



Education  
Advisory  
Board

Advancement Forum

# Reorienting Toward the Top

Cultivating Top Parent Prospects and Securing Lead Gifts

*Diana Barnes, Analyst*  
*[dbarnes@eab.com](mailto:dbarnes@eab.com)*

# Reorienting Toward The Top

## Study Road Map



# The Murky Middle Years

## Parent Enthusiasm Wanes After the First Year



### Second- and Third-Year Parents Are...

- ✗ Less likely to come to campus
- ✗ Less concerned about their child's adjustment to college
- ✗ Less likely to have questions and want to connect with university administrators for answers



#### Diminished Parent Excitement

“Parent engagement starts to drop off after freshman year. Parents often don’t come back for another move-in or another family weekend.”

*Matt Burrows  
Senior Director, Parent & Family Giving  
University of Michigan*

# Unexplored and Uncertain Terrain

## Gift Officers Are Unsure of How to Cultivate Parents



4

### Top-of-Mind Concerns



### Primary “Pain Points”

*“What do I say when parents have questions or concerns about their child?”*

*“I’ve rarely spoken with parents. What are they interested in?”*

*“How am I supposed to cultivate parents within four years, I have a lifetime of cultivation with alumni”*

*“All of our engagement opportunities are for alumni. What can I show parents?”*



#### Lack of Tools

- Fundraisers have few parent-specific engagement opportunities to point donors towards
- Fundraising collateral fails to address parent interests



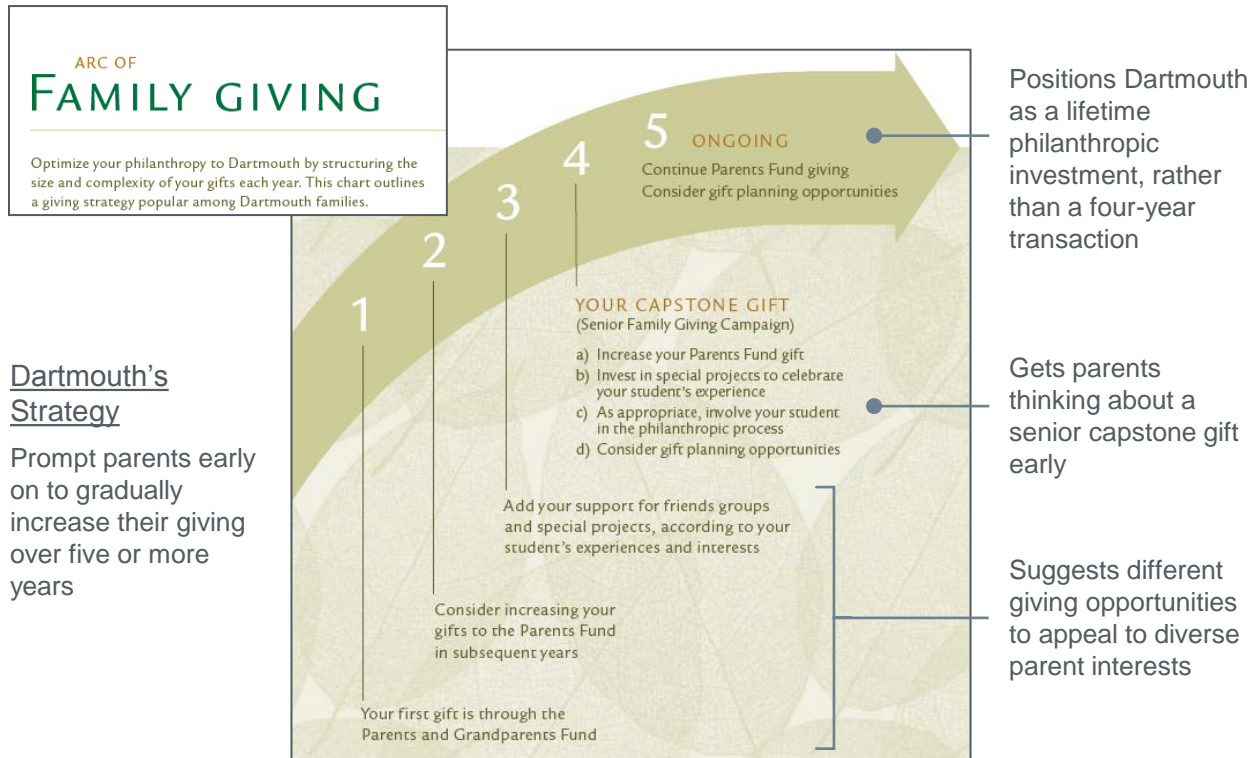
#### Minimal Expertise

- Professional development opportunities focus on engaging alumni, not parents
- Fundraisers have years of experience soliciting alumni, but few with parents



# The Giving Arc Sets Expectations

## Dartmouth's Parent-Centric Tools Outline Five-Plus-Years Giving Plan



### Dartmouth's Strategy

Prompt parents early on to gradually increase their giving over five or more years

# Creating a Roadmap



6

## Giving Arc Tool Guides Fundraisers and Parents

### Tool Touch Points

Fundraisers use tools to have personalized giving conversations with parents before or right at the start of the **first academic year**

Fundraisers use tools to structure discussion about **senior year** capstone gift

Fundraisers briefly revisit tools in giving conversations in the **middle years**

Parent giving office periodically **trains** fundraisers on how to use tools

“

### Sharpening Giving Discussions

“Before the giving arc tools, conversations were nebulous. But when we started using them, conversation became cleaner. Parents liked it because they knew what to expect for the next nine years. Fundraisers liked it because it made them feel comfortable talking with parents.”

*Heidi Anderson, Director of the Parents and Grandparents Fund  
Dartmouth College*

# Expectation-Setting Cannot Stand Alone

It Must Be Coupled With High-Quality Touch Points



7

## The Problem with Current Parent Program



Parent Donor  
Councils



Parent Weekend  
Donor Events



Parent Donor  
Commencement  
Events

### Drawbacks

- Events can be costly to host on campus
- Parent interest in returning to campus decreases after orientation and move-in
- Presidential and other senior leader access is typically limited



### Searching for the Right Initiatives

“To stay connected with parents without breaking the bank, we need easy ways for fundraisers to get in front of parents and show them that we care about them and recognize their support.”

*Director of Parent Programs  
Public University*

# Ready-Made Cultivation Opportunities

## Two Approaches to High-Quality, Flexible Parent Programming

### Approach #1: Regional Parent Donor Events



Events hosted by parent council members in select cities

Benefits	
✓	Targets top parent donors and prospects
✓	Increases engagement through in-person events

### Approach #2: Online Initiatives



Webinars that cover topics of parent interest, such as career services

Benefits	
✓	On-demand option allows for engagement at any time
✓	Easy-to-use tool for gift officers to point parents towards





# Meeting Parent Donors Where They Are

## University of Michigan Brings Underutilized Leaders to Select Cities

### Travels To Top Prospects

Parent giving office brings intimate events to top prospects and donors in large cities

### Includes Campus Leaders

Speakers include range of leaders who address parent interests

### University of Michigan Regional Parent Programming

### Vehicle for Engagement with MGOs

Two to three MGOs attend events to engage top donors in-person

### Hosted by Parent Council Members

Events cultivate and steward parent council members



### High Attendance Rates

**200+** Top donors invited per event

**90+** Donors attend per event

# Redefining Exclusivity

Duke's Web-X Calls Provide Insider Access in an Easy-to-Implement Way



10

## Key Elements



Parent-centric topics delivered by campus leaders



Exclusive access for parents committee members



Three to four webinars per year

### Web-X Call Speaker List

- Director of Admissions
- Dean of Students
- Dean of a graduate school
- Chair of the Board of Trustees



### Engagement Results

10%

Of eligible donors join per webinar

30-40

Dial-ins per webinar

# Multipurpose Engagement Tools



11

## Cornell Uses Parent Webinars Throughout Gift Cycle

### Fundraisers Can Use Webinars in Three Ways

**Introductions**  
Identify high net-worth registrants and send an introductory email that asks how they enjoyed the webinar



**Stewardship**  
Send personalized webinar invitation to donors to create an air of exclusivity

**Cultivation**  
Send archived webinars to prospects who have questions about the school

“

#### A Virtual Ice Breaker

“Parents don’t always know that they have access to webinars. I can easily create a personalized webinar invite for a donor. If they attend, I might also follow-up with them.”

*Meghan Dauler, Parent Gift Officer  
Cornell University*

# Hardwiring A Focus on Parents

## Training and Incentives Advance Parent Giving Goals



12



### Initiative #1:

#### **Ongoing Training and Strategy Sessions**

Fundraisers receive ongoing professional development

*Tufts University*



### Initiative #2

#### **Parent Performance Incentives**

Fundraisers are evaluated on parent fundraising metrics

*Private College*

# Building Fundraisers' Confidence



## Tufts Upskills MGOs With Comprehensive Training in Parent Fundraising

### Tufts' Annual Parent Fundraising Training

#### Topics Covered

One-time  
training session



- Key differences between parents and alumni
- Key differences between freshman parents, donor parents, and non-donor parents
- Ideal outreach timelines that align with the student lifecycle
- Sample phone and email scripting



Quarterly Strategy  
Sessions



#### Agenda Items



- Review past tactics to identify strengths and weaknesses
- Check parent outreach
- Brainstorm new cultivation strategies

# Incentivizing Parent Cultivation

## Private College Uses Written Goals to Focus MGOs on Parents

### MGO Performance Review

Goals differ depending on MGO experience, quality and number of parents in portfolio

- Behavior-based goals (e.g. number of parent visits with a range of 40%-70% of portfolio)
- Results-based goals (e.g. dollars raised with a range of 50-100K+ annually)



### Reaching Parent Giving Goals

**50%** Increase in parent visits by major gift officers

**100%** Increase in dollars raised from parents

# Making It Work on Your Campus



## Use Metrics to Inspire Performance

15

### Key Steps



Considerations for Developing Parent-Focused Metrics	
Develop metrics	✓ Set and stick to appropriate parent donor portfolio size to prevent portfolio bloat
	✓ Prioritize one to two metrics that will boost performance
	✓ Create a flexible system for determining goals that takes into account varying portfolio strengths and different levels of fundraiser experience
Solidify infrastructure	✓ Incorporate metrics into review grids and electronic tracking system to ensure accuracy and consistency
Implement metric system	✓ Communicate metrics clearly to fundraisers through emails and individual meetings
	✓ Adhere to metrics

# Reorienting Toward The Top

## Study Road Map





# Senior Year: The Make-or-Break Moment

A Time to Secure Major Gifts and Inflect Young Alumni Giving



17

## Capitalizing on Student Impact

**Four-Year Cultivation  
Yields Major Gift**

“Parents do not really see the impact of their student’s experience until the junior and senior year. That’s why senior year is a great time to ask parents to think about a large gift.”

## Laying a New Foundation

**Influencing Young  
Alumni Giving**

“We see a huge drop-off in parent giving after graduation. They say “You should be asking my kid.” This is the perfect time to get these young alumni involved and transfer their parent’s philanthropy down a generation.”

## Opportunities for Engagement



Thesis completion



Organization  
awards and  
senior nights



Commencement  
weekend

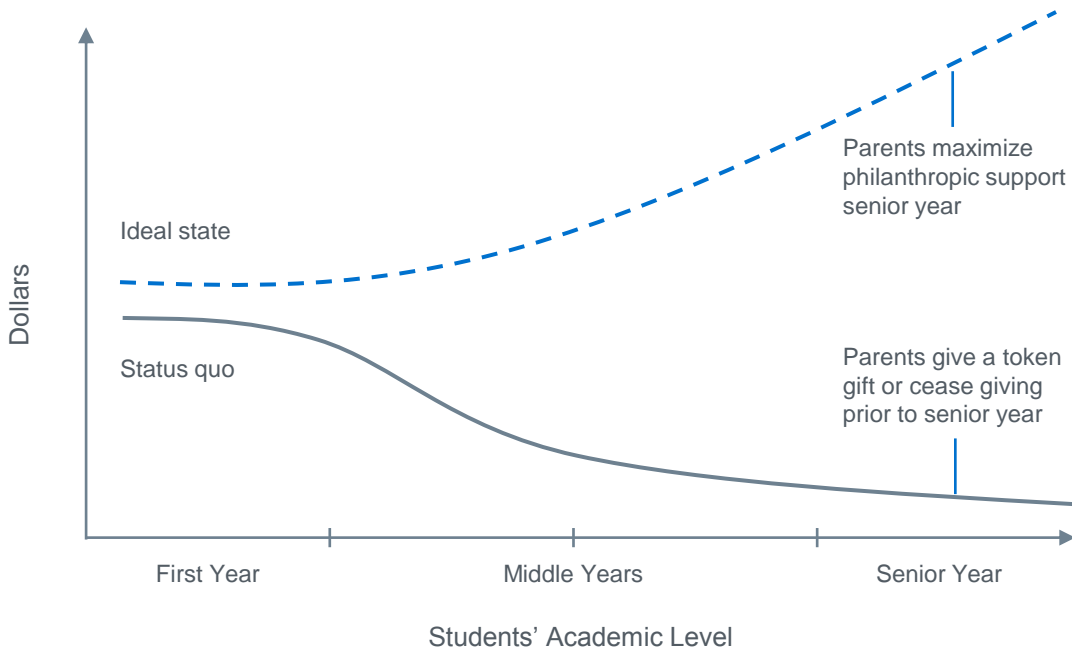
# Missed Potential Senior Year

Despite Big Opportunities, Parent Giving Bottoms Out at the End



18




Parents' Multiyear Giving Trajectory






# Reversing a Downward Trend

## Three Key Elements Leading to a Successful Senior Year Parent Gift

### What Institutions Do Wrong...

-  Start senior gift conversation in the senior year
-  Send “last-gasp” blanket appeal to all parents
-  View parent giving as a four-year transaction

### ...And What They Can Do Right

-  Set parent donor expectations in the first year
-  Focus on top donors and personalize conversations to their interests
-  Involve students in the giving process to pave the way for young alumni giving

# Building Toward the Major Gift

## Deerfield Academy Frontloads Expectations For Giving Capstone



### The Campaign to Honor the Class of 2015

For more than forty years, the families of each graduating class have come together to fund a legacy project in honor of their children. During the summer of 2014, Deerfield's Board of Trustees approved a \$10 million renovation of the Boyden Library as a signature project of Deerfield's emerging campus master plan. The Campaign to Honor the Class of 2015 will provide funding for an essential component of the Boyden Library renovation: new space for Deerfield's Office of College Advising.

The renovated Boyden Library will bring together, under one roof, the offices of the Academic Dean and Academic Support, the Center for Service and Global Citizenship, the Innovation Lab, and College Advising. This will become a building that promotes interdisciplinary, collaborative learning as students engage in real-world challenges, and will recenter the academic hub on campus, both promoting and reflecting Deerfield's heritage of academic excellence. The new Office of College Advising will occupy a wing of the 2nd floor, providing centralized offices for an expanded group of college advisors, additional group meeting space, and work / research desks for students.

The Academy welcomes your support for this transformational project. Commitments to the Campaign to Honor the Class of 2015 may be paid-in over a 3-year to 5-year period, so we ask families to please consider a gift that is a multiple of their previous giving in support of the Academy.

### Giving expectations set through...

- Letter mailed to all parents in the first week of school
- ← ▪ Brochure left with top major gift parent prospects after a visit from a gift officer



### Key Elements from Senior Gift Materials

- Provides four-year giving plan
- Reaches parents in the first year
- Requests that senior year gift amount is a multiple of previous gift amounts
- Allows senior year gift to be paid over a three- to five-year period
- Details comprehensive impact of past senior year gift campaigns

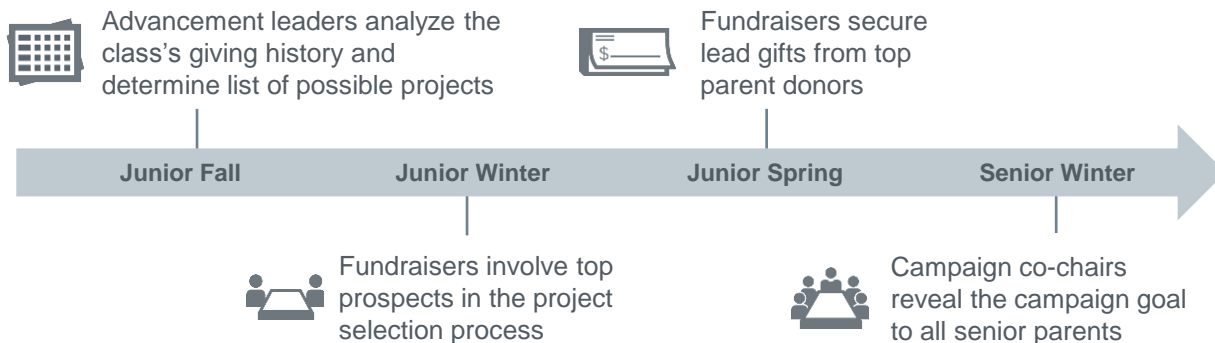
# Mimicking a Mini-Campaign

Deerfield Involves Top Prospects in Planning and Secures Lead Gifts



21

## Deerfield's Senior Gift Cultivation and Solicitation Process

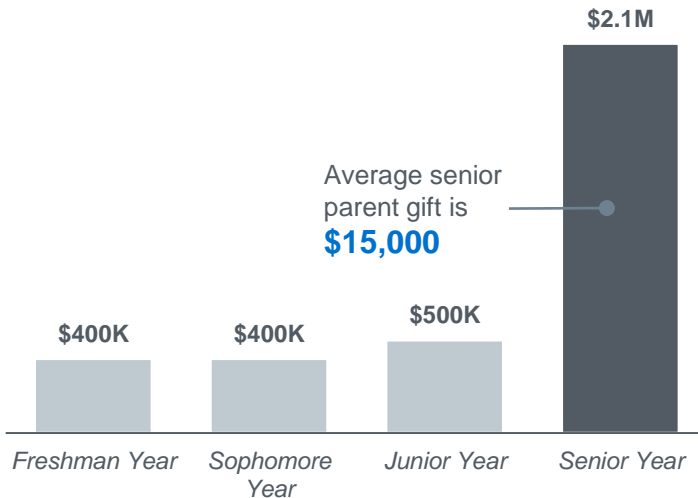


# Ending on a High Note

## Senior Year Gifts Outpace Cumulative Three-Year Giving



### Average Parent Giving by Class at Deerfield Academy



# A Step Beyond “One Last Big Gift”

## Institutions Leverage Parent Giving for Young Alumni Philanthropy



### Current Best Practice



#### Parent Major Gift Solicitations

Institutions leverage parent engagement and past giving to secure major gifts from top donors



### The Next Frontier



#### Joint Parent-Student Gifts

Institutions pursue strategies in which parents make gifts in honor of or in collaboration with their child.

# Modeling Giving Behavior

## Young Alumni Donors Follow Their Parents' Examples

### The Parent Donor Difference



52%

Of adults who watched their parents frequently support nonprofits are today active donors



26%

Of adults who rarely or never saw their parents give are active donors

“

### Getting Students Involved

“It really isn't enough to just assume that young alumni are going to be donors if their parents are. We have to get the involved, help them understand why their parents donate, and show how impactful giving to the university can be.”

*Director of Parent Giving  
Private University*



# The Parent-Student Endowment

## Georgia Tech Experiments With Involving Students in Gift Allocation



### Georgia Tech's New Parent/Family Endowment Effort

#### Parent Involvement



Top parent prospect receives ask for a \$30K endowment paid over three to five years



Parent makes unrestricted gift to establish endowment



Upon graduation, the family determines gift designation



Major gift officer stewards both parents and young alumnus/a

# Promising Early Returns at Georgia Tech



## New Parent-Student Endowment Option Resonates with Top Donors



### Attractive Features for Parents

- ✓ Involvement of their student in the giving process
- ✓ Designation of gift to an area that matters most to the family
- ✓ Stewardship of entire family



### Strong Response Rates

7 Parents asked for an endowment

5 Parents gave an endowment gift

**\$150K** Total gift revenue gained through parent-student endowments

# Reorienting Toward the Top

## Four Key Lessons for Maximizing Parent Donor Impact

### EAB Study Insights

#### 1 Acquire Top Prospects Early

Identify and acquire top parent prospects early through smart qualification strategies and segmented solicitations

#### 2 Empower Frontline Fundraisers

Deepen parent donors' relationship with the institution by equipping gift officers with ready-made cultivation opportunity, and high-value training sessions

#### 3 Share Major Gift Roadmap Early

Set giving expectations early with top parent donors to secure senior year capstone gifts

#### 4 Involve Students in Giving

Leverage the senior year parent giving relationship to jumpstart young alumni philanthropy



Education  
Advisory  
Board

Advancement Forum

# Reorienting Toward the Top

Cultivating Top Parent Prospects and Securing Lead Gifts

*Diana Barnes, Analyst*  
*dbarnes@eab.com*