

The Dartmouth Parents: Engagement and Communication



**Office of Institutional Research
Dartmouth College**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Survey Methodology

- 1) 3,383 parents of Dartmouth undergraduate students were invited to participate in a COHFE sponsored survey. The response rate was 60%.
- 2) Survey was administered via mail using a paper-pencil format.

Local Questionnaire Development

- 3) The 20 local questions were developed by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) with input from offices of the President, Provost, Dean of the College, Dean of the Faculty, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Public Affairs, and Development.

Purpose

- 4) The local questionnaire purpose was to: Identify parent perceptions of the important factors shaping the Dartmouth experience; Determine the level of parent participation at Dartmouth events and presentations; Ascertain the current and preferred ways in which parents get and receive Dartmouth information; and Gauge the relative usefulness of current communication methods utilized by Dartmouth.

"Reference Child" and Parent Respondent Characteristics (Figure 1)

- 5) Parents were asked to complete the survey in reference to one of their children attending Dartmouth.
- 6) More of the surveys were completed by women (45%), or jointly by both parents (35%). Most of the respondents were the custodial parents (96%). Three percent were non-custodial parents and 1% selected "Other". There was no reference child gender difference in the responses. Gender breakdown was 50/50 for the reference children.
- 7) Most reference children reported their race/ethnicity as white (65%), followed by Asian-American (14%), African-American (6%), and Hispanic (6%).
- 8) More reference children were in their 1st year at Dartmouth. Almost equal percentages were other class years.
- 9) The highest percentages of parents were from New York, followed by California, New Jersey or Massachusetts, and Connecticut or Pennsylvania.

Importance of Factors in Shaping the Dartmouth Experience (Figure 2)

- 10) Parents considered the most important factors in shaping the Dartmouth experience to be the *Quality of the Faculty*, followed by the *Quality of the Student Body* and *Range of Course Offering*. *Intercollegiate Athletics* earned the lowest importance rating.

Parent Participation at Dartmouth Events and Presentations

- 11) Events: The most popular event was the First-Year Family Week-end, followed by Parent/Family Orientation, and "Other" Dartmouth Events. Homecoming was attended by the fewest. (Figure 3).
- 12) Presentations in Local Area: Almost 70% of the parents indicated that they would attend a local presentation by the President or Provost. Presentations by the Dean of the College staff and Faculty were also selected (Figure 4).
- 13) Numbers of Presentations: Few parents would not attend a local presentation by someone from Dartmouth. Most (65%) parents indicated that they would attend more than one. Ten percent of the parents would attend talks by five or more different Dartmouth community members.

For parents who would attend only one presentation, a talk by the President or Provost was the most popular selection. Presentations by Faculty and the Dean of the College staff were also selected (Figure 6).

Current and Preferred Ways in Which Parents Get and Receive Information

- 14) How Parents Obtain Information About Dartmouth College (Figure 7)
The most popular method of obtaining information about Dartmouth is through the Web-site, followed by *Dartmouth Life*, *Speaking of Dartmouth*, and *The Dartmouth*. The *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* and the *Vox* were less frequently used sources of information for parents.
- 15) Dartmouth Communication with Parents (Figure 8)
Similar percentages of parents indicated that the President/Provost (28%), "Other" Dartmouth Staff (24%), or staff from the Dean of the College (23%) had contacted them this academic year. Fewer parents reported contacts with the Dean of the Faculty or a Faculty Member.
- 16) Is Parent Receiving Sufficient Communication from Dartmouth? (Figure 9)
72% of parents indicated that the level of contact with Dartmouth was sufficient. 1% thought communication was too much, and 26% wanted more frequent updates. For the updates, the preferred method was using either regular mail or e-mail, followed by regular mail or e-mail exclusively.
- 17) Preferred Way to Receive Information from Dartmouth (Figure 10)
The most preferred method of receiving information from Dartmouth is via printed newsletter, followed by e-mail letters, and e-mail newsletters. E-mail notices, a parents' web-site, and a phone call were also listed.

Usefulness of Dartmouth's Current Communication Methods and Occasions in comparison to Other Institutions (Figure 11)

- 18) The majority of the parents rated the usefulness of the *School Publications* as the "Same" as other Colleges/Universities that their other children were attending. Over 40% rated *Dartmouth School Publications* "More Useful", and 5% "Less Useful". *Dartmouth Web Pages* ratings were similar.
- 19) A usefulness rating of the "Same" was the most frequent response for communication occasions with *Senior Administrators*, *Student Affairs Office*, and *Faculty*. Around 25% noted *Communication* was "More Useful" and between 15% and 18% thought that the *Communication* was "Less Useful".

Predictors and Discriminators of Factors That Shape the Quality of the Dartmouth Experience

- 20) Measures of "parental engagement" were slightly inter-correlated, suggesting commonalities in the ways parents connect with Dartmouth. Parents who attended more *Dartmouth Events* also *Obtained Information About Dartmouth* in more ways, had more *Contacts* with different members of the Dartmouth community, and were interested in a wider variety of *Local Presentations*.
- 21) No substantive *Method of Obtaining Information* differences in the ranking of quality factor importance emerged. Regardless of the multiplicity or combination of methods, parents included the *Quality of Faculty*, *Range of Course Offerings*, and *Quality of the Student Body* in the top three factors that define the Dartmouth experience. This pattern held for the number and type of *Events* the parents attended and the number of *Contacts* with Dartmouth community members. The order of importance changed slightly for *Local Presentations*. Parents interested in presentations by the *Dean of the Faculty* rated *Research Opportunities* and *Facilities* as more important, and parents interested in presentations by *Coaches* rated *Athletics* as more important.
- 22) Parents are very satisfied with their child's undergraduate education. Sixty-three percent responded that they were "Very Satisfied", and another 30% indicated that they were "Generally Satisfied". Only 7% were not at least generally satisfied. Of these parents, 4% noted they were "Ambivalent", 1% "Generally Dissatisfied" and 2% "Very Dissatisfied".

A. Background Information

Survey Methodology

In spring 2007, 3,383 parents of Dartmouth students were invited to participate in a COHFE sponsored survey. After combining the local questions with the COHFE survey, we had a final response rate of 60% (n=2,034). The survey was administered via mail using a paper-pencil format.

Local Questionnaire Development

Each of the COHFE schools was given the option of including 20 questions that could be used to address issues specific to that school. The Dartmouth local questions were developed by the Office of Institutional Research with input from staff in the offices of the President, Provost, Dean of the College, Dean of the Faculty, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Public Affairs, and Development.

Purpose

The broad focus and purpose of these questions was to:

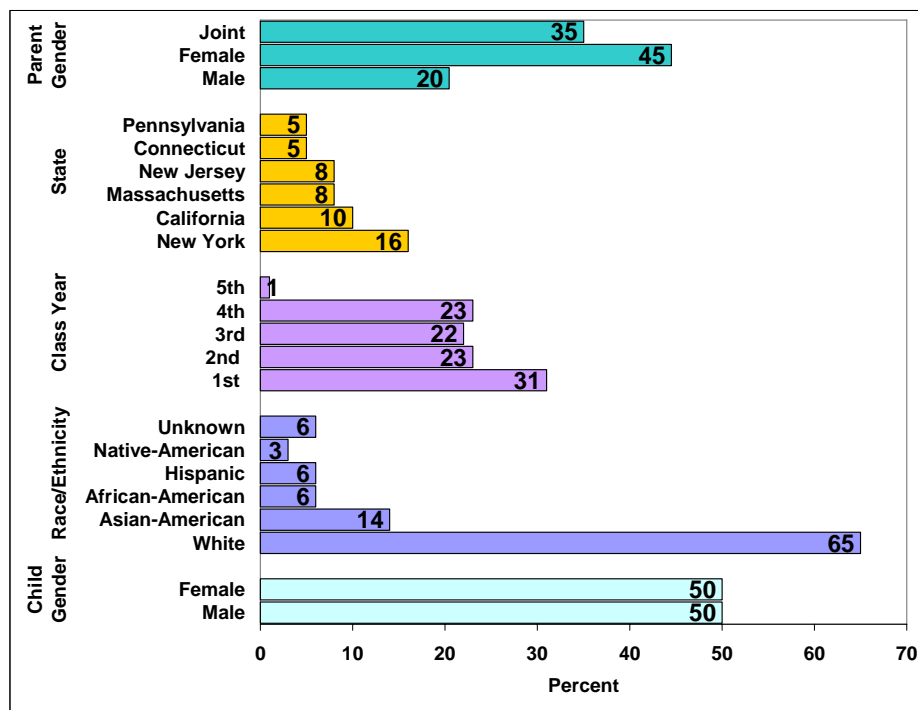
- 1) Identify parent perceptions of important factors shaping the Dartmouth experience;
- 2) Determine the level of parent participation at Dartmouth events and presentations;
- 3) Ascertain the current and preferred ways in which parents get and receive Dartmouth information; and
- 4) Gauge the relative usefulness of current communication methods utilized by Dartmouth.

"Reference Child" and Parent Respondent Characteristics

Survey respondents were parents of Dartmouth undergraduate students who were in residence in Hanover during the spring 2007 term. Parents of international students were excluded. Parents were asked to complete the survey in reference one of their child who was in attendance at Dartmouth¹.

Most of the surveys were completed by custodial parents (96%). Survey respondents were women (45%) or both parents (35%), primarily. (See Figure 1) There was no reference child gender difference in the responses. The gender breakdown of the "reference child" was 50/50. Most of the reference children reported their race/ethnicity as white (65%), followed by Asian-American (14%), African-American (6%) and Hispanic (6%). More of the respondents' reference children were in their 1st year at Dartmouth (31%). Almost equal percentages were in their 2nd, 3rd, or 4th years at Dartmouth. The highest percentage of parents were from New York (16%), followed by California (10%), New Jersey or Massachusetts (8% each), and Connecticut or Pennsylvania (5% each).

Figure 1. Demographic Information for Parent Respondent and "Reference Child."

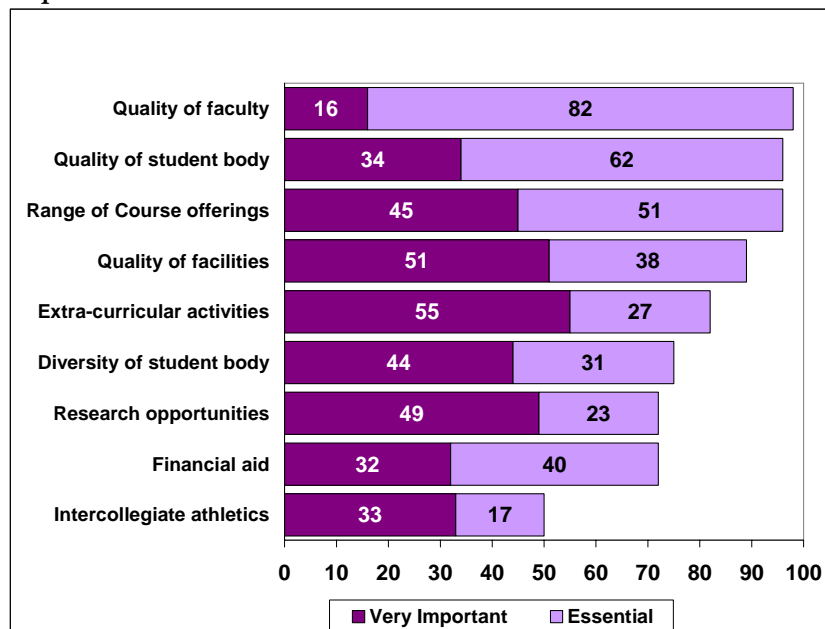


¹ For families with more than one child attending Dartmouth, the parents were instructed to complete the survey in reference to the oldest enrolled child.

B. Importance of Factors Shaping the Dartmouth Experience

Parents were asked to rate the importance of nine factors in shaping the quality of the undergraduate experience at Dartmouth. The four response categories ranged from "Not Important" to "Essential". Figure 2 shows the percentages of parents who indicated that the factor was either "Very Important" or "Essential".

Figure 2. Importance of Factors Shaping the Dartmouth Experience.



Parents considered the most important factor in shaping the Dartmouth experience to be the *Quality of the Faculty*. The *Quality of the Student Body* and *Course Offerings* earned the next highest scores, with 62% and 51% designating these factors as "essential." The *Quality of Facilities* had a slightly lower importance rating (89% of parents selecting either "Very Important" or "Essential"). *Extra-curricular Activities* earned a combined rating by 82% of the parents. The *Diversity of Student Body*, *Research Opportunities*, and *Financial Aid* had ratings of "Very Important" or "Essential" by more than 70% of the parents. *Intercollegiate Athletics* earned the lowest importance rating, with only 50% of the parents considering this factor either "Very Important" or "Essential."

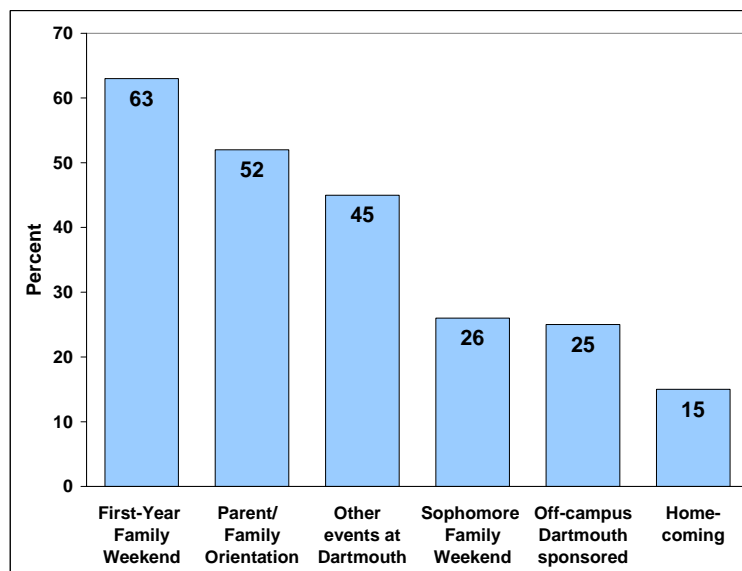
C. Parent Participation at Dartmouth Events and Presentations

Events

Parents were asked "What Dartmouth events have you attended since this child has been in school?". Figure 3 provides the percentages of parents who selected the various events.

Figure 3. Percent of Parents Who Have Attended the Following Events Since Their Child Has Been At Dartmouth

The most popular event attended by parents was the First-Year Family Week-end (63%), followed by the Parent/Family Orientation (52%), and "Other" Events at Dartmouth (45%). Homecoming was the event that the fewest parents attended (15%).

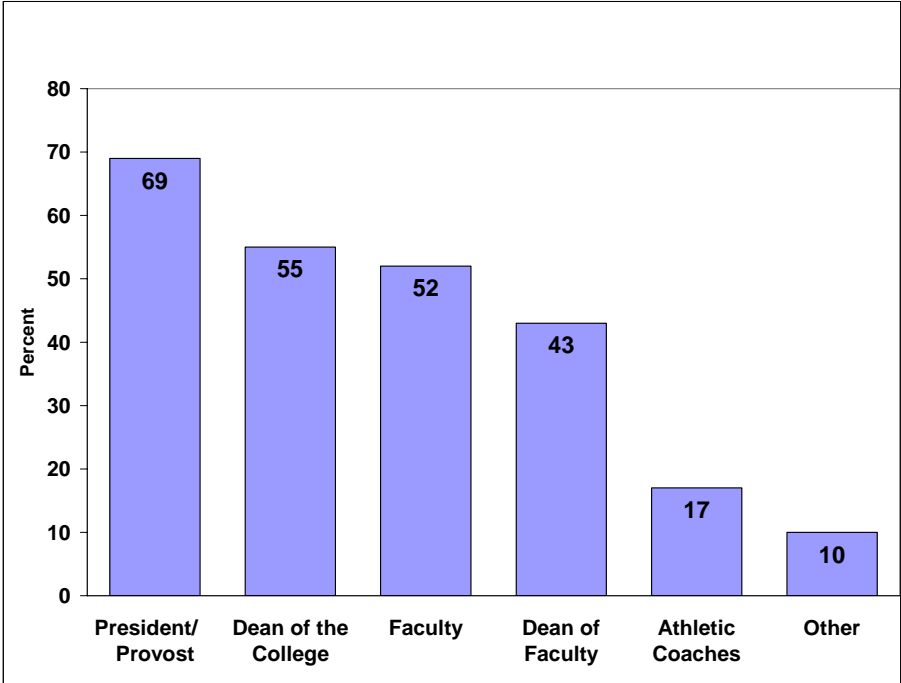


Presentations in Local Area

Parents were asked, "If the following people from Dartmouth were giving presentations in your local area, which presentations would you be most likely to attend?" Each presenter selection is counted separately in the analysis below.

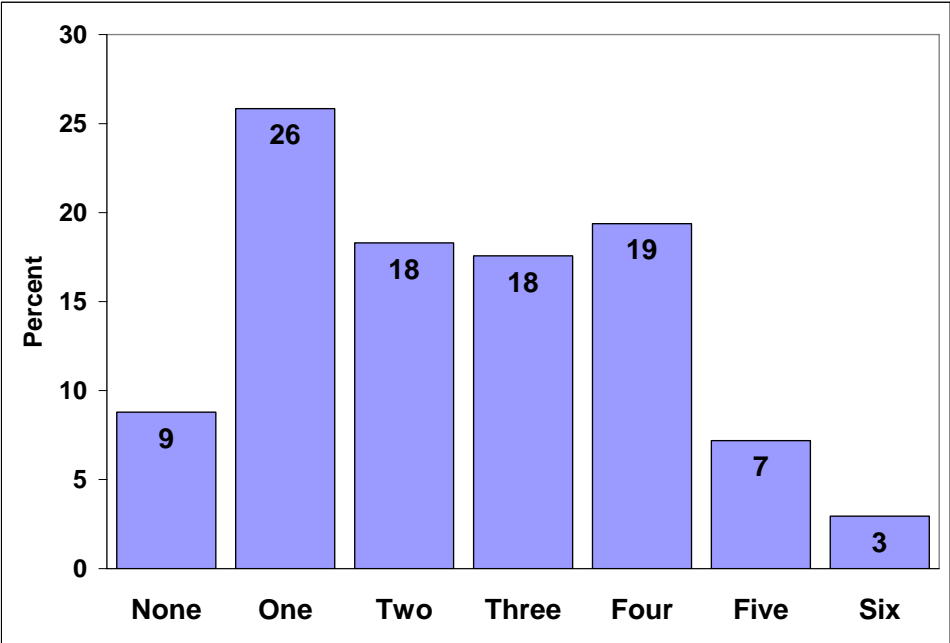
Almost 70% of the parents indicated that they would attend a presentation by the President or Provost. Presentations by staff of the Dean of the College were selected by 55% of the parents. Presentations by Faculty were chosen by 52% of the parents. Forty-three percent of the parents noted that they would attend a presentation by the Dean of the Faculty. Presentations by Athletics staff were selected by 17% of the parents, and presentations by "other" staff were chosen by 10%.

Figure 4. Percent of Parents Who Would Be Interested in Attending a Presentation in their Local Area by the Following People



We summed the number of responses each parent provided to the number of local presentations question to create a measure of the total number of presentations that a parent might attend.

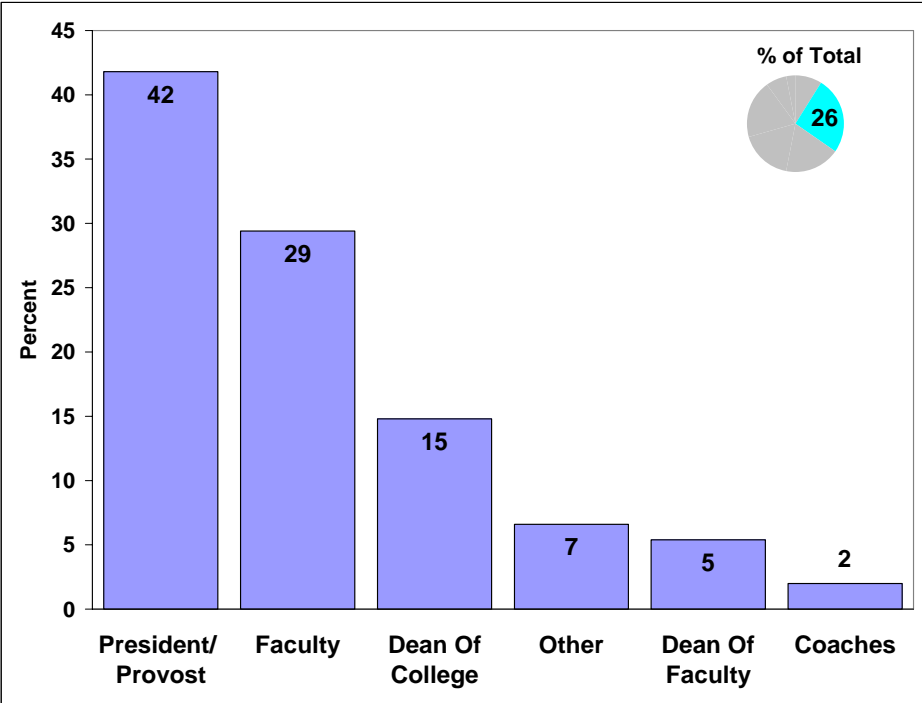
Figure 5. Number of Presentations that Parents are Likely to Attend.



Only 9% of the parents indicated that they would not attend a local presentation by someone from Dartmouth. Many parents would attend one presentation (26%). Most (65%) parents were willing to attend more than one presentation. If the presentations were local, 10% indicated they would attend talks by 5 or more different Dartmouth community members.

Figure 6. People of Interest for Parents Attending One Presentation

For parents who indicated they would attend one presentation (26% of total), a talk by the President or Provost was the most popular selection (42%). Figure 6 provides the detail for different members of the Dartmouth community. Another frequent selection was presentations by faculty (29%). Talks by the Dean of the College staff were selected by 15%.



D. Current and Preferred Ways in Which Parents Get and Receive Information

We had four questions that focused on ways in which parents get and receive information from Dartmouth. The first set of questions sought to identify how parents obtain information about Dartmouth, and who has contacted them from Dartmouth. The next set of questions focused on whether parents were receiving sufficient communication and identified preferred methods for receiving information.

How Parents Obtain Information About Dartmouth College

Parents were asked, "Over the current academic year, how have you obtained information about Dartmouth that has been of value to you?"

Figure 7. Percent of Parents Selecting the Following Methods for Obtaining Information About Dartmouth.

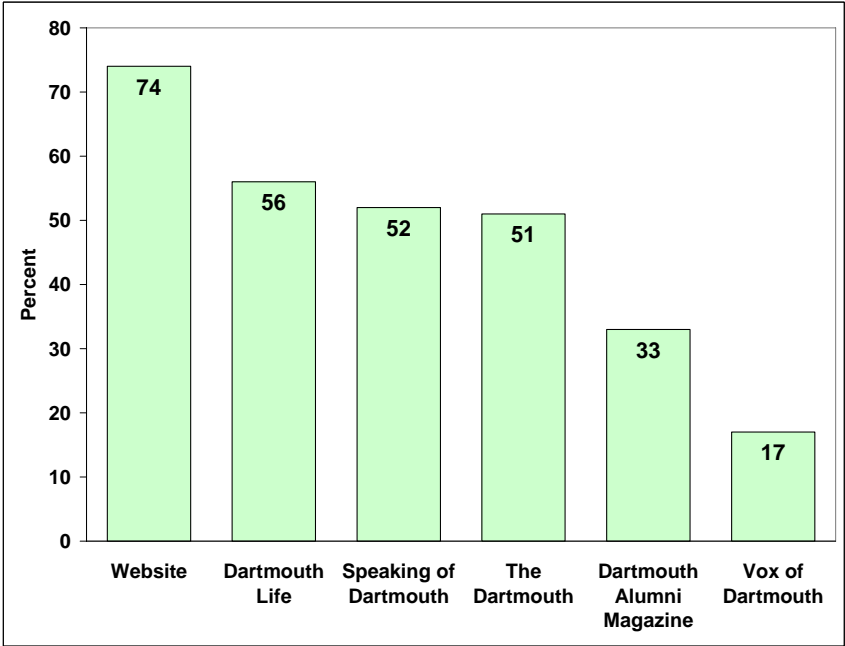


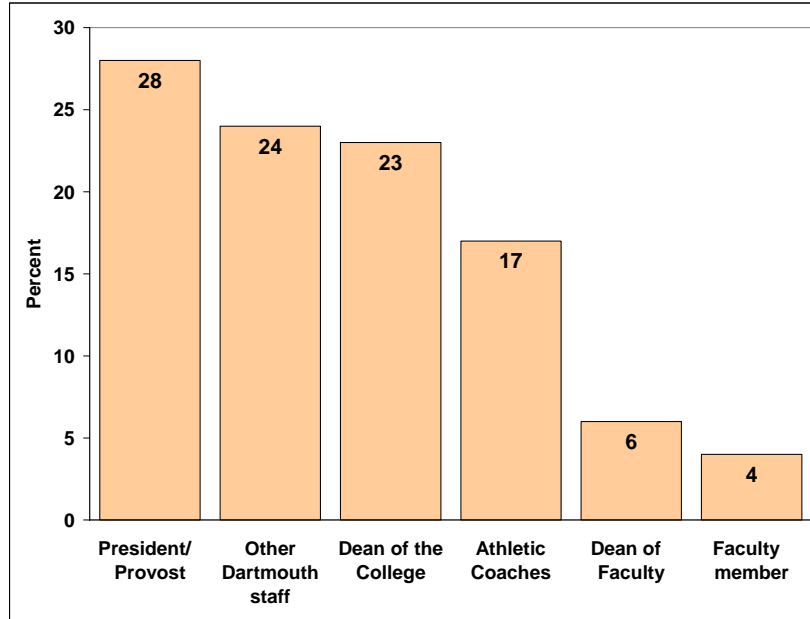
Figure 7 shows the percentages of the parents who selected the various methods of getting information. The most popular method of obtaining information about Dartmouth is through our Website. 74% of the parents used this method to get information. *Dartmouth Life*, *Speaking of Dartmouth*, and *The Dartmouth* were the next most frequently used methods. The *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* and the *Vox* were less frequently used sources of information.

Dartmouth Communication with Parents

Parents were asked "Over the current academic year, who has contacted you from Dartmouth?" Figure 8 provides this information.

Similar percentages of the parents indicated that the President/Provost (28%), Other Dartmouth Staff (24%), or staff from the Dean of the College (23%) had contacted them this academic year. Fewer responses indicated that the Dean of the Faculty (6%) or a Faculty Member (4%) had contacted them.

Figure 8. Percent of Parents Who Have Been Contacted By the Following People from Dartmouth

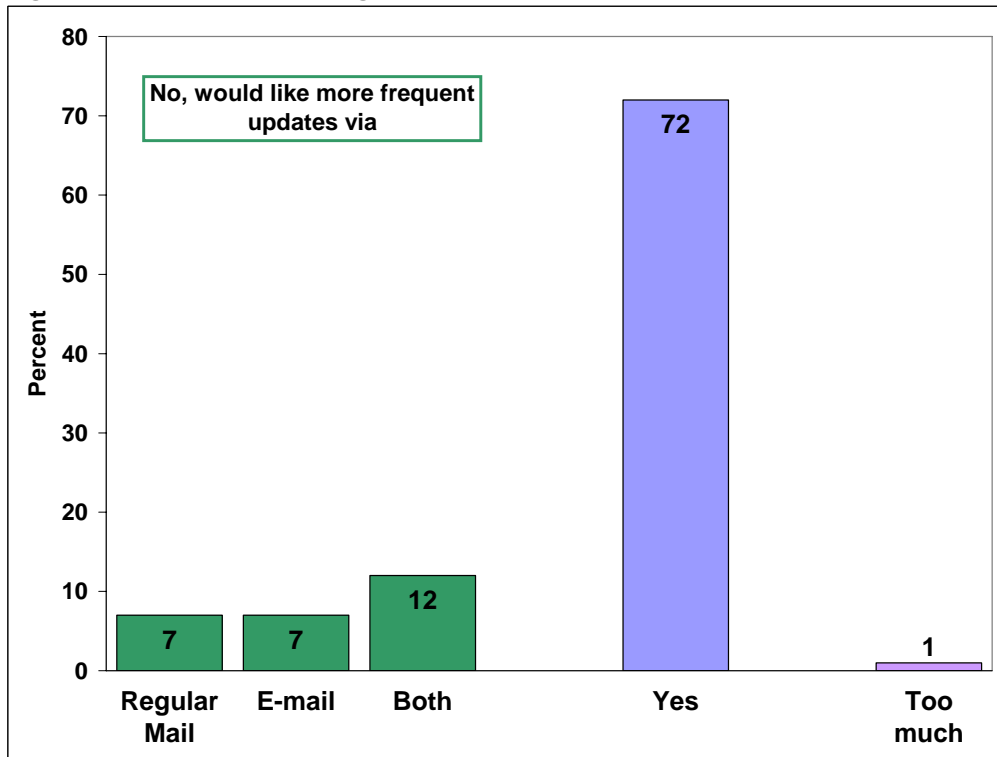


Is Parent Receiving Sufficient Communication from Dartmouth?

Parents were asked, "Do you feel that you are receiving sufficient communications from Dartmouth?" Figure 9 provides the results.

72% of the parents indicated that the level of contact with Dartmouth was sufficient. Only 1% thought the amount of communication was too much. Of the 26% who wanted more frequent updates, the preferred method was using either Regular mail or E-mail (12%). Communication using Regular mail (7%) or e-mail (7%) exclusively was chosen by a few parents.

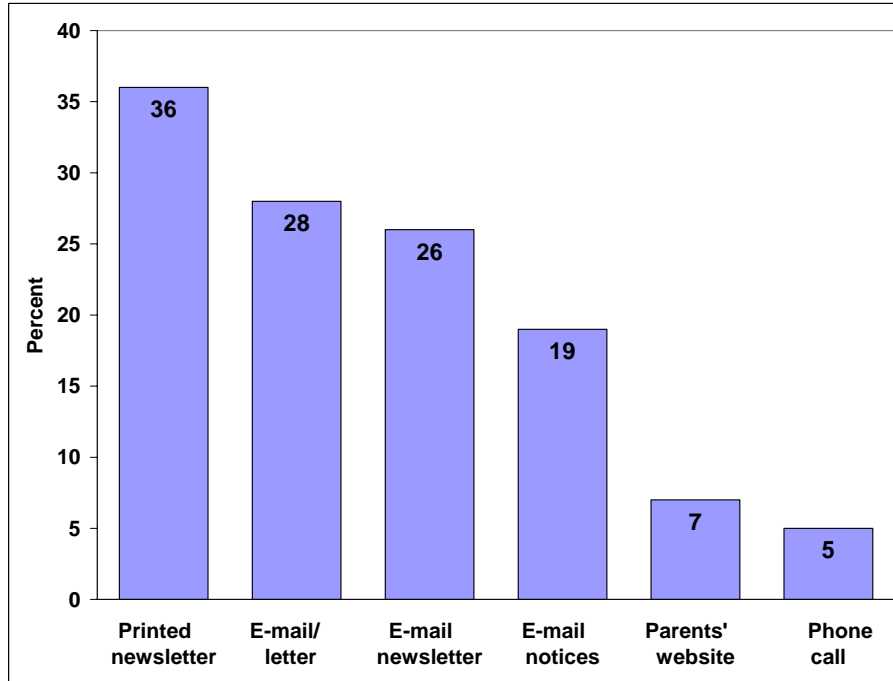
Figure 9. Is Parent Receiving Sufficient Communications from Dartmouth?



Preferred Way to Receive Information from Dartmouth

Parents were asked "What is the best way for you to receive news or information from Dartmouth?"

Figure 10. Percent of Parents Selecting the Following Ways to Receive News/Information from Dartmouth.

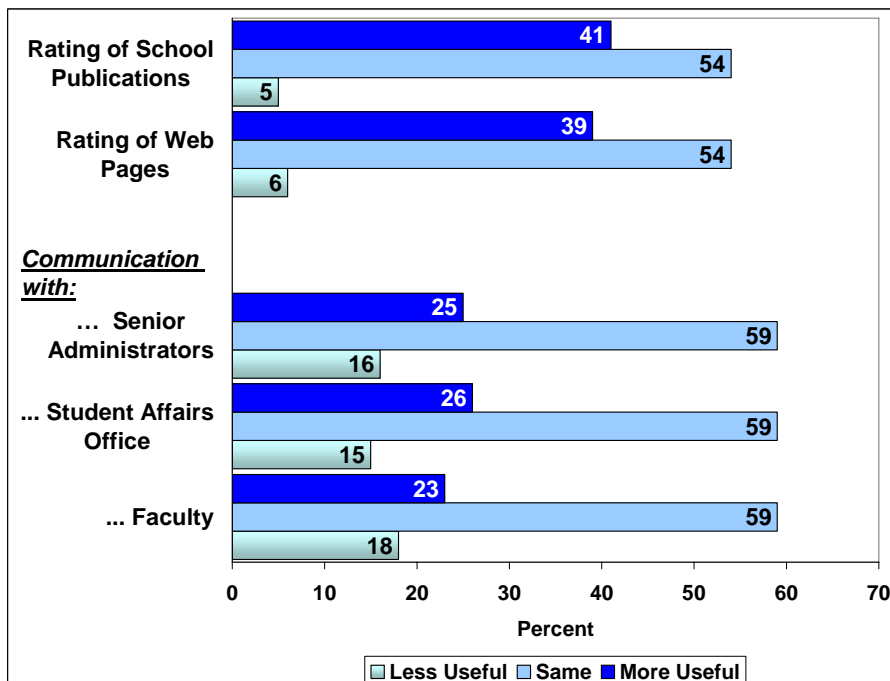


Parents indicated that the most preferred method of receiving news or information from Dartmouth is via printed newsletter (36%). E-mail letters (28%) and e-mail newsletters (26%) were also popular. E-mail notices as a communication method was chosen by 19%, followed by a parents' web-site (7%) and a phone call (5%).

E. Usefulness of Current Communication Methods and Occasions

Parents were asked to compare the usefulness of the Dartmouth web pages and school publications to similar venues used by other Colleges/Universities that their other children were attending. Also, parents compared the relative usefulness of communications occasions with Faculty, the Student Affairs Office and Senior Administrators. Figure 11 provides the detail.

Figure 11. Usefulness Rating of Dartmouth Communication Methods and Occasions Compared to Other Institutions.



Most of the parents rated the usefulness of the *School Publications* as the "Same" as other Colleges/Universities that their children were attending. Over 40% considered *Dartmouth School Publications* "More Useful", and 5% thought they were "Less Useful". A similar trend emerged for the rating of *Dartmouth Web Pages*. A usefulness rating of the "Same" was the most frequent response for communication occasions with *Senior Administrators, Student Affairs Office, and Faculty*. Around 25% noted *Communication* was "More Useful" than similar communications at their other children's schools. Between 15% and 18% of the parents thought that the *Communication* was "Less Useful".

F. Predictors and Discriminators of Factors That Shape the Quality of the Dartmouth Experience

Our measures of "parental engagement" were slightly inter-correlated, suggesting commonalities in the ways parents connect with Dartmouth. Parents who attended more *Dartmouth Events* also *Obtained Information about Dartmouth* in more diverse ways, tended to have more *Contacts* with different members of the Dartmouth community, and were interested in a wider variety of *Local Presentations* by people from Dartmouth. Obtaining *Information* about Dartmouth in numerous ways was linked to having *Contact* with more people from Dartmouth and interest in more *Local Presentations*. Parents who had more *Contact* tended to be interested in more *Local Presentations*.

No substantive *Method of Obtaining Information* differences in the importance ranks resulted. Regardless of the multiplicity or combination of methods, parents included the *Quality of Faculty, Range of Course Offerings, and Quality of the Student Body* in the top three factors that define the Dartmouth experience. This pattern held for the number and type of *Events* attended and *Contacts* with Dartmouth community members. Generally, the analysis for *Local Presentations* was the same. There were some differences in the order of importance for parents interested in presentations by the Dean of Faculty—the *Quality of the Facilities* and *Research Opportunities* trumped the *Quality of the Student Body*. For parents who were interested in *Local Presentations* by Coaches and the President, *Intercollegiate Athletics* were ranked higher than the *Quality of the Student Body* and *Range of Course Offerings*, and the *Quality of the Facilities* trumped the *Range of Course Offerings*.

Parents are very satisfied with their child's undergraduate education. Sixty-three percent responded that they were "Very Satisfied", and another 30% indicated that they were "Generally Satisfied". Only 7% were not at least generally satisfied. Of these parents, 4% noted they were "Ambivalent", 1% "Generally Dissatisfied" and 2% "Very Dissatisfied".