

Parent Involvement in the College Recruiting Process: To What Extent?

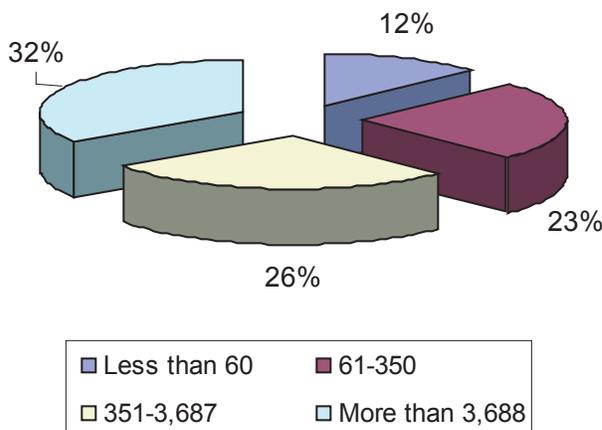
By Phil Gardner

Parents' increasing involvement in their children's transition from college to work has grabbed the attention of the media. In the January 2006 issue of *Fast Company*, a lead article introduced today's parents through several anecdotal stories as they actively, persistently, and at times fiercely advocated for their son or daughter in the workplace. In November a CNN on-line article followed a mother as she reconnoitered her son's career fair on his behalf. Every time I talk with employer groups, I hear similar stories about the pervasive presence of parents in the recruiting process. At the same time, numerous employers questioned the presence of parents in the workplace as they have not experienced this phenomenon with previous generations.

What you will learn!

- Large employers with regional and national brand recognition frequently encounter parents during the recruiting process.
- Companies recruiting to fill business positions are more likely to encounter parents than those filling engineering, scientific and computer positions.
- Parents are most often seen collecting information about the company, submitting resumes on behalf of their son or daughter, and promoting their student to company officials.
- Surprisingly, parents are assisting their sons or daughters in completing work assignment to make deadlines and improve quality.

Percent of Companies Who Witnessed Parent Involvement by Employee Size



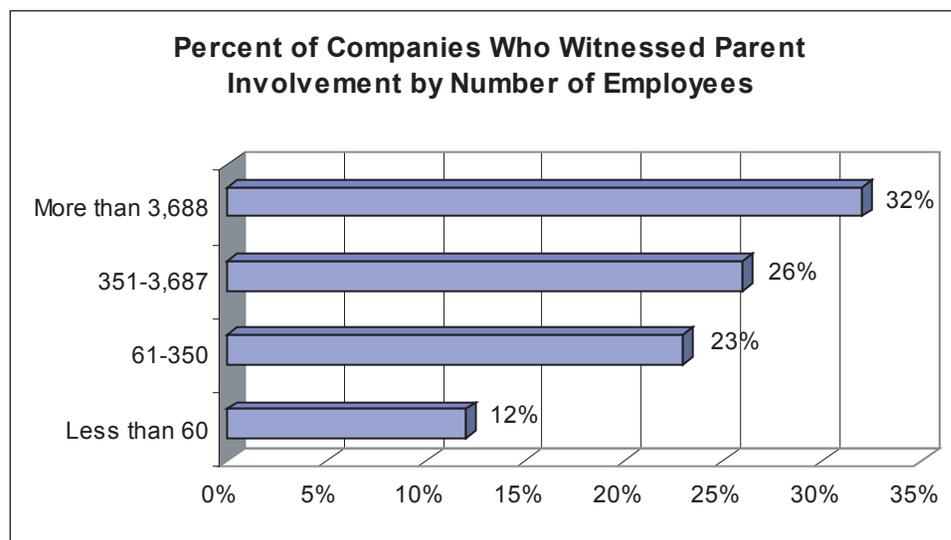
In an effort to move away from anecdotal stories, we probed employers who responded to Michigan State University's 2006-2007 recruiting survey about the extent of parental involvement and the activities parents are likely to engage in. This brief provides information provided by 725 employers on these topics.

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Level of Involvement

Using a five point scale from “not at all” (1) to “very often” (5), employers indicated how frequently they observed parental involvement in the recruiting process and early career stages of college students. Forty-five percent selected the “not at all” option; combined with the “once in awhile” response, approximately 77% of these employers hardly ever witnessed a parent while hiring a college senior. The remaining 23% reported seeing parents “sometimes” to “very often.”

When the responses were examined by company size, a significant difference emerged. Only 12% of companies with fewer than 60 employees reported parental involvement; however, that figure nearly triples for companies that have over 3,700 employees, where 32% reported interacting with parents. Companies that fell between these two size cohorts reported roughly 23% with heavy parental contact.



Employers who recruited heavily on college campuses (on-campus interviewing and attending job fairs, for example) witnessed more parental involvement than companies not regularly present on-campus. Companies attending or hosting campus events tend to possess regional or national brand recognition and are believed to be more prestigious by students and their parents. Because campus events are often open to the public, parents can easily gain access to visiting companies. Parents who desire positive, prestigious outcomes and have been involved from an early age on behalf of their child’s welfare are more likely to be involved in job search activities. As one employer remarked, “If parents can come to campus for a football game, there is no reason they shouldn’t come to the career fair or our information night.”

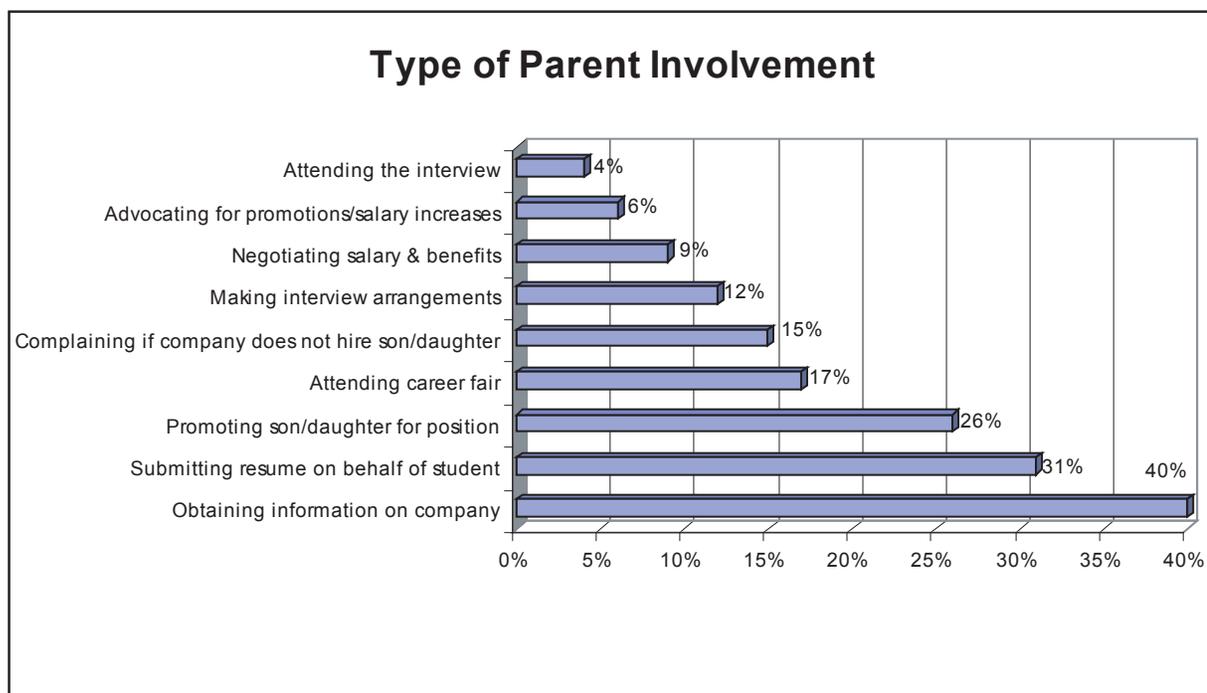
Companies with strong co-op and internship programs reported more interactions with parents. They attributed this to the fact that their programs provide orientation sessions for parents on housing and assignments, especially if the student will be living away from home.

Employers recruiting internationally and in the Northeast and Northwest reported higher incidents of engaging parents during the recruiting process. Parents were less likely to be involved in the Southeast and in the states adjacent to the Great Lakes.

Generally, employers looking to fill positions that require a business background (specifically marketing, finance, hospitality, human resources, ecommerce, business services and sales) saw higher levels of parent involvement. Those seeking to fill engineering, computer and design media, research, scientific, and consulting management positions reported the least involvement from parents.

Just What Do They Do?

The types of activities that parents can undertake on behalf of their son or daughter can range from collecting information about the company to being involved in contract negotiations. A list of nine possible activities, gleaned from media stories and discussions with employers, was presented to the respondents. The survey asked them to check only those activities they have personally witnessed. As shown below, parents obtaining information on the company was reported by 40% of the respondents. The least likely involvement recorded was attending interviews and advocating for promotions and salary increases. Not surprisingly, however, this group often yielded the most interesting anecdotes for media stories.



Several employers could not resist adding comments on their experiences with involved parents. One employer had advice for parents submitting resumes, "Please tell your student that you have submitted a resume to a company. We have called a student from our resume pool only to find they did not know anything about our company and were not interested in a position with us." Another talked of a lengthy discussion with a mother on why the company could not arrange a special interview for her son who could not make the scheduled on-campus interview. Employers acknowledged that they were more likely to see mothers collecting company information and making arrangements for interviews, company visits, and other contacts with the company. Fathers usually appeared during negotiations, when the hiring decision did not favor their student, or when their son or daughter was being disciplined by the supervisor.

What Did We Miss?

Our list may not have been complete so we asked respondents to add any activities that might have been overlooked. Two types of involvement were mentioned that grabbed our attention:

- **Helping their son or daughter complete work assignments so that deadlines are not missed; or reviewing work and making improvements in its quality**
- **When being reprimanded or disciplined (see Brief 1-07), the employee refused to meet with or respond to the supervisor before talking with his or her parents.**

Working with Parents

In a concluding question, employers were asked how they might be accommodating parents as they become more involved in their son's or daughter's job search. Many responded that they take parental presence in the job search as a negative and would like to see less parental "interference." However, two possible areas were mentioned in which employers may expand efforts to engage parents.

1. **Internships and co-ops:** Many employers who have these programs will provide parents with more information about their child's future experiences with the company. Employers indicated that they already share information on housing, community safety, and general overview of the business. In the future they will include information on company business prospects, salary and benefits, locations of company offices, plants, and auxiliary facilities. They would like the parents to be knowledgeable and comfortable with the company.
2. **Competing Offers:** As companies find themselves in situations where a preferred candidate may have multiple job offers, the parent's knowledge of the company will influence which offer their young adult will pick. Companies that do not convey information to parents find that they are losing candidates.

About Us:

Established in 1985 by an act of the Michigan legislature, the Institute was charged with collecting and analyzing information on the initial employment (upon graduation) for the college educated workforce from all four-year institutions within the state. The Institute's charge rose from concerns of a "brain drain" during and following the economic recession of the early 1980's. Until the legislature rolled the Institute's funding into the University's overall budget in 1990, the destination of graduating seniors was the primary research focus. Without the legislative mandate, statewide reporting collapsed as several institutions no longer felt compelled to provide their information.

In line with this work on graduate destinations, research was started on: the socialization experience of new college graduates in the workplace; learning strategies used to enhance workplace performance; impact of co-op and internships on transition outcomes; and recruiter practices, such as use of resumes and behavioral interviewing. A major project which has stimulated discussions and program initiatives is on the acquisition/development of complementary skills and competencies that are required in the work, in addition to disciplinary mastery. This work has evolved into examination of co-curricular activities that support social learning/community of practice.

The research readily identifiable with the Institute is "Recruiting Trends." Michigan State University, for 30 years, conducts an annual survey of national employers seeking their intentions for hiring new college graduates. In the mid 1990's the Institute was asked to coordinate a segment of the University's assessment program, focused on outcome measures. The University's senior exit survey was redesigned to capture program and service assessments for colleges and units. This continues to be a key initiative for the University. The Institute continues to provide leadership in the support of career development programs, student learning initiatives, and strategic