In March 2012, Rice conducted its fourth survey of parents of undergraduates. In households for which there were email addresses on file, one custodial parent received a personal link to the online questionnaire. Parents who had more than one undergraduate at Rice were asked to respond to the survey in relation to the older student. Of the 3,653 parents invited to participate, 1,541 did so, for a response rate of 42 percent. We are grateful to Rice parents who responded and pleased to share this summary of the survey results.

Profile of parents
Ninety-seven percent of the respondents were custodial parents, and they were fairly representative of students in all class years: freshmen (29 percent), sophomores (25 percent), juniors (24 percent) and seniors (22 percent). The students of these parents were about equally split by gender: male (50 percent), female (48 percent) and other (2 percent). Sixteen percent of them had a parent, sibling or other close relative who had attended Rice.

Overall satisfaction with education so far
As in previous years, satisfaction levels were high: 28 percent were “generally satisfied” and 68 percent were “very satisfied.” Asked whether they would recommend Rice to a high school senior with similar attributes as their student, the endorsement was overwhelming, with eight out of 10 parents responding that they “definitely would,” for a total of 93 percent who probably or definitely would do so.

Satisfaction with aspects of Rice
Measured on a four-point scale, levels of satisfaction were greatest (“very satisfied”) for the sense of community on campus, the intellectual atmosphere, the focus on teaching and the social life on campus. A bit lower on the scale, but still within the satisfactory range, were academic advising and career counseling. Further analysis showed no statistically significant differences by class year for satisfaction with academic advising and career counseling. The levels remained within the same “generally satisfied” range.

Mean Satisfaction With Aspects of Rice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Satisfaction Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual atmosphere</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on teaching</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student housing</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with faculty</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin responsiveness</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal connection</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advising</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career counseling</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Their perceived priorities for Rice are shown below:

“Very Important” That Rice Offers:
- Personal growth and maturity: 87%
- Broad-based education: 86%
- Writing and oral skills: 80%
- Leadership skills: 72%
- Grad school prep: 72%
- Research opportunities: 64%
- Access to alumni network: 55%
- Specific career training: 54%
- Earnings potential: 54%
- Diverse student body: 50%
- Service/volunteerism: 46%
- Diverse interactions: 44%
- Study/work abroad: 41%
- Foreign language skills: 35%
- Extracurriculars and athletics: 33%

Parents agreed most strongly with statements about the value of the college system, the inclusiveness of the campus and the effectiveness of faculty teaching.
Staying informed and involved

Eighty-four percent of the parents reported that they received too little communication from Rice. Nevertheless, overall the information they received met their needs as parents “adequately” or “quite well.” What they would like more information on are the following: (a) career counseling, (b) academic life and policies, (c) off-campus programs, (d) residential life and policies, (e) financial aid and (f) resources for parents (e.g., Parents Association). Of least interest is information on psychological counseling, religious life and athletics. These priorities were the same regardless of the class year of the student, except that financial aid was less of an issue for juniors and seniors.

By phone, email or otherwise, parents contacted their student once a week or a few times per week during the current school year (August 2011 to March 2012). Over the same period, one-third had visited the campus two or three times and the same proportion had visited four or more times.

From a list that included various offices on campus and their student’s instructor and adviser, parents indicated that they interacted most (by phone, email or in person) with the Office of Financial Aid (29 percent) or the Cashier’s Office (24 percent).

Parents discussed long-term career or academic plans with their students much more frequently than they gave advice on choosing courses.

College admission process

Reviewing various aspects of the admission process, parents found the following to have been most helpful to their child: campus visits, parent-child discussions, guidebooks and high school counselors.

Activities in Current Year

Nine out of 10 visited the Rice website, and two-thirds read the campus newspapers online or in print. Around 40 percent had attended an event on campus. Half had watched videos available from the Rice website. Only 20 percent followed Rice blogs or social media.

Parents discussed long-term career or academic plans with their students much more frequently than they gave advice on choosing courses.

In Current Academic Year, How Often Did You Talk About the Following With Your Student?
Sixty-three percent of respondents (971) indicated their Rice student had received a grant from some source to help defray expenses for the 2011–12 academic year. Of those, 14 percent had annual family incomes of less than $50,000.

Overall, among the families with grants, 84 percent were either “generally satisfied” (35 percent) or “very satisfied” (49 percent) with the level of financial aid they received. Families met 75 percent of college expenses by utilizing primarily regular income and savings.

Regardless of class year, seven out of 10 parents had not borrowed to pay for their child’s education.

Overall, the impact on the family of Rice educational costs (for those parents who contributed funds to these expenses) was reported as “severe” by only 6 percent. The typical response was “moderate” (39 percent). The mean score by class year showed the impact on parents of seniors significantly lower in severity (2.06 on a four-point scale) than second- (2.22) and third-year parents (2.23). The first-year mean was 2.18.

Families with incomes between $100,000 and $150,000 seem to feel the impact of paying for college a bit more than their counterparts in other income ranges.

An overwhelming 96 percent recorded that their child’s educational experience at Rice was worth the financial impact on the family.
Agreement with miscellaneous statements

- Nine out of 10 parents were happy that their student attends Rice and agreed that overall their student was doing well.

- Parents of seniors were the least likely to agree that their child was under too much stress.

- Parents of sophomores were more in agreement than parents of juniors and seniors with the statement that it was very difficult to pay for their child’s education.

- Parents of freshmen and sophomores were more likely to be worried that their child will graduate with too much debt.

- Parents of seniors were the least concerned that their child will have trouble finding a job after graduation.

Most pleasing about Rice:

- That my child is so happy and pleased.
- High academic standard and the college system.
- Quality of instruction, small size of university and classes.
- How our child has flourished socially and academically.
- The quality of life and intellectual stimulation.
- It is a beautiful campus with a safe environment.
- Impressed with the enthusiasm of the students and professors.

Most disappointing about Rice:

- Alcohol drinking.
- Cost increases.
- Lack of financial aid.
- Difficulty in enrolling in some classes.
- Student advising (or lack thereof).
- Having to live off campus for a year.
- Medical services available.

Thoughts on paying for college:

- Wish tuition could be fixed for the duration of the child’s degree. Would help with planning.
- Would have liked to have more information about financial aid.

Written comments
The questionnaire concluded with written comments by the parents as to what pleased or disappointed them about Rice and other comments about paying for college. Here are a few excerpts: