

**Offices of the Dean of Student Life
New Student & Family Programs
Parent and Family Assessment
Summer 2021**

Purpose of Assessment

New Student & Family Programs (NSFP) wanted to gather feedback from parents and family members of first year and third year students regarding communication with the university, as well as to understand their experiences receiving communication regarding the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-2021 academic year. This is the second time Student Life Studies has worked with New Student and Family Programs conducting a parent and family assessment.

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 of the results and qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of parents' and families' experiences.

- Because most parents and families check the university website at least once a month and like to receive information once a month or more through the NSFP newsletter, it is important to keep the information accurate, thorough, and timely.
- Many parents and families used the unofficial parent Facebook group or other non-Texas A&M organizations (e.g., Aggie Moms Clubs) to get questions answered. New Student & Family Programs should ensure, to the best of their ability, that accurate information is being shared.
- Parents of students getting closer to graduation are interested in topics related to post-graduation and the ceremony itself. NSFP partners could provide information to share with parents through the Connection portal.
- Related to COVID-19, parents and families look at the Texas A&M website and the Connection portal for information. The COVID-19 information should be consistent when communicating with families about policies and processes. Several respondents said they did not receive information about it.
- Similar to last year, 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 & 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, Scholarships and Financial Aid, 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.

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 23-question electronic survey contained 22 quantitative questions and one qualitative question. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw every question. The survey link was sent to first year and third year 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 July 6, 2021, to 22,828 family members; however, one email address failed, and 282 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 19, 2021. Of the 22,545 parents and family members receiving the survey invitation, 1,585 completed some part of the survey, yielding a 7% response rate, lower than last year's Parent and Family assessment which garnered 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. Comparisons to the 2020 responses are provided as applicable. Summary themes are contained in this report; the entire list of qualitative responses can be found in a separate document.

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, on the following page, shows, similar to last year, 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 that method was used monthly or less. Those selecting the "other" response option (n=780) were provided the opportunity to write a method they utilize in contacting the university. The most common response from 104 parents and family members included asking their students and talking to other parents. Some additional methods mentioned were Newsletters, Aggie Moms Clubs, and social media (Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, etc.).

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)	2021 Mean (sd) [n]	2020 Mean (sd) [n]
University websites	1%	2%	9%	19%	39%	19%	12%	3.01 (1.23) [1,576]	3.03 (1.27) [3,277]
Email	2%	2%	5%	7%	20%	36%	28%	2.43 (1.41) [1,580]	2.66 (1.63) [3,271]
Google	2%	2%	6%	12%	24%	17%	39%	2.41 (1.47) [1,550]	2.37 (1.61) [3,194]
Phone call	1%	1%	1%	3%	11%	40%	43%	1.86 (1.07) [1,560]	1.93 (1.24) [3,242]
Post question on social media (unofficial Parent Facebook Groups)	1%	1%	4%	5%	10%	16%	63%	1.78 (1.28) [1,560]	*
Post question on social media (official TAMU channels)	1%	1%	2%	3%	7%	12%	74%	1.54 (1.10) [1,553]	1.64 (1.24) [3,223]
Other	1%	<1%	3%	3%	3%	3%	87%	1.34 (1.04) [780]	1.46 (1.26) [1,692]
Meeting on Zoom	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	4%	17%	77%	1.32 (.74) [1,547]	1.29 (.74) [3,211]
In-person meeting on campus	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	2%	23%	74%	1.29 (.56) [1,557]	1.29 (.74) [3,211]**

Table 1: Frequency and Method of Communication

*Question not asked

**Question combined in-person meeting or via Zoom

Additionally, parents and families were asked whether they contacted various offices in the last year by email, phone, or text. Table 2, on the following page, illustrates that Financial Aid was the most common office contacted by parents of both first year and third year students. Parents are rarely contacting the Commandant's Office or the Office of the President/Chancellor's Office. Those selecting "other department" (n=123) were provided the opportunity to specify which department they contacted and 107 wrote a comment. Some of the responses included the 12th Man Foundation/Athletics, Admissions, Disability Resources, Dining Services, academic advisors, Registrar, University Police Department, Student Health Services, Counseling and Psychological Services, and Veterans Affairs.

Which offices have you contacted by email, phone, or text within the last year?	First Year Parent n=797	Third Year Parent n=392
Financial Aid	45%	44%
New Student & Family Programs	45%	29%
Residence Life	44%	17%
Student Business Services	25%	39%
My Student's Academic College	24%	21%
Transportation Services	16%	11%
Division of Student Affairs	13%	13%
Offices of the Dean of Student Life	10%	11%
Other	10%	10%
Commandant's Office	5%	4%
Office of the President/Chancellor's Office	3%	4%

Table 2: Contact with Texas A&M Offices in the Last Year (n=1,189)

Respondents were also asked about the frequency and methods they preferred to receive information from the university. Table 3 demonstrates that the NSFP Parent & Family Connection portal newsletter and social media were the most preferred methods. A webinar was the least preferred method. Depending on the method, the frequency typically ranged from once a year to 2-3 times a month. Those selecting the "other" option (n=516) could specify other methods of communication they preferred and 43 shared a comment. Email communication was the most common response from parents and families. Like last year, some respondents also indicated wanting to hear from the university through text messages, but this was mostly for emergency communications.

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)	2021 Mean (sd) [n]	2020 Mean (sd) [n]
Parent & Family Connection portal newsletter from New Student & Family Programs	1%	2%	27%	17%	48%	3%	3%	3.72 (1.07) [1,585]	3.69 (1.15) [3,295]
Social Media	2%	10%	24%	15%	19%	3%	27%	3.47 (1.81) [1,493]	3.58 (1.84) [3,189]
Text	1%	2%	16%	15%	29%	5%	33%	2.86 (1.57) [1,493]	2.88 (1.64) [3,165]
Mail	1%	1%	8%	7%	42%	17%	25%	2.60 (1.24) [1,487]	2.52 (1.37) [3,192]
Webinar	<1%	<1%	3%	4%	30%	24%	40%	2.07 (1.08) [1,471]	2.03 (1.20) [3,130]
Other	<1%	1%	2%	3%	6%	2%	86%	1.38 (1.04) [516]	1.29 (.99) [1,502]

Table 3: Frequency of Preferred Communication Method

New Student & Family Programs wants to enrich communication with parents and families of juniors and seniors. In a check all that applied format, third year parents were asked about topics they would like to see. As shown in Table 4, they are most interested in topics related to graduation and post-graduation. Parents were least interested in physical health and alcohol and drug use. The 19 “other” comments included items such as activities, scholarships, and academic issues (changing major, grades, withdrawal).

Topic of Interest	Frequency Percent [n=1,554]
Career Information—internship/co-op search	76%
Career Information—full time job search	72%
Graduation	47%
Career Information—graduate or professional school programs	45%
Aggie Ring Order/Ring Day	36%
Education Abroad	27%
Student Involvement Opportunities	24%
Financial Aid/Student Loan Repayment	23%
Health & Wellness (Mental Health)	15%
Health & Wellness (Physical Health)	5%
Health & Wellness (Alcohol and Drug)	3%
Other	1%

Table 4: Parent Interest in Communication Regarding Juniors and Seniors

Parents and families of first year students were asked where they first saw official university communication messages regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 5 illustrates that almost half of the respondents first received university communication through the Parent & Family Connection email. The least chosen response was other Aggies families. Everyone selecting the “other” option (n=45) provided a wide range of responses. Of the 43 comments, respondents indicated first receiving communication from their students, Facebook pages, and the news. Several reported not receiving information.

Where did you <u>first</u> see official university communication messages regarding COVID-19?	2021 Frequency Percent [n=983]	2020 Frequency Percent [n=3,297]
Parent & Family Connection portal announcement email	43%	49%
TAMU social media	16%	21%
TAMU website	12%	6%
Email from my student	10%	17%
Other	5%	5%
Other Aggie families	3%	3%

Table 5: Initial Communication Method for COVID-19

Using a select all that apply question, parents and families of first year students were also asked where they went (or continue to go) to seek out information regarding COVID-19. Table 6, on the next page, reveals that almost half refer to the Texas A&M website, which is slightly more than in 2020. Those selecting the “other” response (n=45) option were given the opportunity to write a comment and 42 responded. Parents and families use social media, the news, their student, and the Texas A&M app.

Where did you (or still do) seek out information regarding COVID-19? (Select all that apply)	2021 Frequency Percent [n=989]	2020 Frequency Percent [n=3,297]
TAMU website	49%	43%
Parent & Family Connection	41%	55%
TAMU social media	24%	33%
Email from my student	20%	27%
Other Aggie families	10%	11%
I did not seek out information	10%	5%
Other	5%	7%

Table 6: COVID-19 Communication Methods

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement regarding communications related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 7 indicates that the communication was timely and sufficient. The responses were virtually the same as last year.

	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2021 Mean (sd) [n=1,561]	2020 Mean (sd) [n=3,269]
Email communication related to COVID-19 shared by the Aggie Parent & Family Connect was timely.	26%	65%	7%	1%	3.16 (.65)	3.17 (.61)
The number of email communications related to COVID-19 shared by the Aggie Parent & Family Connect was sufficient.	27%	63%	8%	2%	3.15 (.65)	3.16 (.64)

Table 7: COVID-19 Communication Frequency and Timing

Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that the number of COVID-19 announcements was sufficient (n=155) were asked a follow-up question to understand how many announcements they would have preferred receiving. A majority (76%) felt there were not enough emails. In contrast, 4% reported there were too many emails, and 20% selected the “something else” option. Those indicating they would have preferred “something else” (n=31) were given the opportunity to write a comment, and 28 elaborated on their feelings. Some respondents indicated they did not receive communication, and others thought the information was not clear or timely.

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 some of the 237 comments expressed appreciation and praise for the university’s communication and response, 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. Many parents and families talked about the (negative) impact on the student experience in and out of the classroom because of the virtual environment.

New Student and Family Programs provided a list with Universal 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 2021 enrollment. Some parents or family members had more than one student enrolled at Texas A&M; demographics of all students were included in the analysis, although duplicates were removed as more than one parent or family member could also represent one student on the list. First year students represented about 64% of respondents, while third year students represented 37%. The demographic information for students associated with those who received the survey and

those who responded to the survey can be found in Table 8 in descending order for the survey respondents in each category. The demographics were generally similar between the survey population and the respondents. Survey respondents with students who were freshmen, White, and not first generation were slightly overrepresented.

	Survey Population [n=16,753]	Survey Respondents [n=1,281]
Classification		
First Year	53%	64%
Third Year	47%	37%
College		
Engineering	27%	32%
Liberal Arts	14%	12%
Agriculture and Life Sciences	11%	10%
Mays Business School	11%	9%
Education and Human Development	10%	9%
General Studies	8%	8%
Veterinary Medicine	6%	7%
Science	6%	5%
Architecture	4%	4%
Geosciences	2%	2%
Public Health	2%	1%
Nursing	<1%	<1%
Sex		
Male	48%	51%
Female	52%	49%
Ethnicity		
White	62%	69%
Hispanic or Latino	23%	20%
Asian	9%	6%
Black or Multi-Racial with Black	3%	2%
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%	<1%
First Generation		
No	80%	89%
Yes	20%	11%
Unknown	1%	1%

Table 8: Student Demographics

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 “assists new undergraduate students as they transition to Texas A&M while supporting families of all undergraduate students. NSFP serves as a campus leader in providing a foundation to the expectations, academic standards, and a sense of belonging at Texas A&M. Our work with incoming students and all families of undergraduate students creates opportunities that lead to successful student transition, retention, and persistence to graduation.” New Student and Family Programs (NSFP) provide outreach to Aggie families because they understand how families contribute to students’ college success.

Student Life Studies and Project Details

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://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/aqform/>.

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