with parents. Student affairs professionals' primary contact with parents is by phone (62 responses, 72.1%). The second most frequent method of contact is in person (13 responses, 15.1%). The third most frequent method of contact is via e-mail (9 responses, 10.5%).

Table 9*Method of Contact with Parents (PIQ Item 7)*

Frequency of Contact	N	Response %
By Phone	62	72.1%
In Person	13	15.1%
Via e-mail	9	10.5%
No Contact	2	2.3%
Totals	86	100.0%

Table 10 shows that students affairs professionals believe that negative parent interactions have not increased over the last two years. The most frequent response is 'No' (44 responses, 51.2%) parent involvement has not increased; followed by 'Yes' (40 responses, 46.5%) stating the negative parent interaction has increased.

Table 10*Increase in Negative Parent Interaction over last two years (PIQ Item 9)*

Frequency of Contact	N	Response %
No	44	51.2%
Yes	40	46.5%
No Contact	2	2.3%
Totals	86	100.0%

Table 11 shows during the 30 days prior to completion of the questionnaire, respondents reported having had a negative parent interaction 1-2 times (35 responses, 40.7%). The second most frequent response was no negative parent interaction in the past

30 days (30 responses, 34.9%). The third most frequent response was 3-5 times (14 responses, 16.3%). This was followed by 6-9 times (4 responses, 4.7%); and 10-19 times (1 response, 1.2%)

Table 11

Occurrence of Negative Parent Interaction in previous 30 days (PIQ Item 10)

Occurrence	N	Response %
1-2 times	35	40.7%
0 times	30	34.8%
3-5 times	14	16.3%
6-9 times	4	4.7%
10-19 times	1	1.2%
No contact	2	2.3%
Totals	86	100.0%

Based on the responses from the interviews and questionnaires, an analysis of the data produced the following results for each research question:

Question #1 What is the level of incidence of negative parental interactions in the student affairs profession?

All of the interview participants and 76.8% (66 respondents) of questionnaire respondents reported at least monthly contact with the parents of college students. This contact occurs by phone (72.1%), in person (15.1%), and via e-mail (10.5%).

The interview participants all reported multiple negative incidents with parents. Of the questionnaire respondents, 86.9% (73 respondents) reported a negative interaction

with a parent. Those who had experienced the largest number of negative interactions with a parent were Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs and those who worked in Housing and Residence Life. Those who had not had a negative interaction with a parent worked in the areas of Career Planning and Placement, Leadership, Multicultural Affairs, Student Activities, Student Publications, and Student Success/Advising.

Of the questionnaire respondents, 62.9% (54 respondents) reported having a least one negative parent interaction in the 30 days prior to the study. One respondent reported having 10-19 negative interactions with parents in the 30 days prior to the study.

Question #2 What are the forms of negative parental interactions?

Interview

The interviews revealed various forms of negative interactions that occurred with parents. The following list shows the variety of incidents that have occurred:

- Received a mean-spirited letter or written correspondence
- Received harassing e-mail messages
- Show up at office without an appointment
- Question decision
- Name drop in an attempt to intimidate
- Get upset because professional didn't have an immediate answer
- Raise their voice or yell
- Use profanity towards the professional
- Use harassing language (e.g. slurs, obscenities, innuendoes)

- Threaten to go to supervisor or other superior
- Threaten a lawsuit
- Issue a verbal threat
- Issue an assault/death threat via email
- Physical assault
- Vandalized Personal property
- Vandalized University property

Questionnaire

The questionnaire respondents were asked about their negative parent interactions using a multiple choice format. The incident most frequently reported was having a parent question the decision of the professional (83.1% or 69 respondents). More than half of the respondents reported the following negative interactions: Parents name dropped in an attempt to intimidate (79.5% or 66 respondents); threatened to go to supervisor or other superior (74.7% or 62 respondents); showed up at the office without an appointment (73.5% or 61 respondents); raised their voice or yelled at the professional (69.9% or 58 respondents); threatened a lawsuit (62.7% or 52 respondents); got upset when professional did not have an immediate answer (62.7% or 52 respondents); and sent a mean-spirited letter or written correspondence (57.8% or 48 respondents) (see Table 12). In addition to the forms previously revealed, through write-in responses, the questionnaire respondents revealed that parents have also offered bribes, threatened to go to the media, called elected officials, and threatened to file civil rights complaints.

Table 12*Forms of Negative Interaction (PIQ Item 11)*

Forms of Negative Interaction	N	Response Percent
Question decision	69	83.1%
Name drop in an attempt to intimidate	66	79.5%
Threaten to go to supervisor or other superior	62	74.7%
Show up at office without an appointment	61	73.5%
Raise their voice or yell	58	69.9%
Get upset because professional didn't have an immediate answer	52	62.7%
Threaten a lawsuit	52	62.7%
Received a mean-spirited letter or written correspondence	48	57.8%
Use profanity towards the professional	29	34.9%
Received harassing e-mail messages	22	26.5%
Use harassing language(e.g. slurs, obscenities, innuendoes)	17	20.5%
Issue a verbal threat	17	20.5%
Other	6	7.2%
Issue an assault/death threat via email	2	2.4%
Physical assault	0	0.0%
Vandalized Personal property	0	0.0%
Vandalized University property	0	0.0%

Question #3 What are the levels of severity of these interactions?

The interview participants revealed negative parent interactions that ranged from mild (receiving mean-spirited e-mails) to severe (being physically assaulted by a parent). One participant describes a negative parent interaction that began with a roommate conflict.

[A father on the phone] started telling me what he was going to do when he came here and threatened physical action against me, knocking my head off, among other things...I had to have an officer with me when he came (Interview #3, female, Residence Life).

Another participant describes a different experience.

I receive angry e-mails. I interact with parents via e-mail and listserv due to Orientation sessions. When a parent feels I've given an inappropriate response or they hear something different from another parent, I will receive an e-mail questioning my competence and knowledge (Interview #1, female, Orientation).

Although they reported mild to moderate negative parent interactions, none of the questionnaire respondents reported the severe interactions of being physically assaulted, having their personal property or university property vandalized that were reported by the interview participants. Of the questionnaire respondents, 17.9% (15 respondents) have been in a situation with a parent where campus safety or the police had to get involved.

Question #4 How have student affairs professionals responded to these incidents?

Interviews

The interviews revealed that professionals are more likely than not to take some action in response to a negative parent interaction. The actions taken were to document the interaction in writing – “I write everything down, in my area, documentation is very important” (Interview #9, female, Disability Services); discuss the interaction with a colleague; and/or discuss the interaction with their supervisor or other superior. However, depending on the situation, some professionals would simply chalk it up as a part of the job and continue work as usual. “There are hard days and I really hate for parents to leave

on a negative. I try to keep them and my attitude positive and that's all you really can do" (Interview #2, male, Residence Life).

Questionnaire

Based on the questionnaire data, the primary response of professionals to negative incidents with parents is to discuss the interaction with their supervisor or other superior (84.3% or 70 respondents). Professionals also tend to document the interaction in writing (63.9% or 53 respondents) and to discuss the interaction with a colleague (54.2% or 53 respondents). The questionnaire data also revealed that professionals have discussed the issues with their college attorney, alerted other superiors or President's Office of the interaction, notified Campus Police, and followed up with a parent in writing.

Question #5 What were the issues that contributed to the negative parental response?

Interviews

The interviews revealed a number of factors tended to contribute to negative parent interaction. The factors contributing were: Federal policies (FERPA, HIPAA, ADA); campus policies/procedures; student conduct issues; differences in student lifestyles/habits; lack of an immediate answer to question; and the cost of attendance. Some examples are below:

"[My worst experience] is being cursed out over the FERPA system. [A mother] didn't have a clear understanding of what it was and why we did it and got very angry before the situation could be diffused" (Interview #1, female, Orientation)

"... a parent came to a judicial hearing without my prior knowledge. She came in ready to argue for her son. I attempted to explain the process but she didn't want to hear

it...unfortunately [it got so bad] she had to be escorted off-campus” (Interview #5, female, Judicial and Greek Life)

“A student left campus and there was damage in the room. Of course, the student was billed for the damage...the parent called demanding proof that his student did the damage . . .” (Interview #7, male, Residence Life)

Questionnaire

The questionnaire data revealed that student conduct issues (73.2%) were the number one factor contributing to negative parent interaction. The second most frequent factor was found to be a campus policy/procedure that did not involve a conduct issue (63.4%). The campus policy/procedure could include things such as a student’s inability to make cosmetic changes to his/her room or to apply for a campus job after a posted deadline. The third most frequent factor was a federal policy such as FERPA, HIPAA, or the legal drinking age of 21 (62.2%). Additionally, the questionnaire revealed denial of requests and parents’ inability to let go as factors contributing to negative interactions.

Question #6 How do these negative interactions vary based on (a) the professional’s area of responsibility, (b) the number of years in the profession, (c) the gender of the professional, and (d) the type of institution?

Questionnaire

(a) Due to small sample sizes, meaningful analyses were unable to be conducted.

However, an analysis of the data of the largest two groups, Housing and Residence Life professionals and Vice Presidents of Student Affairs/Deans of Students found a difference. While there was no significant difference in

experiencing negative parent interaction, Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs experienced more profanity used towards them, more harassing language, and more verbal threats than those in Housing and Residence Life.

- (b) An analysis of data examining negative parent interaction and years in the profession revealed that those with 26+ years in the profession had more negative parent interaction than those with any other amount of experience; however this was not statistically significant. The years of experience and interactions over time could account for this result.
- (c) An analysis of data examining negative parent interaction and gender found no significant difference in the negative parent interactions experienced based on the gender of the professional.
- (d) An analysis of data examining negative parent interaction and type of institution yielded no significant difference in negative interaction and institution type.

Question #7 What coping strategies do student affairs professionals employ when they encounter a negative parent interaction?

Interview

The interview data found that professionals use a number of coping strategies in order to handle negative parent interactions. The professionals used the following coping strategies:

- Take each interaction as a challenge

- Take a deep breath
- Pray
- Positive attitude
- Optimism – “maybe not this family but someone will get it”
- Reflection and laughter
- Honesty – “tell parents some things take precedence over others”
- Compassion – “trying to remember they do it because they care”
- Try to anticipate problems
- Just get used to it

Questionnaire

The questionnaire data revealed a diversity of coping strategies used when professionals encounter a negative parent interaction. The most prevalent responses to the open-ended question were to take a deep breath and to share with a colleague or supervisor. However, the strategies range from being as nice as possible to avoidance.

Listed below are quotes from professionals regarding their coping strategies:

- “Close my door and think through what happened and how I could have handled it better.”
- “Move on to other matters as soon as I can.”
- “I cry. I question myself. I mean it’s hard to deal with sometimes . . .”
- “Be patient, go over and beyond to please the parent.”
- “Speak honestly and candidly about the problem. This has worked well for me in the past and who can argue with the truth?”

- “Try to maintain a professional demeanor, protect the rights of the student, and try to illustrate how I have their son or daughter in mind, but also ALL the students who live and attend the institution.”
- “Listen, listen, listen. Most just want/need to be heard. However, those encounters that ‘beat up on you’ require a great deal of internal strength and prompt sharing with a trusted colleague, journaling, and relaxation!”
- “Trying to remember that it isn’t personal or about me. Parents are usually upset with someone or something else but in my role, I get the brunt of their frustration [and] anger.”

Question #8 How satisfied are student affairs professionals with the support they receive from their institution when a negative parent interaction occurs?

Interviews

The interview data revealed that student affairs professionals were very satisfied to somewhat satisfied with the support they receive from their institutions when a negative interaction occurs. They would suggest to colleges and universities not to jump quickly to the solution of giving the parent what he or she wants. They wish to remind parents and institutions that student growth and development are an important part of the college experience.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire data showed that for the most part student affairs professionals are either Very Satisfied (54.8%) or Somewhat Satisfied (34.5%) with the support they receive from their institutions. However, over half offered suggestions to improve upon

the support institutions offer to professionals. Some of these suggestions are to provide training techniques to cope with potential scenarios, provide more support, to have fewer “special circumstances” for the student whose parents are “so and so” or are a big contributor to the campus, care about the employees as much as they care about the parent/student, and to examine all sides of the issue—not just the parent’s.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Members of the current generation of college students, the Millennials, have parents who are very involved in their lives. When it comes to higher education institutions, parental involvement can be both positive and negative. Those in the higher education profession, especially in student affairs, have interactions with parents on a regular basis. While research has focused on parents and higher education's response to parent involvement, there has been a lack of research on the impact the increased parent involvement has had on the student affairs professional. Nor has any research addressed the type and severity of negative experiences that student affairs professionals face with parents. For this study, the researcher explored negative parental interaction, its prevalence, severity, and impact on the student affairs professional. The study also analyzed the characteristics surrounding the interactions. It sought to further understand how increased and negative interaction impacted the professional and the profession as a whole.

Discussion

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed as a result of this study. The data provided valuable insights and information for the current questions related to negative parent interaction.

The interviews for this study found that there was no one way that parents contacted student affairs professionals. They were contacted in person, by phone or via e-mail. The questionnaire revealed that student affairs professionals had frequent contact with the parents of college students. It is possible that increases in electronic communication, such as cell phones and e-mail, have made it easier for parents to contact student affairs professionals by providing more immediate and convenient means of communication. Additionally, in the 30 days prior to the study, the majority of student affairs professionals had experienced at least one negative parent interaction. The immediacy and convenience of cell phones and email may lead parents to contact staff at the student's college or university without thinking through what they want to communicate or how they want to communicate it.

Though this study focused on negative parent interaction, some positive parent interactions were shared. "There are things like graduation where a parent says thank you for assisting my [student] . . . probably more often . . . in a crisis situation . . . they are gracious . . . Those [interactions] are rewarding" (Interview #4, male, Residence Life). Another professional shared the following, "I have had a parent call to express appreciation for helping their child find a job. They didn't have to but they did, that was nice" (Interview #8, male, Career Services and Orientation).

Several themes emerged during the open-ended interviews. Each professional experienced stress, frustration, anxiety, low morale, and thoughts of leaving the profession as a result of negative parent interaction. However, each professional had developed a set of coping strategies he/she used when he/she encountered a negative

parent interaction. These strategies varied by individual and ranged from having a positive attitude regardless of the situation to reflecting and laughing once the situation was resolved.

The interviews also revealed the nature of negative parent interactions that occurred. Student affairs professionals have been threatened with lawsuits, yelled and cursed at, threatened physically, and undermined in their jobs. The factors contributing to these interactions showed that almost any issue or concern had the potential to turn negative, especially when the desired response did not occur. One of the challenges found was that sometimes professionals had no control over the reasons surrounding the issue. At times, a Federal policy, like FERPA, had an impact on a situation. At other times, it was a campus policy, like students not being able to paint their rooms, which caused the negative parent interaction.

Based on the interviews, the professionals were satisfied with their institution's response but all had comments regarding parent involvement. Some of the comments are listed below:

- “Parents are a great source of information and sometimes a great source of amusement.” (Interview #1, female, Orientation)
- “Education needs to happen on both ends – we talk about parent councils but no one is saying this isn't appropriate. On our end, we haven't really examined training or discussed on campuses how this impacts the whole.” (Interview #2, male, Residence Life)

- “We can’t expect parents to stop their interaction cold turkey...we have to wean them off that. Let parents say their piece, hear them out, affirm that their concern is valid and then explain what you can and can’t do.” (Interview #4, male, Residence Life)
- “Parents are circumventing their student and speak for their student; Parents now are quick to get involved and call college directly but are not so nice about it . . .” (Interview #2, male, Residence Life)
- “Sometimes parents come ready to do battle when there isn’t a battle to be fought.” (Interview #6, female, Judicial Affairs)
- “Parents want to talk to whomever is in charge and will go up the chain until they get the answer they want. I hate the ones whose child can do no wrong because their child won’t learn as much from the process. I think this impedes on our making the judicial process educational. They mean well and want to get their student out of situation they’re in but handle it the wrong way.” (Interview #5, female, Judicial & Greek Life)
- “There are hard days . . . I try to keep parents and my attitude positive and that’s all you really can do. Experience has made me more confident.” (Interview #5, female, Judicial & Greek Life)
- “I think we spend too much time dealing with the parent than dealing with the students. My optimistic view is that we’ll learn from this and fix it.” (Interview #3, female, Residence Life)

- “I had these great expectations right out of graduate school and a skewed view of how it was going to be. All roses and helping students become actualized. I don’t understand why they [parents] would attack the people they leave their children with. I wish they were on our side sometimes. There are a few parents who call, definitely not the norm, who understand what we are trying to do and thank us but it is rare – but nice when that happens.” (Interview #5, female, Judicial & Greek Life)
- “I think it hurts the student in the long run. They are taught ‘I’m always going to win and always going to get what I want’ the real world isn’t like this.” (Interview #3, female, Residence Life)
- “Having a supportive campus, good communication and care and concern for students make it easier.” (Interview #7, male, Residence Life)
- “In the end, we do it for the students and that is what matters most.” (Interview #6, female, Judicial Affairs)

The responses to the PIQ indicated that there are areas of student affairs that have more negative parent interaction than others. Though not statistically significant, Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs and Housing and Residence Life had more negative interactions than others. This may be due to the nature of these positions and the level of contact they have with students. The fact that 73.2% reported a contributing factor to negative interactions was conduct policy issues further supports this notion. Both Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs and Housing and Residence Life staff enforce codes of conduct and oversee judicial processes. Students who live in

on-campus housing spend more time in their residence halls than in any other location in campus, contributing to the amount of contact they are likely to have with residence life staff. Beyond residence life, Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs handle more serious code of conduct and judicial matters. These conduct matters could affect a student's college career and life beyond. When comparing Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs and those in Housing and Residence Life, Deans of Students/Vice Presidents of Student Affairs experienced more profanity, harassing language and verbal threats than those in residence life. These negative interactions are the more serious forms and could directly relate to the impact this position could have on a student's academic career. Perhaps when parents perceive that the stakes are higher (for example, the student could be suspended or expelled), the level of intensity of their interactions increases. Although other student affairs areas have student contact, the nature of the position, level of contact, and amount of time spent with students may lessen the potential for negative parent interaction. In addition, less may be at stake, or it may be perceived that less is at stake, for the student and the parent in situations involving these other areas of student affairs.

There were no major differences found based on institution type and size. The type asked for general information which revealed both public and private institutions of varying sizes. Further breakdown of institution type into categories such as religious affiliation and historically black college or university may have revealed differences.

Another finding was those with 26+ years in the profession had more negative parent interaction than any other amount of experience. These professionals tended to be

senior-level student affairs professionals and in decision-making roles. It may be that parents have started their interactions with more junior professionals and have worked their way up the “chain of command” to a more senior person and may be more angry and frustrated by the time they reach the professionals at this level. It also may be that, when parents interact with a senior professional, they are seeking to address a major concern about their student. Once again, it may be that the higher the perceived stakes, the greater the likelihood of interactions taking on a negative character. This also could be the result of negative parent interaction over span of career since the questionnaire did not specify interactions from only the Millennial generation.

The forms of negative interaction found during the interview phase were supported by the data from the PIQ. Student affairs professionals experience a variety of negative interactions with parents. These range from mean-spirited e-mails, to being offered bribes, to a number of different threats. These also range from relatively minor to more severe physical assaults where police have had to get involved. Perhaps it is because Millennial parents are more financially and emotionally invested in higher education than parents before that they are not hesitating to get involved and demand desired outcomes (Carney-Hall, 2008). However, the approach to get the desired outcome may not be appropriate. In an attempt to get the desired outcome, threats and intimidation were reported to be prevalent forms of negative parent interaction. The fact that 17.5% of respondents reported that campus security needed to be called to deal with the parent situation is particularly concerning and underscores how serious these interactions can be.

Some factors beyond the control of the individual professional can contribute to the occurrence of negative parent interactions. These factors include Federal laws and campus policies, student conduct issues, differences in values, and college costs. At times, it may be a misunderstanding of a policy that causes a negative response. Other times, it may be a conflict between the student's or family's values, religious beliefs, a campus policy or decision that leads to the negative interaction. Education, patience and an open-mind may be the keys to successful partnerships between parents and college professionals.

Following a negative interaction, professionals tend to discuss the interaction with another individual. Sometimes, this individual is a supervisor or other superior and other times this individual is a colleague. Since stress, specifically role stress, has an impact on the student affairs professional, discussing the issue is one way to lessen the effect of a difficult situation (Moore & Twonsley, 1990; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995). The incidents also tended to be documented in writing. The responses have also included contacting other offices on campus, including campus police, the campus attorney, and the President's Office. In our litigious society and increasingly dangerous world, it is positive and intelligent to communicate concerns as they arise.

In an effort to cope with negative parent interactions that have become a part of the job for student affairs professionals, professionals have developed personal coping strategies. The coping strategies are as diverse as the professionals themselves. These strategies can be solitary or involve the parent or other individual. The use of coping strategies is a positive mechanism to combat the stress that negative interactions can

cause. Lazarus (1980) developed two classifications of coping: instrumental coping, which focuses on behavior that is intended to change the situation, and palliative coping, which is intended to reduce emotional distress. The instrumental coping strategies found in this study included: maintaining a positive attitude, being honest with parents, being compassionate, and anticipating problems. The palliative coping strategies found were: talking to a superior or colleague, taking a deep breath, praying, taking each interaction as a challenge, using reflection and laughter and optimism. According to Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) the most effective copers are those who are flexible and who use a number of coping strategies. This could have a positive impact on job satisfaction and lessen the propensity for student affairs professionals to leave the field (Ward, 1995).

Although most professionals are satisfied with the support they receive from their institutions, the overall feel was that there was room for improvement in how campuses addressed negative parent interaction. This supports previous research on burnout and job satisfaction that found professionals do not feel their institutions are as supportive of their staff as they could be (Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995). For success with all parties, it is imperative that campuses work on the relationships between themselves, their staff, and their parents. Mullendore and Banahan (2005) suggested that student affairs professionals be more proactive when working with parents in order to be the most effective. By reaching out to parents, student affairs professionals may lessen the incidence of negative parent interaction.

Implications and Recommendations

Although the findings of this study offer some encouragement that student affairs professionals are coping with negative parent interaction, the findings also suggest that more needs to be done to educate parents, professionals, and institutions about the evolving impact of parents in the higher education process. There is no question that parents are involved in higher education and communicate regularly with higher education professionals. The challenge now is to develop strategies for institutions and parents to work collaboratively in ways that will be most beneficial to the student, parent, higher education professional and the institution.

Campuses have made changes in an attempt to assist parents and to address parent involvement. Campuses have implemented parent programs and created departments and staff positions. They have also added parent orientations, websites, and newsletters. These may lessen questions and conflicts by keeping parents informed and by keeping them actively involved in campus life. In addition to general college information, these resources could be beneficial in educating parents about diversity and college student development. They could also be tools to educate parents on proper protocol for addressing concerns.

For institutions, campuses must go beyond simply developing and implementing programs, websites, and orientation sessions to address parent involvement. Institutions also must develop policies for handling parent interactions. Some professionals chose to document or inform their supervisors, whereas others believed it is a part of the job and dealt with it. Due to this inconsistency, it appears there are few guidelines in place to

address parent interaction. In addition to creating policies, professional development opportunities and training could be beneficial for the professional in managing parent involvement.

Institutions also should examine how they handle parent involvement. In coping with negative parent interaction, some professionals stated that they and suggested that their institutions “. . . go over and beyond to please the parent.” Institutions should ask themselves if giving in or going above and beyond to please the parent is in the best interest of the student. There appears to be a disconnection between student development, parent involvement, and holistic education. It seems that institutions react out of fear of losing a student rather than the best interest of all. The professionals in this study suggested that student affairs has shifted from working with students and their development to working more with parents. Institutions must examine if parents are being involved in the right ways. They must remember that giving in to parents may lower the morale of their employees and undermine the authority and the work of student affairs professionals on-campus. They also must ensure that administrators, faculty, and staff are on the same page when it comes to parent involvement at their institution.

With 86.9% of respondents reporting a negative parent interaction, it is clear that some parents treat those professionals whom they have entrusted their children poorly. Some respondents also reported spending more time focused on parents than on students. While wanting the best for their student, parents may be hampering the development of their student. Parents should remember they could be damaging an important relationship and can lose a potential ally in the lives of their students—the student affairs

professional. Some parents seem not to understand that student affairs professionals have the best interests of the student in mind. Parents also need to ask meaningful questions to gain clarity on an issue prior to responding in a manner that may be negative.

Student affairs professionals may need to voice their concerns about parent involvement and take the lead in facilitating change in how parents are involved and educated about the higher education process. They must also understand that parents are an integral part of higher education. It is important that they examine opportunities to create partnerships with parents. The challenge of negative parent involvement may impact whether professionals remain in or leave the field.

Graduate programs can aid in the preparation of students prior to their entrance into the field. One way is by educating graduate students about generations and generational change. A history on how generations of students and parents have evolved can increase understanding of present day circumstances. Another way graduate programs can assist is by being realistic. The reality of some student affairs positions is that they may be working with parents as much as or more than with students. Additionally, graduate students must know and understand the theories and standards of college student development may be changing. Lastly, graduate programs can address the issue of negative parent interaction and discuss coping strategies with students.

Parents, institutions, and student affairs professionals must remember that they all want the best for the student. Although each may see the other as an adversary, it would be in the best interest of the student to build collaborative relationships in order for the student to develop into the best individual and professional.

Limitations

As with any study, this study has its limitations. One limitation and a threat to external validity is that this study focused on the professionals in one region. Because a convenience sample was used and the sample comes from only one region of the country, there may be a limit to the generalizability of the data. An attempt to lessen this threat was made by seeking diversity among institution size, type, and area of specialty among survey participants.

Those who had been in the field of student affairs for 26 plus years reported more negative parent interactions. However, this study did not ask if these negative interactions dealt specifically with the Millennial generation.

As with all other research methods, interviewing has its weaknesses. There is an assumption of “honesty of the respondent” (Mertens, 1998, p. 105). The validity of the data is dependent upon this assumption. The hope is that the confidentiality of the interviews would lessen the impact of this weakness. In order to control for the weakness of researcher bias, all interview participants were asked the same questions and given the same prompts. Another potential weakness was the possibility for researcher bias on coding. To control for this, all transcriptions were reread specifically for codes that may have emerged after the initial coding process. In addition, the researcher met regularly with a colleague knowledgeable about qualitative research to discuss the status of the research and emerging factors in the data.

The assumption of “honesty of the respondent” is also true when using survey data (Mertens, 1998, p. 105). Therefore, the question could be raised as to whether

respondents accurately responded to survey questions. Continued research will be necessary to see if similar results are found with different samples.

Contributions of the Study

This study expands the literature surrounding parent involvement in higher education. While literature exists on parent involvement, it primarily focuses on the parent, the Millennial generation of students, involvement at the elementary and secondary school levels and college student development. This study examines parent involvement from the point of view of the student affairs professional. While positive interactions exist, it particularly examines negative parent interaction in the student affairs profession. It adds knowledge on the prevalence, forms and severity of negative parent interaction. It also adds knowledge of the issues surrounding negative parent interaction and how student affairs professionals are coping with this change in the field. This study begins an area that bears further examination and exploration.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study is the beginning of the examination of parent involvement, negative interactions, and the student affairs professional. Additional research is needed in this area. Suggestions for future research are as follows:

This study could be replicated using the PIQ with a larger and more diverse population of professionals in which more comparisons of similarities and differences can be made. Given anecdotal reports of negative parent interactions with faculty members, similar research, using the PIQ or a modified version of the PIQ, could explore interactions of parents and faculty members.

The impact of increased negative parental involvement also needs to be studied. What is the relationship of negative interactions with parents to burnout and the propensity of student affairs professionals to leave the profession?

Additional research on the impact parent involvement has on the development of students also needs to be conducted. In addition, student perceptions and beliefs about parent involvement also could be studied.

Research that focuses on specific departments within academic and student affairs can be conducted to further determine the issues and strengths that promote positive or negative parent interaction. Comparisons could be made between new professionals and experienced professionals to determine if there are differences in the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about parent involvement. Also research of the perceived values and intentions of the institution to determine the reasons behind responses to parents would provide valuable data for this area of study.

An examination of parent involvement related to gender can be conducted. This would determine whether male or female parents are more involved and who is more prone to interact with higher education professionals and who is more prone to negative interaction.

A closer examination of parent interaction by institution type should be considered. This examination can determine whether differences exist based on an institution's mission, religious affiliation, and status as a historically black college or university.

Finally, an exploration of best practices for collaborative partnerships between parents, institutions and higher education professionals would be an asset to the field. This would give institutions and professionals ideas for successful partnerships.

Conclusion

The parents of Millennial students are actively involved in their student's lives. While previously prevalent in K-12 education, parent involvement had not been prevalent at the college level. With the current generation, parent involvement has become prevalent in the higher education setting. Due to the nature of their positions, student affairs professionals are having increased interactions with parents. While at times positive, these interactions can also be negative.

This study sought to examine negative parent interaction and the student affairs professional. Interviews were conducted and a survey was developed to explore this issue. This study found that negative parent interaction is prevalent, at times severe, varies based on functional area, and has various factors that contribute to it. Student affairs professionals find their institutions supportive and have found ways to cope with the regular negative parent interaction.

Regardless of how institutions address the issue, parents have a vested interest in higher education and the problem of negative parent interaction must be addressed. Positive interactions must be encouraged and promoted. It is imperative for all stakeholders.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many years have you been in the Student Affairs Profession?
2. What current position do you hold in student affairs?
3. In what functional areas have you worked?
4. Have you had negative interactions with parents? If so, please tell me about one negative interaction.
5. What has been the worst experience you have had with a parent?
 - a. What was the issue surrounding the incident with the parent?
6. What forms of negative interactions took place? Threats? Damage to Property?
7. How frequent are the negative interactions? Have the incidents of negative interactions increased? Over the past year, past 5 years?
8. What has been the impact of these experiences on you as a professional?
9. To what extent do you feel you are prepared to deal with parents?
10. Have you considered leaving the profession?
 - a. If yes: What are the reasons why you have considered leaving the profession?
11. Have your interactions with parents impacted the satisfaction of your job?

APPENDIX B

PARENT INTERACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (PIQ)

Demographic Information

Institution Type

- Public – 2 year Public – 4 year
 Private – 2 year Private – 4 year

Institution Size

- 1,999 & under 20,000 to 29,999
 2,000 to 9,999 30,000 to 39,999
 10,000 to 19,999 40,000 & over

Gender

- Female
 Male
 Transgender

Current Student Affairs Functional Area

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing and Residence Life | <input type="checkbox"/> Judicial Affairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Orientation | <input type="checkbox"/> Greek Life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Career Planning and Placement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disabled Student Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multicultural Affairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Years in the Profession

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 21-25 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 26+ years |

Parents – For this study, the term parent will be used to describe any parent, family member or guardian who acts as a representative for a student.

Negative Parental Interaction – For this study, this term will be used to describe any non-verbal, verbal or physical act or threat that is inflicted upon a student affairs professional by a parent, family member or guardian who acts as a representative for a student.

1. How frequently do you have contact with parents of college students?

<input type="checkbox"/> Daily	<input type="checkbox"/> Every two weeks
<input type="checkbox"/> Every other day	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly
<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Every 2-3 months
<input type="checkbox"/> Every 6 months	<input type="checkbox"/> Once per year

2. Are most of your interactions with parents (*Choose one*):
 - On the phone
 - Via e-mail
 - In person

3. Have you had a negative interaction with a parent?
 - Yes
 - No

4. Have the number of negative interactions with parents that you have had increased over the last two years?
 - Yes
 - No

5. Indicate how often you have had a negative parent interaction in the past 30 days?
 - Have not had a negative interaction in the past 30 days
 - 1-2 times
 - 3-5 times
 - 6-9 times
 - 10-19 times
 - 20 or more times

6. Have you ever had a parent (Check all that apply):
 - Send you a mean-spirited letter or written correspondence
 - Send you harassing e-mail messages
 - Show up at your office without an appointment
 - Question your decision

- Name drop in an attempt to intimidate
 - Get upset because you didn't have an immediate answer
 - Raise their voice or yell at you
 - Use profanity towards you
 - Use harassing language towards you (e.g. slurs, obscenities, innuendoes)
 - Threaten to go to your supervisor or other superior
 - Threaten a lawsuit
 - Issue a verbal threat
 - Issue an assault/death threat via email
 - Physically assault you
 - Vandalize your property
 - Vandalize university property
 - Other _____
7. Have you been in a situation with a parent, where campus safety or the police had to get involved?
- Yes
 - No
8. What action(s) do you take in response to a negative parent interaction? (Check all that apply)
- Document the interaction in writing
 - Discuss the interaction with a colleague
 - Discuss the interaction with your supervisor or other
 - Chalk it up as part of your job and continue work as usual
 - Other _____
9. What factors have contributed to the negative parent interactions that you've encountered? (Check all that apply)
- Federal Policy (FERPA, HIPAA, ADA)
 - Campus Policy/Procedure
 - Student Conduct Issue
 - Differences in student lifestyles/habits
 - Lack of an immediate answer to a question
 - Cost of Attendance
 - Other _____

10. How satisfied are you with the support you receive from your institution when negative parental interactions occur?

- Very Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Not Applicable

11. What are ways your institution could improve upon the support currently provided when negative parental interactions occur?

12. What coping strategies do you employ when you encounter a negative parental interaction?

APPENDIX C
LETTER OF INVITATION

Parent Interaction Questionnaire Invite

Dear Student Affairs Colleague:

My name is Sandra Rouse and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Program at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting my dissertation research study to explore negative parent interaction and student affairs professionals.

You are cordially invited to participate in this study. Participation will involve completing an online survey. This survey consists of 12 questions including demographic information. This survey should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete, and will be completely confidential. Please print a copy of the informed consent form for your records before continuing with the survey.

To complete the survey, just click on the link
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=HQP2kfLoaigtCKZKO7JgEQ_3d_3d

Thank you for your participation.

Sandra A. Rouse
Doctoral Candidate
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro