

Offices of the Dean of Student Life New Student and Family Programs Parent and Family Assessment Spring 2020

Purpose of Assessment

New Student and Family Programs is one of the units in the Offices of the Dean of Student Life. New Student and Family Programs (NSFP) provides outreach to Aggie families because they understand how families contribute to students' college success. According to its website (<https://familyprograms.tamu.edu/>), the Aggie Parent & Family Program collaborates with campus partners to "work with parents to help them understand the student experience, support student learning, and empower students to take personal responsibility for their social and academic choices."

New Student and Family Programs wanted to gather feedback about parents and family members' communication with the university as well as to understand the experience parents and families receiving communication regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. While Student Life Studies has worked with NSFP in the past, this is the first time this specific parent and family assessment has been conducted.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Student Life Studies identified some key findings and developed actionable recommendations the department may take based on the results. However, New Student and Family Programs staff may identify other findings using their knowledge and understanding of the families they serve. Staff members are strongly encouraged to read all the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of parents and families' experiences.

- Parents and families indicated they would prefer regular communication with the university, especially for any emergency or crisis. They also expressed that the communication should be direct, include detailed information, and be presented in an easy to read format, such as bulleted items. Furthermore, parents and family members reported receiving their first university communication of COVID-19 from a Parent & Family Connection email, which is a source just over half of respondents said they still utilize for COVID-19 pandemic information. Finally, the Parent & Family Connection portal email was said to be the most preferred method for receiving university information. New Student and Family Programs should continue to focus on communications with Aggie families.
 - Consider keeping the communications direct, detailed, or not vague, and easy to read in all communications through the Aggie Parent & Family Program.
 - Develop a regular day or timeline as well as format for ongoing communication with parents and family members. Maybe this could be something catchy as Weekly Wednesday or Tell Us Tuesday.
 - Parents and families want to know information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on campus and in the community. Consider working with university administrators on a process to share information from the Brazos County Health District related to the COVID-19 pandemic that directly affects the campus community. Parents want to understand how many students, staff, and faculty test positive for the coronavirus or campus areas that are closed for cleaning due to COVID-19. This information might also be beneficial for students to know so they can be well informed to hopefully make positive decisions when they are on-campus and off-campus.
- Parents and families commented on a variety of topics, many of which are outside of the scope of the Aggie Parent & Family Program. New Student and Family Programs is strongly encouraged to identify campus partners and stakeholders, as well as to share these results with them.

- Some potential Division of Student Affairs partners might include the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, Residence Life, DSA Marketing and Communications, Student Health Services, Office of the Commandant, and Disability Resources.
 - Potential campus partners could include Texas A&M Marketing and Communication, Office of the Provost, Registrar's Office, Financial Aid and Scholarship, Study Abroad, and Facilities and Dining Administration.
 - Parents and families are external stakeholders; NSFP could share highlights from the survey results, as well as any action that is being taken by the university based on the data.
- Additionally, many parents and family members asked questions of the university, especially about detailed plans for the fall 2020 semester, medical resources for students if they return to campus and transparent information about COVID-19 cases on campus and in the Bryan/College Station community. One respondent even shared their name and phone number with their comment so they could be contacted. NSFP staff is encouraged to address questions and concerns raised by parents and family members as communications are shared through the Parent and Family Connection.
 - Create a list of questions and concerns expressed by parents and family members and gather answers and information to respond. This could be shared widely, in collaboration with various campus partners, with parents and family members through listservs, websites, and parent Facebook pages.
 - Many parents indicated that their student was an adult and they expected their student to be the one to get information. NSFP might also look at methods of sharing answers and information with students, in addition to the parents and family members.
 - Families living out-of-state, or within Texas but still 8+ hours from campus, expressed frustration in decisions made late and making it more challenging with traveling to or from campus. They shared that it requires a little bit of planning for their student to come home. New Student and Family Programs could look at avenues they could be an advocate for these families.
 - Just over two-thirds of the respondents (69%) reported utilizing the university website once a month or more to get a question answered or concern addressed. New Student and Family Programs might share this information with others throughout the university to encourage all departments and programs to keep their website updated and user-friendly. Within the Division of Student Affairs, sharing survey results with the DSA MarComm Team might help reach most division departments.

Method and Sample

The survey was developed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. The data collected from the survey were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®. The 28-question electronic survey contained 27 quantitative questions and one qualitative question. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw every question. The survey link was sent to Texas A&M students' parents and family members through email addresses of those who signed up with the Parent & Family Connection through NSFP.

The survey link was sent on June 22, 2020, to 26,220 family members; however, seven email addresses failed and 807 emails were undeliverable, therefore the survey invitation was not received. Up to three reminders were sent to non-respondents before the survey closed on July 1, 2020. Of the 25,406 parents and family members receiving the survey invitation, 4,982 completed some part of the survey, yielding a 20% response rate.

Results

Results are reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are in descending mean or frequency percentage order. Summary themes are contained in this report; the entire list of qualitative responses can be found in a separate document.

The first half of the survey, parents and family members were asked a series of questions to understand how often they contacted the university, the methods used and the departments contacted, as well as how often and the methods they preferred to receive communication from the university.

The first question asked about the frequency and methods used when parents and families had a question or concern related to their student's experience. Table 1 shows that parents and family members utilize the university websites and email most when communicating with the university. In-person meetings on campus or through Zoom was the least used method. Of the parents and family members utilizing a method, generally, it was used monthly or less. Those selecting the "other" response option (n=1,692) were provided the opportunity to write a method they utilize in contacting the university. The most common response from 262 parents and family members included parent Facebook pages and talking to their students. Some additional methods mentioned were Newsletters, Aggie Moms Clubs, social media, friends, and Instagram.

On average, how often do you use these methods to get a question or concern related to your student's experience answered or addressed by the university?	Multiple Times a Day (7)	Daily (6)	Weekly (5)	2-3 Times a Month (4)	Once a Month (3)	Once a Year (2)	Never (1)	Mean (sd) [n]
University websites	1%	2%	9%	20%	37%	19%	13%	3.03 (1.27) [3,277]
Email	4%	4%	7%	8%	18%	32%	27%	2.66 (1.63) [3,271]
Google	3%	3%	5%	9%	20%	16%	44%	2.37 (1.61) [3,194]
TAMU mobile app	1%	1%	5%	8%	15%	14%	56%	1.98 (1.36) [3,211]
Phone call	2%	2%	1%	3%	11%	37%	44%	1.93 (1.24) [3,242]
Post question on social media (official TAMU channels)	1%	1%	3%	4%	8%	12%	71%	1.64 (1.24) [3,223]
Other	1%	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%	86%	1.46 (1.26) [1,692]
In-person meeting on campus or via Zoom	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	3%	15%	80%	1.29 (.74) [3,211]

Table 1: Frequency and Method of Communication

Additionally, parents and families were asked about the frequency in which they contacted specific university departments. Table 2 indicates over half of those responding report never contacting any of the offices listed. Of the department options provided, New Student and Family Programs was reported as being contacted the most. Those selecting “other department” (n=2,209) were provided the opportunity to specify which department they contacted and 574 wrote a comment. The most common department parents and family members contacted related to students’ finances, either contacting Financial Aid and Scholarships or Student Business Services. Several respondents also said they contacted Residence Life, their students’ academic college or advisor, Admissions, Disability Resources, and the Registrar’s Office.

When contacting the university for assistance (using methods from the previous question), on average, how often do you initiate contact with the following departments?	Multiple Times a Day (7)	Daily (6)	Weekly (5)	2-3 Times a Month (4)	Once a Month (3)	Once a Year (2)	Never (1)	Mean (sd) [n]
New Student & Family Programs	<1%	1%	2%	2%	8%	30%	58%	1.63 (.95) [3,225]
Other Department	<1%	<1%	1%	2%	6%	18%	73%	1.40 (.78) [2,209]
Division of Student Affairs	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	4%	21%	73%	1.36 (.71) [3,164]
Campus Operator	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	5%	17%	76%	1.35 (.78) [3,170]
Dean of Student Life	--	<1%	<1%	1%	2%	11%	86%	1.19 (.55) [3,172]
Office of the President / Chancellor’s Office	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	5%	93%	1.11 (.47) [3,167]
Commandant’s Office (Corps of Cadets)	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	4%	94%	1.09 (.46) [3,158]

Table 2: Frequency Contacting University Departments

Respondents were also asked about the frequency and methods they preferred to receive information from the university. Table 3, on the following page, demonstrates that the NSFP Parent & Family Connection portal newsletter and social media were the most preferred methods. A webinar was the least preferred method. Weekly, 2-3 times a month, and once a month were the common frequency for several methods. Those selecting the “other” option (n=1,502) could specify other methods of communication they preferred and 83 shared a comment. Email communication was the most common response from parents and families. Many respondents also indicated wanting to hear from the university through text messages, but this was mostly for emergency communications. Additionally, the frequency increased, often to daily or multiple times per day, for those preferring emergency text messages. Other preferred methods included as needed, social media, and the TAMU app. Some mentioned specific departments rather than a method.

How often do you prefer to receive information from the university using the following methods?	Multiple Times a Day (7)	Daily (6)	Weekly (5)	2-3 Times a Month (4)	Once a Month (3)	Once a Year (2)	Never (1)	Mean (sd) [n]
Parent & Family Connection portal newsletter from New Student & Family Programs	1%	4%	25%	18%	44%	4%	4%	3.69 (1.15) [3,295]
Social Media	3%	12%	24%	14%	18%	3%	25%	3.58 (1.84) [3,189]
Articles posted in the Parent & Family Connection portal (tx.ag/familyportal)	<1%	4%	22%	18%	41%	5%	10%	3.51 (1.29) [3,221]
Text	1%	4%	16%	13%	27%	5%	34%	2.88 (1.64) [3,165]
Mail	<1%	2%	9%	6%	34%	17%	31%	2.52 (1.37) [3,192]
Webinar	<1%	1%	4%	3%	26%	18%	47%	2.03 (1.20) [3,130]
Other	<1%	1%	2%	2%	3%	1%	90%	1.29 (.99) [1,502]

Table 3: Frequency of Preferred Communication Method

The remaining survey questions were related to the university's communication regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and updates of university changes. It was explained that the responses to these questions would be used to assist the university in any future emergency communication or crisis response.

Parents and families were asked where they first saw official university communication messages regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 4 illustrates that almost half of the respondents first received university communication through the Parent & Family Connection email. Parents and family members first saw university communication related to COVID-19 from other Aggie families and the TAMU website the least. Everyone selecting the "other" option (n=178) providing a wide range of responses. Many parents and family members indicated first receiving communication of COVID-19 from their students, Facebook pages, the news, and email messages. A few others mentioned hearing from a friend, Aggie Family emails, and the TAMU app.

Where did you <u>first</u> see official university communication messages regarding COVID-19?	Frequency Percentage [n=3,297]
Parent & Family Connection portal announcement email	49%
TAMU social media	21%
Email from my student	17%
TAMU website	6%
Other	5%
Other Aggie families	3%

Table 4: Initial Communication Method for COVID-19

Using a select all that apply question, respondents were also asked where they went (or continue to go) to seek out information regarding COVID-19. Table 5 reveals that just over half of those responding utilized the Parent & Family Connection portal emails and the Texas A&M website. Those selecting the “other” response (n=217) option were given the opportunity to write a comment and 213 responded. Many reported receiving Texas A&M information on COVID-19 from the website, Facebook (either general or parent pages), their student, email messages, TAMU app, and the Corps of Cadets. Additionally, parents and family members shared where they go to receive general information about COVID-19, including different websites (.gov, Brazos County Health District, and Center for Disease Control), the news, and google or internet searches.

Where did you (or still do) seek out information regarding COVID-19? (select all that apply)	Frequency Percentage [n=3,297]
Parent & Family Connection portal announcement email	55%
TAMU website	43%
TAMU social media	33%
Email from my student	27%
Other Aggie families	11%
Other	7%
I did not seek out information	5%

Table 5: Communication Methods

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement regarding communications related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 6 informs us that a majority of respondents were in agreement that the email communication was timely and the number of announcements was sufficient.

	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean (sd) [n]
Email communication related to COVID-19 shared by the Aggie Parent & Family Connect was timely.	27%	64%	8%	1%	3.17 (.61) [3,269]
The number of announcements related to COVID-19 shared by the Aggie Parent & Family Connect was sufficient.	28%	62%	9%	2%	3.16 (.64) [3,269]

Table 6: COVID-19 Communication Frequency and Timing

Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that the number of COVID-19 announcements was sufficient (n=335) were asked a follow-up question to understand how many announcements they would have preferred receiving. Of the 327 responses, a majority (87%) felt there were not enough emails. Additionally, 1% reported there were too many emails, and 13% selected the “something else” option. Those indicating they would have preferred “something else” (n=41) were given the opportunity to write a comment and 33 elaborated on their feelings. Several felt that the communication was slow or sent out too late and they could find out information from other sources quicker. Some indicated the email messages and the subject lines were too vague or unclear. Others felt that the email messages did not cover important topics such as getting rebates, checking out of housing, and finding out about classes or grades. A few parents and families would like to hear more about the current number of cases in the Bryan/College Station area as well as on campus. Several said they did not receive any email messages.

The final question allowed parents and family members the opportunity to share any feedback they had about the university's communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. While almost one-third (31%) of the 680 comments expressed appreciation and praise for the university's communication and response, many other parents and family members felt that the communication was too slow in being shared, too vague, and generally were very frustrated with the university's response related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents and families had plenty of suggestions or shared what they would like including direct, official communication to parents, more information and details, decisions made earlier, concise messages, regular updates throughout the fall semester, more transparency regarding the number of cases on the Texas A&M campus, and statistics on the cases of COVID-19 in the Bryan/College Station area. Several parents who explained that information with details was needed earlier because they were from out-of-state, or in-state but 8-12 hours from College Station, and it took them a little time to make plans. Many parents and families had many questions they still wanted answers for and expressed a variety of concerns.

New Student and Family Programs provided a list with University Identification Numbers (UINs) of students associated with the parent or family member receiving the survey. The UINs were used to gather demographic information from the university student database based on students' spring 2020 enrollment. There was no spring 2020 enrollment data for 3,067 students associate with parents or families who received the survey. Some parents or family members had more than one student enrolled at Texas A&M; demographics of all students were included in the analysis. The demographic information for students associated with those receiving the survey and those who responded to the survey can be found in Table 7, on the following page in descending order for the survey respondents in each category. Most of the demographics were similar between the survey population and the respondents. Survey respondents with students who were freshmen, White, and not first generation were slightly overrepresented. Alternatively, students who were juniors, seniors, in the College of Engineering, and were first generation were slightly underrepresented for survey respondents.

	Survey Population [n=23,193]	Survey Respondents [n=4,733]
Classification		
Freshman	18%	37%
Sophomore	33%	31%
Junior	30%	24%
Senior	20%	8%
Masters	<1%	<1%
Postbac / Nondegree	<1%	<1%
College		
Engineering	37%	30%
Liberal Arts	15%	13%
Agriculture and Life Sciences	12%	11%
Mays Business School	11%	11%
Education and Human Development	10%	9%
General Studies	7%	7%
Veterinary Medicine	6%	6%
Science	5%	5%
Architecture	4%	4%
Geosciences	2%	2%
Nursing / Public Health	2%	2%
Galveston	<1%	<1%
Sex		
Male	49%	51%
Female	51%	49%
Ethnicity		
White	62%	68%
Hispanic or Latino	24%	20%
Asian	8%	6%
Black or Multi-Racial with Black	3%	3%
Multi-Racial (excluding Black)	3%	3%
International	1%	<1%
Unknown or Not Reported	<1%	<1%
American Indian	<1%	<1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	--
First Generation		
No	76%	82%
Yes	21%	14%
Unknown	3%	4%

Table 7: Student Demographics

Students' state of residency was also gathered. A majority of those responding to the survey (95%) were from Texas. Other top states represented included California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia. This was similar compared to everyone who received the survey, 96% were from Texas. The entire list of state residency can be found in a separate document.

Department Background

According to its website (<https://studentlife.tamu.edu/>), the Offices of the Dean of Student Life “strive to enhance your opportunities as a student to participate fully in the University experience.” The department does this by sharing information, services, programs, and involvement opportunities. New Student and Family Programs is one of several program areas in the department. While each area has a specific mission and function, they all have the common goal to provide education, outreach, and support to students.

According to its website (<https://studentlife.tamu.edu/nsfp/>), NSFP “facilitates the success of new students through their first year at Texas A&M University by providing them with the framework to adjust to the expectations, standards, academic rigors, and social community here at A&M. Additionally, we recognize the important role that family members play in a student's college success and we strive to equip families with resources to aid their student.”

Student Life Studies and Project Details

There were a couple of potential limitations with this survey. First, the survey was administered while many of the university functions continued to provide remote delivery for programs and services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This change could have affected the response rate and the feedback provided by parents and families. Second, it was initially believed that the parents and family members receiving the survey currently had a student at Texas A&M University. However, the list included parents and family members who had students who graduated from Texas A&M University before the spring 2020 semester.

The Department of Student Life Studies provides quality assessment services, resources, and assessment training for departments in the Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs and student organizations. Services by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at <https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, division staff and students can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.

To work with Student Life Studies for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://slsform.dsaapps.tamu.edu/>.

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