

PARENTAL OPINION SURVEY

FIRST YEAR STUDENTS – Fall, 1998

Background and Study Objectives

The Student Information Flow Team (SIFT) committee was formed to review the undergraduate enrollment process at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. As part of this effort, SIFT asked the Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning to conduct a survey that would identify factors contributing to students' decision to attend Rutgers, evaluate the specific components of enrolling at the university, and provide benchmarks against which future improvements in the enrollment process can be measured.

The target population for the survey consists of the parents or legal guardians of entering first year students. The relatively young age of most entering students - many of these students are 17 and 18 years of age - make it likely that their parents are actively involved in the college selection and enrollment process. Moreover, the availability of basic information about why students select Rutgers from sources such as the Rutgers undergraduate application obviates the need to obtain redundant information and provides an opportunity to seek the opinions of other individuals who are likely to have a significant impact on a student's decision. While the impact of parents and legal guardians in the selection of a college is likely to be quite strong, it is also reasonable to assume that parents would have intimate knowledge about various components of enrollment at the university (e.g., admissions, financial aid, academic advising, registration, and billing). Indeed, the perceptions and experiences of parents provide an important and often overlooked view of the Rutgers enrollment process.

This report summarizes results from the Parental Opinion Survey. The questionnaire (see Section 1 in the Appendix) is designed to provide information about the process of selecting

Rutgers and to obtain feedback from parents on how the enrollment process went for their son or daughter during their initial registration at the university.

The first part of the questionnaire asks parents their perception of the importance of several factors in their child's decision to attend Rutgers. Also asked of parents in this first section is the importance parents themselves place on these factors. The design of the survey allows the linking of these latter responses by parents to those identified by their child on their admissions application.

The next section of the questionnaire asks parents about when the college selection process began for their child and the amount of time and effort the parents personally expended during this process. Information about degree of involvement in this decision by other family and community members was also requested. Awareness and use of various information sources by parents in helping their child decide to enroll at Rutgers complete the college choice segment of the questionnaire.

The second major area addressed by this study is an evaluation of the Rutgers undergraduate enrollment process. Parents are asked about their awareness, understanding, and timing of several aspects of the enrollment process including the procedure for applying, acceptance notification, the welcoming letter by the accepting college, placement testing, student orientation, academic advising, registration for classes, financial aid, and the term bill. Four areas are explored in depth: the admissions process, the financial aid process, academic advising and registration, and the attendance confirmation payment form. As the term bill had been recently revised, an additional set of open-ended questions asks parents to identify specific concerns they may have related to the term bill and to offer suggestions for its improvement.

The survey concludes by asking parents to provide any additional comments they have concerning the enrollment process.

Overview of Research Design

Surveys were mailed to parents of all first year full-time day students with residences within the United States; students whose parents reside outside the country were excluded from the study for various reasons. When more than one student shared the same permanent address, one student was randomly selected from the household and one survey instrument was sent to the parents of the selected student. The other students sharing this address were systematically excluded from any subsequent analysis.

The total initial mailing consisted of 6,171 questionnaires and occurred in October 1998. A postcard was sent approximately two weeks after the initial mailing thanking parents who had already responded and requesting that those that did not already return their questionnaires to do so as soon as possible. A second questionnaire was sent to non-responders approximately three weeks later with a new cover letter requesting the prompt return of their questionnaire. Finally, in January 1999, a reminder letter was sent to all parents who had not yet responded.

Responses from parents are linked to various student databases allowing us to compare parent's perceptions of a student's college choice factors to a similar set of factors students had identified on their undergraduate admissions form. Linking to existing data also allows for the identification of first generation college students and reduces respondent burden by not needing to ask a series of demographic questions. Another important benefit of these links is the ability to compare demographic information of the parents' responding with the characteristics of parents who did not return their questionnaires. Thus, we are able to know how responders differ from non-responders.

Organization of the Report

The organization of the report follows the design of the questionnaire with sections related to college choice preceding detailed evaluation of the enrollment process. Extensive tables in the Appendix give the frequencies and crosstabulations for all questions by background characteristics including gender, educational level, and state residence of parents, along with students' college of attendance, race/ethnicity, gender, and citizenship status. Additional tables in the Appendix also indicate the importance given to specific factors for several topics ranked by the parents or students. The last two sections in the Appendix provide verbatim comments related to the term bill specifically (Section 14) and other enrollment process issues in general (Section 15). The first section of the Appendix also contains a copy of the survey instrument and frequencies of all questions on the Parental Opinion Survey.

Student and Parent Profiles

Profile of Responders

Overall, 2,633 usable surveys were returned by parents of first year full-time day students for a response rate of 43%. See Table 1 below. Many parents gave written comments about the enrollment process as well as their student's experiences at Rutgers University in general.

Returns approached 50% for Mason Gross School of the Arts, Cook College, and the College of Engineering. Return rates are below 40% for Livingston College (37%), Newark College of Arts and Sciences (31%), and the College of Nursing (30%). Crosstabulations of return rates by student's gender for each registration unit are in Section 1 of the Appendix.

TABLE 1: RETURN RATES BY REGISTRATION UNIT

	<i>NUMBER</i>	<i>RETURNS</i>	<i>RETURNS</i>	<i>COMMENTS</i>	<i>COMMENTS</i>
	Mailed	Count	%	Count	%
Livingston College	711	264	37%	102	39%
Douglass College	744	300	40%	116	39%
Mason Gross School of the Arts	140	70	50%	33	47%
Cook College	699	343	49%	140	41%
Rutgers College	2,176	978	45%	365	37%
College of Engineering	533	265	50%	83	31%
Newark College of Arts and Sciences	575	177	31%	55	31%
College of Nursing	37	11	30%	4	36%
College of Pharmacy	185	76	41%	23	30%
Camden College of Arts and Sciences	371	149	40%	58	39%
TOTAL	6,171	2,633	43%	979	37%

Among those indicating their relationship to the student, mothers (60%) are twice as likely to respond as fathers (28%). A few of the remaining 12% of the respondents identify themselves as other family members (sibling, grandparent, etc.) or did not indicate their relationship.

Profiles of students of responding and non-responding parents

Appendix Table 1 (see Section 1) provides a profile of selected student and parent characteristics for responders and non-responders. The percentage of parents responding with a student in each school or college is within one or two percentage points of the overall distribution of the first year population as a whole. Age, gender, and in- or out-of-state permanent residence of responders are quite similar to the entire first year student population included in this study.

Only the areas of students' ethnicity, citizenship, and their parents' education (whether one or both graduated from college or not) show a slightly disproportionate response from parents. Parents of Asian students make up 16% of the returns compared to 22% of the students in the population selected to participate in the study. Parents of white (non-Hispanic) students are over represented contributing 66% of the completed questionnaires, but only representing 54% of the population. The parents of non-citizen permanent residents are slightly underrepresented with only 8% of the returns coming from this group. Students who are permanent residents make up 12% of the first year (1998) population. Families where either the mother or father has a college education are slightly more likely to respond than where the mother or father has not been to college at all.

Why Rutgers University?

The questionnaire began by asking parents about the factors they thought were most important to their students and themselves in the decision to attend Rutgers University. A similar list of college choice factors was evaluated by students when they completed the Undergraduate Admissions form.

Parents' Most Important Factors in Choosing Rutgers

Results indicate that Rutgers' biggest draws, according to responding parents, are its academic reputation, value (cost in relation to benefit), and availability of specific academic programs or courses. Approximately one-third of the ranking points¹ for all factors are allocated by mothers and fathers alike to Rutgers' academic reputation. Value (cost in relation to benefit) and the specific academic program or courses offered by Rutgers University each received 25% of the total points. (See Table 2; Appendix Section 2 provides additional breakouts.)

TABLE 2: IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS' COLLEGE CHOICE FACTORS

	<i>Percent of Possible Points</i>	<i>Weighted Points</i>
Academic Reputation	34%	4,370
Value	25%	3,248
Academic Program or Courses	25%	3,172
Quality of Faculty	8%	980
Quality of Student Life	5%	656
Opportunity to live on Campus	2%	256
Student Diversity	1%	198

¹ Points were allocated by assigning a value of 3 points for first choice, 2 points for second choice, and 1 point for third choice to each parent's response to a request that they rank the top three factors they considered as most important. Scores were summed across respondents and the percentage for each factor was obtained by dividing the points it received by all possible points for all factors.

Parents' Perception of Student's Choice Factors

Parents were asked to indicate how important each of these same college choice factors was to their student. Academic reputation and the programs or courses offered at Rutgers are also top considerations for their child based on "Importance Indicator" scores.² Rutgers' academic reputation and the academic program or courses offered are also top choice factors for students. Value (cost in relation to benefit) seems to have greater salience to the parents themselves than they accord to their children. However, value is in the top three for both parents and children. (Section 3 in the Appendix contains percentage breakouts of these responses for various groups.)

TABLE 3: PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF STUDENT'S CHOICE FACTORS

	<i>Number Answering</i>	<i>% Very or Extremely Important</i>	<i>Importance Indicator</i>
Academic Reputation	2,601	92%	12.0
Academic Program or Courses	2,599	92%	11.5
Value	2,592	85%	5.6
Quality of Student Life	2,591	81%	4.2
Quality of Faculty	2,584	81%	4.1
Opportunity to live on Campus	2,585	65%	1.8
Student Diversity	2,584	41%	Less than 1

² The "Importance Indicator" is calculated by dividing the number who circled "Very or Extremely Important" by the number who circled "Somewhat or Not Very Important." So we can say, looking at Table 3, 12 parents believe their son or daughter considered Rutgers' academic reputation to be very or extremely important in their college choice decision for every one parent who responded that Rutgers' academic reputation was only somewhat or not very important.

Student's Choice Factors from Admissions Form

A slightly different set of college choice factors was offered to students on the Undergraduate Admissions form. They were asked to list the top three. Using the same scoring system used for the factors the parents ranked, overall points and percent of total points for each factor are given in Table 4. Note that although the top rated "Academic Quality/Reputation" is awarded 38% of all possible points (which is actually higher than the parents rating of 34%), the next two college choice factors only receive 14% of the total points. This is because there are eleven factors to be ranked as first, second, or third rather than the seven ranked by the parents.

TABLE 4: STUDENTS' CHOICE FACTORS (Admissions Form)

	<i>Percent of Possible Points</i>	<i>Weighted Points</i>
Academic Quality/Reputation	38%	13,779
Cost	14%	4,970
Availability of Majors	14%	4,958
Location	12%	4,636
Recommendations	8%	2,877
Scholarship Availability	3%	1,099
Employment Opportunities	3%	1,089
Diversity of Student Body	3%	1,086
Campus Visit	3%	1,054
Info from Rutgers University	1%	516
Size of University	1%	375

Factors similar to those ranked in the top three by parents come in second and third for students as well: availability of majors and cost. Location is rated nearly as high (13% of all points) by the students, but was not asked of the parents. Section 4 in the Appendix contains tables ranking the importance of these factors for many subgroups: students whose parents did or did not respond, student gender, citizenship status, choice level of registration unit (enrolled in student's first, second, or third choice preference), New Jersey high school graduate or not, ethnic identification, registration unit, mother's and father's education level, and first generation college students or not. College choice factors remain remarkably stable across subgroups.

The Decision Process

Choosing a College – Timing

Parents report that most students begin their search for a college in their junior year of high school (40%) or later (38%). One in five (21%) begin their search before their junior year. More than half (54%) of the students who are permanent residents (but not citizens) wait until after their junior year to begin their search. One-fourth of the parents of students enrolled at Rutgers College (25%), Douglass College (25%), Cook College (23%), and Camden College of Arts and Sciences (23%) say their children began to look for a college before their junior year. Beginning the search early is a strategy used more by students who enrolled in their first choice college or school. Approximately one in four (23%) start before their junior year compared to 18% of those who enrolled in their third or higher choice at Rutgers. Parental education also influences the timing of the college choice process. Although 35% of the students with one or more parents who have graduated college wait until after their junior year in high school to begin their college search, 42% of the first generation college students wait this long. Students from out-of-state (31%) are less likely to wait until after their junior year compared to students from New Jersey (38%). (See Section 5 in the Appendix for tables documenting these findings.)

Parents' Level of Involvement

Parents who responded to the survey were very active in the student's choice of a college. More than half (57%) of the parents were "Very Involved" in the student's college choice. Another three in ten indicated moderate involvement. (Table 5.)

Parents of African American students (70%) and Puerto Rican students (68%) were "very involved" compared to the parents of Asian (44%) or other Latino students (43%) who indicated

TABLE 5: WHO'S INVOLVED IN THE COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS?

	<i>Number Responding</i>	<i>% Moderately or Very Involved</i>
The student	2,578	97%
Parent responding to survey	2,603	87%
School Counselors	2,439	41%
School Teachers	2,391	32%
Family Members (other than parents and siblings)	2,331	31%
Student's Siblings	2,273	28%
Student's Friends	2,405	27%
Rutgers Alumni	2,320	24%
Parents' Friends	2,354	13%
School Personnel (other than counselors and teachers)	2,250	12%

this level of involvement. The type of involvement, - the amount of time and effort parents personally give - is extensive: 87% of the parents report giving either a moderate amount or a great deal of both time and effort. Out-of-state parents are the most involved. More than half (56%) of parents report spending a great deal of time and 53% indicate expenditure of a great deal of effort in the college selection process. (See Section 6 in the Appendix.)

Student Involvement and Other Influences

Responding parents report that nearly all entering first year students (97%) are moderately or very involved in the college choice decision. (Table 5.) As noted above, parents are quite involved as are the student's friends, family, and high school personnel. High school counselors are most involved with 41% of the parents indicating that counselors are "moderately or very involved." Parents report similar involvement on the part of teachers (32%), siblings (28%), other family members (31%), and friends of the students (27%). One in four (24%) of the parents responding indicate that Rutgers alumni are moderately or very involved. Parents report a smaller role is played by their own friends (13%) and by high school personnel other than teachers or counselors (12%). (See Section 1 in the Appendix for frequencies.)

Parents of New Jersey High School Grads (identified from student records) are more likely to include their own and parents friends, teachers, and counselors in the decision making process than students who did not graduate from New Jersey high schools. Although brothers, sisters, friends of the students, teachers, counselors, and Rutgers alumni all have lower levels of involvement for out-of-state students (based on permanent residence of responding parents), their degree of involvement in the student's decision to attend Rutgers is impressive given the fact that these are out-of-state students. Parents indicate that siblings (16%), the student's other family members (26%), high school counselors (33%), teachers (25%), and Rutgers alumni (17%) are moderately or very involved in the college choice decision of out-of-state students. (See Section 7 in the Appendix.)

As noted above, high school counselors and teachers play an important role in deciding which college the student will attend. Parents indicate that this was particularly true for students enrolled in Livingston College, Camden College of Arts and Sciences, and Newark College of Arts and Sciences where approximately 45% of the student's high school counselors are moderately or very involved in the decision. Teacher involvement at this level is also noticeably higher at Newark College of Arts and Sciences (38%) and at Mason Gross School of the Arts (36%). (See Section 7 in the Appendix.)

First generation college students, those for whom neither parent is a college graduate, make up one-third of the first year full-time day student population. Forty-three percent of parents of first generation students report that Rutgers alumni are involved to some extent in the college decision process. Minority students are more likely to be first generation college students: American Indian or Alaskan Natives (69%), Hispanic Non-Puerto Rican (53%), Puerto Rican (49%), African American Non-Hispanic (41%). (See Section 1, Profile of First Generation Students.) This is true for all incoming first year students and for those whose parents returned completed surveys.

Family, teachers, and counselors are involved in a different pattern for these minority groups than they are for Asian and white non-Hispanic students. Parents of these minority students (other than Asian) report that counselors are moderately or strongly involved in the decision process: 41% for Puerto Rican students, 52% for other Latinos, and 49% for African Americans. Parents of Asian students report only 38% of high school counselors being this involved in the decision process. Approximately one-third of parents of white non-Hispanic student report counselors as being very or moderately involved.

Teacher involvement to this extent in the college choice process is reported as 43% for African American students, 35% for Puerto Rican, and 41% for other Latino students compared to only 28% for Asian and 27% for white non-Hispanic students. Siblings are involved to a greater extent for Puerto Rican (32%), other Latino (29%), and Asian students (30%) compared to African American (22%) or white non-Hispanic students (23%). Students' friends play a larger role

among Latinos other than Puerto Ricans. Parents indicate 31% of these non-Puerto Rican students have friends who are moderately or very involved compared to Puerto Rican students with only 23% having friends involved to this degree. One in four of the parents of Puerto Rican (27%), other Latino (26%), and African American students (25%) indicate that Rutgers alumni are moderately or very involved in the college decision process. Only slightly less involvement on the part of alumni is indicated for white non-Hispanic (21%) and Asian (16%) students. (See Section 7 in the Appendix.)

TABLE 6: PARENTAL INFORMATION SOURCES

	<i>Number Responding</i>	<i>No Access to Information</i>	<i>Number with Access</i>	<i>Had access, but did not use</i>	<i>% Relied on Moderately or Heavily</i>
Admissions Publications or Mailings	2,529	4%	2,439	5%	73%
College Guides	2,509	7%	2,324	19%	54%
University Publications (not from Admissions)	2,470	12%	2,186	22%	42%
Family Members	2,468	14%	2,121	30%	39%
Rutgers Internet Homepage	2,501	27%	1,823	36%	37%
Rutgers Alumni	2,482	24%	1,891	36%	33%
Parents' Contact with High School Counselor	2,480	12%	2,186	35%	32%
Parents' Friends	2,461	16%	2,075	44%	21%
Parents' Contact with High School Teachers	2,456	15%	2,100	49%	21%
Other Media Sources	2,444	14%	2,103	53%	17%
Parents' Contact with Student's Friends	2,462	18%	2,014	50%	16%
Off Campus Rutgers' Recruiter	2,440	44%	1,359	71%	12%

Information Sources and Use

Parents and the students themselves are the most involved in the college selection process. Therefore, it is important to know what information sources they are aware of and which ones they rely on as they consider various colleges. Table 6 shows the information sources used by parents responding to the survey.

According to Parents

Admissions publications and mailings from Rutgers University are the main source of information used by parents during the college decision process. Among those with access, seven in ten parents (73%) rely on these materials either “Moderately” or “Heavily.” Access to the admissions materials is nearly universal (96%) and only one in twenty (5%) have access to the publications and mailings but do not use them in deciding on which college their child should attend. Half (54%) of the parents consult college guides if they have access to these materials; the second most relied upon source of information. University publications (other than those provided by admissions) are also a popular source of information for four out of ten parents (42%). One-fourth (27%) of responding parents indicate they have no access to Rutgers’ Internet Homepage. Among those who have access, one-third of the parents consult the homepage (37%), using it either moderately or heavily; approximately the same number have access but do not use the website (36%).

In addition to the heavy consultation with print and electronic media, parents who have access to such sources, look to family members (39%), high school counselors (32%), Rutgers alumni (33%), their own friends (21%), and high school teachers (21%) for information regarding the decision making process.

Out-of-state parents are more likely to report moderate to heavy reliance on the Rutgers Internet Homepage (33%) compared to parents residing in New Jersey (24%). On the other

hand, parents from other states are less likely to rely to this degree on information from family members (21% compared to 32% for New Jersey parents). (See Section 8 in the Appendix.)

One-third (32%) of the parents of first generation college students have no access to Rutgers Internet Homepage compared to only 22% without access where at least one parent has a college education. Half (50%) of the parents in these more highly educated homes rely moderately or heavily on college guides, while only 44% of the homes of first generation college students do so. (See Section 8 in the Appendix.)

According to Students

Students are asked to list their top three information sources from a list of 15 on the Admissions Application form. Unlike their parents who rely heavily on media as their information sources, students rely on people. Of course, their parents are student's most relied upon source and, as we can see from the parents' responses, the parents do their homework. Table 7 shows the overall ranking of information sources for all first year full-time day students eligible for this study. Each information source is given a 3 for first choice, a 2 for second choice, and a 1 for each time it was listed as the student's third choice. The total points received for each category are listed under the column headed as "Weighted Points." A comparison of student information sources broken out by whether or not a parent returned a survey shows that students whose parents participated in the study rank all 15 information sources in exactly the same order as do all first year students. Furthermore, students whose parents did not respond closely parallel students of responding parents in the information sources they cite. (See Section 8 in the Appendix following the crosstabulations of parents' responses by various demographics.)

As noted above, parents receive the most points (18%) of all the information sources. University students (14%), guidance counselors (12%), and friends (11%) are close behind. Information sources do vary for some particular groups. Although percentage differences are not statistically significant, we can look at which information sources are ranked as the top four for

each group. Students enrolled in Mason Gross School of the Arts include teachers and alumni in their top four at the expense of guidance counselors and friends. Among the few College of Nursing students, alumni are the top sources of information. College guidebooks displace friends for College of Pharmacy students in the ranking of information sources. Admissions representatives are reaching Puerto Rican students as their top source of information and have more impact on African American students than do the student's friends. University students, guidance counselors, and teachers, along with parents, guide Latino students who are not Puerto Rican. (See Section 8 in the Appendix.)

TABLE 7: STUDENT INFORMATION SOURCES (Admissions Form)

	<i>Percent of Possible Points</i>	<i>Weighted Points</i>
Parents	18%	6,413
University Students	14%	5,223
Guidance Counselors	12%	4,475
Friends	11%	3,975
College Guidebooks	8%	2,815
Alumni	7%	2,696
Admissions Representatives	6%	2,262
Teachers	6%	2,142
RU College Brochure	4%	1,549
News Magazines Rankings	4%	1,274
RU Viewbook	3%	1,246
Course Catalogue	3%	1,191
RU Web Site	2%	691
RU Scholar's Brochure	1%	207
Other Internet Sites	Less than 1%	79

Enrollment Steps

Knowledge, Understanding, and Timing

In the questionnaire, parents are asked to evaluate each of the enrollment steps before going into greater detail on a subset of these items. First we ask parents if they know about the activity. Among those saying yes, we ask if their understanding of the process is clear or unclear. Finally, we ask the knowledgeable parents to evaluate the timing of the activity. In the letter sent to parents to elicit their cooperation in the study, we ask for the parent who was most involved in the college selection process to fill out the questionnaire. Therefore, we expect respondents to be fairly familiar with the process.

TABLE 8: PARENTAL VIEW OF THE ENROLLMENT STEPS

	<i>Parent is Aware</i>	<i>Process Is Not Clear</i>	<i>Timing Too Early</i>	<i>Timing Too Late</i>
Application Process	91%	6%	3%	4%
Acceptance Notification	96%	4%	2%	8%
College Welcome Letter	87%	3%	1%	4%
Placement Testing	87%	15%	7%	12%
Student Orientation	92%	9%	5%	7%
Academic Advising	67%	24%	3%	15%
Financial Aid	87%	23%	4%	15%
Registration for Classes	86%	21%	4%	15%
Term Bill	91%	14%	5%	11%

Parental awareness of the listed enrollment steps varies widely. (See Table 8.) Awareness is highest for activities that occur early in the process: acceptance notification (96%), application process (91%), and the welcome letter from the college or school accepting the student (87%). Parents are also highly likely to be aware of student orientation (92%) and the term bill (91%). However, these “knowledgeable” parents are least aware of academic advising with only two-thirds (67%) indicating that they know about this activity. As expected, parents are familiar with financial aid (87%). And, surprisingly, just as familiar with placement testing (87%) and registration for classes (86%).

Even if parents know about the process, they may be unclear about it. Again, parents have the most difficulty with academic advising with 24% saying they are unclear about this process. Financial aid (23%) and class registration (21%) are the next areas of confusion. Many parents indicate a lack of clarity about the term bill (14%) or placement testing (15%) as well.

As to the timing of these activities, most parents say the timing is about right. However, some activities stand out in that parents believe the timing is too early or too late. In general, the consensus is that timing is “too late” rather than “too early.” Academic advising, financial aid, and registration for classes happen too late according to 15% of the parents.

Academic Advising: Knowledge, Understanding, and Timing

Awareness, clarity, and the timing of academic advising vary by the student’s registration unit. As noted above, overall two-thirds of parents are aware of this activity. However, awareness is higher at Camden College of Arts and Sciences (83%), Cook College (81%), and Newark College of Arts and Sciences (79%). Lower awareness of academic advising is found at the Colleges of Engineering and Pharmacy (51%, respectively) and the College of Nursing (56%). This does not necessarily indicate that advising is poor at these latter schools, simply that parents may be less aware of advising in professional schools as the students themselves are more

knowledgeable about this activity and, therefore, express less confusion to their parents. (See Section 9 in the Appendix.)

As to clarity of the academic advising process, only 16% of parents of students enrolled at Camden College of Arts and Sciences, 17% at Newark College of Arts and Sciences, and 14% at Livingston College indicate that academic advising is not clear. There is still room for improvement, but these colleges seem to be informing parents of the advising process. Surprisingly, only 16% of parents of first generation college students believe academic advising is unclear, compared to 27% of parents from homes where at least one parent has a college degree. Many parents of students at Rutgers College (27%) and Mason Gross (24%) are unclear about the advising process. More than a third of the parents of Douglass College students (35%) also believe academic advising is unclear.

Camden College of Arts and Sciences and Livingston College have fewer parents saying the academic advising process comes too late (11% and 12%, respectively) compared to parents with students at Douglass College (24%) and the College of Pharmacy or Newark CAS (17%, respectively).

Financial Aid: Knowledge, Understanding, and Timing

Parents are much more aware of the financial aid process, regardless of the registration unit of the student. However, many parents of students at Douglass College (31%) and the College of Engineering (26%) indicate they are unclear about financial aid. Timing is an issue for parents of students at Douglass College (22%) and Newark College of Arts and Sciences (20%), where one-fifth say that financial aid comes too late. One in five (22%) of parents of students who are not enrolled in their first or second choice school or college at Rutgers University, said that financial aid comes too late compared to only 14% of parents of students enrolled in the student's first choice school or college. (See Section 9 in the Appendix.)

Registration for Classes: Knowledge, Understanding, and Timing

Parents of students at the College of Pharmacy (26%) and Douglass College (20%) are less aware of the class registration process than parents from other schools and colleges. Many parents (29%) of the women enrolled at Douglass and 34% of the parents of students enrolled at Mason Gross School of the Arts are also unclear about registration for classes. Parents of students registered at the following colleges are also concerned that registration is too late: Douglass College (21%), Mason Gross School of the Arts (20%), and 17% at both the College of Pharmacy and Newark College of Arts and Sciences. (See Section 9 in the Appendix.)

Placement Testing: Knowledge, Understanding, and Timing

The responses about placement testing given by parents of various student subgroups/characteristics are quite similar to the overall respondent population. (See Section 9 in the Appendix.)

EVALUATION OF THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS

The Admissions Process

As noted above, publications and mailings provided by the admissions office are the main source of information used by parents during the college decision process. Therefore, it is reassuring that parents are quite satisfied with the quality and the quantity of these materials. Table 9 provides detailed information about the admissions process. The “Satisfaction Indicator” is obtained by dividing the total number of satisfied responses by the total number of dissatisfied responses. This measure tells us that for every one parent who was not satisfied with the quality of the admissions materials, 32 are satisfied.

TABLE 9: THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

	<i>Number Responding</i>	<i>% Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfaction Indicator</i>
Quality of Admissions Materials	2,502	97%	32.4
Ease in Completing Admissions Application	2,492	96%	24.7
Quantity of Admissions Materials	2,487	96%	21.2
OVERALL RATING OF ADMISSIONS PROCESS	2,486	95%	18.6
Timeliness of Admissions Materials Delivery	2,487	94%	14.4
Timeliness of Admissions Decision	2,497	92%	11.7
Quality of Campus Tour (among those who took tour)	1,990	92%	10.8
Helpfulness of Admissions Staff (among those with contact)	2,115	88%	7.2
Accessibility of Admissions Staff (among those with contact)	2,096	84%	5.3

Satisfaction with the admission process is quite high overall with 95% of parents indicating they are satisfied. The quality and quantity of materials and the ease of completing the Admissions Application are the same or slightly above the overall satisfaction level. Since the percent satisfied is quite high for all aspects of the admissions process, the “Satisfaction Indicator” is useful in pointing out areas for improvement. One area is the campus tour. Although no particular school or college has higher levels of dissatisfaction with the tour, the comments

offered by parents at the end of the survey may be illustrative and underscore the relatively low score on the Satisfaction Indicator. (See Section 15 in the Appendix.)

A second area identified in Table 9 for improvement is the admissions staff. Parents having contact with the admissions staff are less likely to be satisfied with either the accessibility or the helpfulness of the staff than with other areas in the admission process. Again, comments in Section 15 in the Appendix speak to this issue. It is interesting to note that there were no differences between New Jersey and out-of-state parents regarding accessibility or helpfulness on the part of the admissions staff. However, one-fourth (25%) of parents with students enrolled in the College of Pharmacy were dissatisfied with access to admissions staff. (See Section 10 in the Appendix.)

The Financial Aid Process

Overall satisfaction with the financial aid process (73%) is considerably lower than satisfaction with the admissions process (95%). The lowest rating of satisfaction with the admissions process is 84%; the highest for the financial aid process is 77%. Best ratings go to the timeliness in the receipt of enrollment decision information and the ease of completing the financial aid application. More than three parents are satisfied for every one parent expressing dissatisfaction in these two areas. (See Table 10.) Areas for improvement include helpfulness and understanding of the two-stage notification process where only two parents are satisfied for every one who is dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with the financial aid process is not different based on the gender of the student or the parent responding, the residence of the parent (New Jersey or out-of-state), student's ethnicity, or first generation college student status. (See Section 11 in the Appendix.) However, three in ten parents of students enrolled in Douglass College (33%) and the College of Pharmacy (30%) expressed overall dissatisfaction with the financial aid process. Common areas of dissatisfaction were the amount of information received after the student was accepted at

Rutgers University and the helpfulness and understanding of the two-stage notification process. In addition, parents of Douglass College students were dissatisfied with the timeliness of the information in getting started at Rutgers University and the quality of the financial aid information.

TABLE 10: FINANCIAL AID

	<i>Number Rating Satisfaction</i>	<i>% Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfaction Indicator</i>
Timeliness – Deciding to enroll	1,661	77%	3.3
Ease of completing the Financial Aid Application	1,696	77%	3.3
Amount of information when Rutgers accepted the student	1,733	75%	2.9
Helpfulness of Financial Aid staff	1,513	74%	2.9
Timeliness of Information in getting started at Rutgers	1,681	74%	2.9
Quality of Financial Aid information	1,699	74%	2.8
Amount of Information after student accepted Rutgers	1,706	73%	2.7
OVERALL RATING OF THE FINANCIAL AID PROCESS	1,727	73%	2.7
Accessibility of Financial Aid staff	1,522	72%	2.6
Helpfulness of Two-Stage notification	1,615	68%	2.2
Understanding of Two-Stage notification	1,655	68%	2.1

Academic Advising

Academic advising, like financial aid, is problematic for parents of first year students. Among the parents expressing an opinion, less than three-fourths (72%) indicate their overall satisfaction with academic advising. (See Table 11.) Dissatisfaction is not aimed at any particular area; helpfulness and accessibility of academic advisors and the quality of academic advising (as it relates to course selection) all receive satisfaction ratings of less than 75%. Since the overall rating is lower than any of the other items measuring satisfaction with academic advising, there are most likely areas of dissatisfaction unmeasured by this survey instrument. Section 15 in the Appendix contains parents' comments about the problems relating to academic advising which shed light on this issue.

TABLE 11: ACADEMIC ADVISING

	<i>Number Rating Satisfaction</i>	<i>% Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfaction Indicator</i>
Helpfulness of Academic Advisors	2,017	74%	2.8
Accessibility of Academic Advisors	1,949	73%	2.7
Quality of Academic Advising – Course Selection	2,091	73%	2.7
OVERALL RATING OF ACADEMIC ADVISING	2,052	72%	2.6

In general, academic advising is a black box for many parents. Unlike most questions where non-response is limited to a few percentage points, approximately 20% of the parents gave a “Not Applicable” response to the four academic advising questions indicating that they “did not have information” about these items. Two groups in particular had high levels of not applicable

responses on academic advising questions: parents of Asian students (30%) and parents of students who are not U.S. citizens. More than one-fourth (27%) of parents of students who are not citizens but are permanent residents and 44% of parents with students here on temporary visas did not evaluate the academic advising questions.

Wide variation in the not applicable response to academic advising questions is found for parents based on the registration unit of their child as well:

34%	College of Engineering
28%	College of Pharmacy
25%	Rutgers College
22%	Douglass College
20%	Mason Gross School of the Arts
19%	Livingston College
19%	Newark College of Arts and Sciences
12%	Cook College
10%	Camden College of Arts and Sciences

Registration for Classes

Registration for classes gets slightly higher marks than academic advising or the financial aid process. Overall, among parents evaluating the registration process, 80% expressed satisfaction. (See Table 12.) However, only 74% of these parents are satisfied with the times classes are offered, which thus limits their availability. Five parents are satisfied for every one dissatisfied when it comes to the number of course sections offered. With the exception of parents of Nursing students, there are no differences in satisfaction with the various aspects of registration by any of the demographic groups examined. (See Section 12 in the Appendix.) As was the case with academic advising, many parents (16 to 23%) felt they did not have sufficient information to evaluate the registration process either.

TABLE 12: REGISTRATION FOR CLASSES

	<i>Number Rating Satisfaction</i>	<i>% Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfaction Indicator</i>
Number of Course Sections Offered	2,120	84%	5.2
Schedule of Courses – Overall for Semester	2,184	82%	4.6
OVERALL RATING OF REGISTRATION PROCESS	2,242	80%	4.1
Availability of Course Sections – Times Offered	2,103	74%	2.8

The Term Bill and Attendance Confirmation and Payment Form

The final section in the Parental Opinion Survey examines the Term Bill and Attendance Confirmation and Payment Form. Agreement is high that the steps to finalize registration are clear (91%) and the number of payment options offered by Rutgers University is adequate (89%). (See Table 13.) The overall rating of the term bill process is high (90%), although there probably is some confusion resulting from the mislabeling of the response options. These options were labeled as level of “agreement” rather than “satisfaction.” However, most parents did respond to the question. The most confusion about the term bill process surrounds the Hope Scholarship Booklet. Among the approximately 1,500 parents responding to this question, nearly one in three (28%) do not believe it is helpful. A series of open-ended questions elicited comments from parents concerning areas on the term bill that could be improved. The parents’ verbatim comments can be found in Section 14 of the Appendix.

Crosstabulations of responses about the term bill with various demographic characteristics did not show any differences among these groups. The term bill is as clear and payment options as adequate for parents responding to the survey regardless of gender, first generation student status, student's ethnic group, or the student's registration unit. (See Section 13 in the Appendix.)

TABLE 13: THE TERM BILL

	<i>Number Rating Agreement</i>	<i>% Agree</i>	<i>Agreement Indicator</i>
Steps to Finalize Registration Clear	2,383	91%	9.5
Number of Payment Options Offered by RU Adequate	2,288	89%	8.0
OVERALL RATING OF TERM BILL PROCESS – Mislabeled Agreement not Satisfaction	2,413	90%	8.6
Instructions on Term Bill Clear	2,469	86%	7.0
Information of Term Bill Adequate	2,451	83%	5.0
Satisfied with Office's Response about Term Bill	1,852	83%	4.7
Hope Scholarship Booklet Helpful	1,448	72%	2.5

General Comments from Parents

Parents provide a wide range of comments, not completely restricting their comments to the enrollment process. Table 14 (pages 30-32) gives percentages of positive and negative comments. The total percentage of comments is greater than 100% as many parents comment on more than one aspect of their experience with Rutgers University. Fifty-five percent of the comments made by 974 parents are positive about Rutgers and the enrollment process. Twice as many (111%) suggest areas for improvement. This is not unexpected as those parents who feel strongly, either positively or negatively, are the most likely to write extensive comments.

Most positive comments are general (38%). One in four write along the lines of Rutgers is "great" or the enrollment process is fine. Staff services are commented upon favorably by seven percent of the parents and four percent say something positive about their son's or daughter's particular school or college. General positive comments are given about parental involvement (1%) and campus conditions (1%) as well. Admissions (7%), financial services (3%), orientation (3%), course scheduling (2%), academic advising (1%), and housing (1%) also receive positive comments from these parents of first year students.

Parents are much more specific in their negative comments. Among those parents who offer comments, one-third (33%) have problems with financial services. Course scheduling (19%) and academic advising (16%) are also areas of dissatisfaction. A series of comments which are generally negative (13%) are directed at (the lack of) parental involvement, staff services, Rutgers University, the enrollment process, campus conditions, or the student's registration unit. Seven percent of the parents who comment have negative comments about admissions, orientation, or housing. Others express dissatisfaction with placement testing (5%) or dining services (3%).

Praise for Rutgers

Positive comments are most likely to be general ones with one in four (24%) related to praise for Rutgers University or the enrollment process. Selected comments follow. All verbatim comments are in Section 15 in the Appendix. Each parent's comment is printed separately sorted by the student's registration unit. Praise is also given to admissions (7%), financial services (3%), orientation (3%), course scheduling (2%), academic advising (1%), and housing (1%).

"More positive information about Rutgers needs to be disseminated. At first, my daughter really didn't want to attend Rutgers and after one month, she tells everybody that it's the best place for her. Even her guidance counselor told her she wasn't going to do well because it a 'party school' and she was going to get distracted. We're very happy so far."

"We continue to be impressed by the professionalism of Rutgers. We had visited many private and Ivy colleges and regard Rutgers on their level in all our dealership so far. More press is still needed to enlighten our students as their privilege of being accepted into Rutgers as opposed to out of state colleges."

"Over the course of eleven years – 3 children in the Rutgers engineering course. Rutgers has improved in providing information. We believe you're doing a good job of informing students and parents during the enrollment process."

"We are proud of our Rutgers tradition and I have seen the University grow and prosper in always a positive manner. After having 3 other children at 3 other universities, the whole application-acceptance- registration-move in process for my freshman son was the smoothest I've ever experienced."

"I liked information and advice on computer (and mailed) regarding parent/student issues while in college for first year."

Areas for Improvement

Areas for improvement (not limited to the enrollment process) include: financial services (33%), course scheduling (19%), academic advising (16%), admissions (8%), orientation (7%), housing (7%), placement testing (5%), and dining services (3%). Sometimes it's just the whole process that is overwhelming. One parent summarizes a number of frustrations:

"We applied to 7 different schools. The process was a nightmare – too much paper work, essays, applications, financial aid, fasfa, catalogs, etc. We spent a great deal of time and effort in getting my son into a good college. I am tired! The rest is up to my son. I pay for college. You send too much mail – leave me alone! I forgot to send in the spring semester term bill. I put it off – way. I'm busy working to pay for college, and don't have the time. Perhaps you should send a simple outline or timeline stating what you want, when you want it. Between aid, financial aid loans, knight express, pta, fasfa, I am killed with paper work."

As noted above, financial services was the most frequently noted area of concern. The following comments illustrate areas where parents suggest improvement should be made.

"I feel that whoever works in the financial aid office loses paperwork. After sending in all pertinent papers (and keeping copies) requests were made for papers they already have – this also held up payment for one of my children."

"Financial aid is a nightmare. For people that work, such as myself, I can not spend all day on the phone waiting for it to ring. Then you're transferred all over the place. My experience with the financial aid was horrible for both my children."

"The student financial center needs to have a more positive attitude towards the parents. The phone line is always busy and the staff is rude."

"New parents are not familiar with the different types of loans. Your staff is very familiar with them (the names) but not much time was spent on them."

Timeliness and lack of efficiency could be improved in the areas of admissions, registration, and course scheduling. Parents are concerned student's time at Rutgers will be extended as a result of these early difficulties. Problems with academic advising are another common thread through the parents' comments. Parents' comments follow.

"There were several forms we had completed and returned immediately and then were notified that Rutgers had not received them. The paperwork had to be done again. Are you dealing with such a volume that paperwork is lost in the system? The course selection process on orientation day was frustrating and with one counselor to help many students, it took too much time for the amount of help that was given."

"(Student) received his schedule in the mail. It did not reflect his AP and college credit. He was told that the college would fix this for him and send him another schedule later in the summer. Later in the summer when he didn't get the schedule he worried and called up there. He was then told that the new schedule would be in his mailbox when he got there. This was not true either. He was told it would be in his mailbox before classes started. It wasn't until classes started and the new schedule hadn't arrived that he found out that he had to reschedule his classes himself on a phone system that was perpetually busy. This was very upsetting for him and for us and led to a lot of unnecessary stress. This was a very poor first impression!"

"Freshmen are unable to get the classes they need to get a good start in the first semester. It is really important for freshmen to get off on the right foot to insure they will want to continue. This process is just too difficult. Also, not enough info was sent out regarding dining choices, night express, telephone service, how to change your schedule. Telephone calls to different departments helped to fill these gaps, but parents want this info in writing before sending their student off to school."

"Placement test results came in after scheduling of classes. After testing out of a level it was difficult to find an available class to fill the now exempt class. My daughter was placed into a new course, but this class was also in the level she tested out of. Adjustments had to be made with the department head. Placement test results should be available before class scheduling."

"It would be nice if first term freshmen are allowed to register courses on their own based on published guidelines. First term freshmen should be allowed the freedom of setting their courses and schedules on their own. There must be a better way of registering courses other than using the telephone. My daughter had to spend a whole day on the telephone trying in vain to register for next term. This is a lot of frustration and a waste of time. We did the same thing 35 years ago and the whole process was a lot easier. We attended City College of NY, NYU, Polytechnic Brooklyn, and Columbia University."

"My daughter signed up for 5 classes as a first semester freshman. When she received her schedule only 2 of the original 5 were on it and only 2 unchosen classes were added. She then had only 12 credits. Not wanting to take on the problem of trying to add/drop as a beginner – only 12 credits are being taken."

"Incredibly difficult registration process for the second semester. Very limited opportunities for him to realize getting into preferred subjects. Unfavorable schedules result in very inconvenient transport to out of campus subjects students are forced to take."

"My son could not get some basic courses he wanted. I was told it would not be a problem, BUT IT WAS! For his second term he was advised to take only 4 courses. It appears Rutgers needs fewer students or more classes. The school almost encourages a 5 year completion schedule. Overall I am satisfied, except for the available courses and that one very rude and bold financial aid officer."

"I am most dissatisfied with the course registration process because my daughter tells me that at least once each semester, she is closed out of a course she needs to take, even though she signs up as promptly as possible. Also, the counseling process is obviously deficient. Rutgers has gained a reputation among the students as a school from which it is impossible to graduate in 4 years, because either one was advised poorly as to courses to take or one could not get into the classes one needed in a timely fashion. What can be done to correct this?"

"There was and is confusion with advisement. A freshman needs to be given attention and advice and direction. Very difficult to get hold of his original advisor. As a result he went to someone else available and that person was more helpful and aware of the lost feelings a new student has. As a result the 2nd semester is clear."

"I was dissatisfied with academic advisement during the freshman orientation phase. I didn't feel the advisor was knowledgeable about course curriculum, electives, assisting students in selecting courses which would correspond to their major."

"I need to know more of the outcome of academic advisement and the efforts to channel student towards his/her talented course of study based on the placement tests and performance in the current semester."

"Course selection and academic advisor: I would have appreciated having some input in this process, but I wasn't aware that I could have had. Also, from the perspective of my child having undergone second semester course selection – many courses not available."

"Weakest link is academic advising!!! Parents should get some info on this process prior to orientation so can help student if requested. Student and parent really felt like a grain of sand on the beach during this process."

"When my daughter first attempted to meet with her advisor, the advisor was not available as scheduled. She registered for courses without meeting with her advisor. A freshman should not be allowed to register without being advised by someone in his or her major. In selecting courses on individual choice, a student may avoid or delay certain university or major requirements, which is my concern about the courses that my daughter has selected."

“The quality of my son’s academic advisor leaves a lot to be desired. This person opened up the course catalog and told my son to pick ‘anything that looked interesting.’ Had no input, nor any interest in helping my son take courses that would help his major. If it wasn’t for the help of (name), we would have been ‘flying by the seat of our pants’!! Perhaps all academic advisors need to be ‘coached’ on what courses are available to incoming freshmen and make recommendations based on majors.”

“The registration is mayhem! No one could give us a straight and definite response regarding orientation and scheduling – my daughter got a schedule she does not want. Her academic advisor could not give her time to properly direct her as to the appropriateness of her subjects. She is taking a course right now which she does not need because no one wants to help out. This is a mistake made by the university and she ends up paying!”

“My major disappointment is with how students sign up for first semester classes. Although this is our 3rd child to attend college we felt totally confused by the process. My daughter was told to circle interesting sounding classes. She did not get a clear understanding of degree and college requirements. Getting her classes so late made us all very anxious. We could not review the selections adequately or make changes. I believe getting their schedule to incoming freshmen earlier and then allowing them to use the phone for change over the summer would be a much better method.”

“I admit my daughter was not adequately prepared for registration despite my encouragement to read catalogues. However, I did not feel (based on what she reported to me) that the advisor was helpful in explaining requirements or with advice or knowledge of courses offered.”

“The only problem my student has had at the university was when she was enrolling the first time for classes and the advisor told her she couldn’t take any art classes because it was her first semester. She later found this to be untrue, but it was too late to enroll because all the art classes were full.”

“In meeting with guidance my son seemed somewhat discouraged in pursuing his goal. They should be more optimistic and supportive of freshmen so early on in the year.”

Summary and Conclusions

There is strong agreement on the factors both parents and students take into account as they consider colleges: academic reputation of the university, availability of specific programs or course offerings, and value or cost. Location is a strong factor as well. Many begin the process before the student’s junior year in high school, especially if considering schools in states other than where their parents live. Students are most involved in the process with strong support from parents. Parents rely somewhat on their family but more on media (admissions materials, other university publications, and college guides) while students rely on people (parents, university

students, guidance counselors, and friends) as primary sources of information about colleges. High school teachers and counselors play an important role in the college choice selection, especially for minority students, as do Rutgers alumni.

Parental awareness of the listed enrollment steps varies widely. Awareness is highest for activities that occur early in the process: acceptance notification, application process, and the welcome letter from the college or school accepting the student. Parents are also highly likely to be aware of student orientation and the term bill. However, these “knowledgeable” parents are least aware of academic advising with only two-thirds (67%) indicating that they know about this activity. As expected, parents say they are familiar with financial aid and, surprisingly, just as familiar with placement testing and registration for classes.

Satisfaction is highest among parents of first year students regarding the admissions process and the term bill, with class registration coming in third. However, only 74% of these parents are satisfied with the times classes are offered, thus limiting their availability. Other parents are not satisfied with the number of course sections offered. The areas of financial aid and academic advising are both unclear and problematic according to many of these parents who say they are familiar with the process. Parents having contact with the admissions staff are less likely to be satisfied with either the accessibility or the helpfulness of the staff than with other areas in the admission process. The most confusion about the term bill process surrounds the Hope Scholarship Booklet. Among the approximately 1,500 parents responding to this question, nearly one in three (28%) do not believe it is helpful. Improvement in these areas, along with specific areas commented upon by parents such as campus tours, will improve the enrollment process experience for future first year students.