

Title of Entry:	Parent Connect
Category:	#23, Best Electronic Newsletter
Institution:	Baldwin-Wallace College
Contact:	George Richard, Assistant Vice President/Director of College Relations
Names of Persons Responsible for Entry:	Joyce DeGirolamo, Public Relations Specialist Alicia Maurer, Assistant Director of Publications Susan Rapps, Director of Web Administration
General Description:	Having just completed its first year of inception, Parent Connect is a 20-issue series of electronic newsletters for parents of freshman students and new transfer students. The issues run from mid-July to mid-April and are spaced two weeks apart.
Goals/Objectives:	<p>From an institutional standpoint, the purpose of Parent Connect is to aid in the retention process by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Providing families with information pertinent to their needs/interests at the time when they and/or their students may be facing important college-related issues. •Providing access and connections to B-W resources, programs and staff members who can help with parent needs and considerations. •Building good will with parents and reinforcing the message that their students made the right choice to come to B-W. •Creating copy that is informative, engaging and compelling so that parents will read it and including dynamic graphics that are eye-catching and depict the academic, co-curricular and social aspects of campus life. •Supporting the newly designed B-W parent web site by having teaser copy and links from the newsletter to the web site. The teaser copy in Parent Connect links parents to the full-length articles appearing on the first-year parent web site and/or to other links on the B-W web site.
How Project Fits Into Institutional/ Advancement Goals:	<p>One of a series of initiatives aimed at parent communications/relations, Parent Connect is part of B-W's integrated marketing plan. It is a concerted effort to broaden the college's outreach to a key constituency group – parents. This electronic newsletter aims to engage parents in the B-W community by recognizing the key role they play in the lives of their college students.</p> <p>Freshman parents differ from parents of upperclassmen. Often, parents of freshman students have more questions and/or concerns because they are navigating through new territory. These parents may be more anxious for a variety of reasons, including:</p>

- being unfamiliar with a particular college or even college, in general.
- adjusting to new roles in parenting.
- facing increased financial stresses (if applicable).
- being emotionally connected to their students, so that student concerns and adjustments can be upsetting to some parents.

The topics in Parent Connect are designed to help parents support their students in their transition to college by providing them with useful and timely information. While the teaser copy in Parent Connect is brief to facilitate scan reading, the links to the longer articles on the parent web site feature more in-depth coverage of topics and often include a series of parent pointers they can use when talking with their students.

Likewise, Parent Connect strives to support advancement initiatives by engaging parents in the B-W community with the hope that they will support the Parents Fund and/or Senior Class Gift Fund at Baldwin-Wallace. At the broader level, studies have shown there is a positive relationship between parents being philanthropic and their children being philanthropic. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that parents who are favorably connected to B-W and are donors to the Parents Fund and/or Senior Class Gift are likely to be modeling positive philanthropic behavior to their students, which will benefit B-W in years to come as these students graduate and become alumni.

Audience:	Parents of first-year students, which includes freshmen and new transfer students.
Staff Totals:	This project was developed and is managed completely in-house. There is one coordinator of the project. In addition to managing the project, this individual develops and writes the parent newsletter/web-based articles. Assisting this individual is a graphic designer who designed the publication and provides technical support. A third person is responsible for the actual dissemination of the electronic newsletter, for providing technical support and for helping to gather data about the newsletter. With all three individuals, Parent Connect represents only part of their workload. No one person is exclusively devoted to this project.
Program Budget/Costs:	There is a cost of \$200, which is the cost of printing a post card that is mailed on July 1 to first-year parents. The post card serves to publicize both the electronic newsletter as well as the parent section of the web site.
Special Circumstances:	Not applicable.
Documented results:	Two measures of review were done with regard to this electronic newsletter. The first was data that B-W received at the time of distribution. The second was a survey that was completed at the end of the 20-issue cycle to assess parent views of the publication in terms of frequency, content and relevance.

E-Communication Vendor

For each of the issues, data was collected and reviewed each week. The view rate consistently was above 50%, with a high of 69%.

In comparison to a commercially generated electronic newsletter B-W used for the preceding few years, Parent Connect had view rates that were often twice as high or even three times as high as the commercially generated publication.

Survey Data

A six-question survey link was included within the body copy of Parent Connect 20, the final issue, and a follow-up letter with a survey link was sent shortly thereafter. The response rate for the survey was 15% (of the total number of persons who were on the mailing list for Parent Connect). The results indicated that 38% of the respondents rated Parent Connect as being excellent and 53% rated it as being good. In addition, more than half of the respondents said they spent 10 minutes or more reading the publication. Likewise, a number of the respondents who gave detailed feedback about Parent Connect expressed not only their approval of the publication and its usefulness in keeping them informed of timely topics, but they also asked that B-W continue the Parent Connect series by offering it to sophomore parents.

Ancillary Benefits

Parent Connect2 will be launched for the 2009-10 academic year. The new program will continue the Parent Connect series by featuring seven new issues that explore sophomore issues. Parent Connect2 will serve to not only assist B-W with its retention initiatives, but it also will assist the College in its goal to build a relationship with parents, a key group for development purposes.

As an example of success in building relationships with parents at an early stage of a student's college experience, the parents of a student in this year's freshman class made a commitment of \$100,000 to B-W's comprehensive fund campaign. While it may not be possible to pinpoint any single initiative as the premise of this donation, B-W believes its efforts to build parent relations is one that is paying off in multiple ways.

Sample Links:

http://www.bw.edu/blast/parent_connect12/

http://www.bw.edu/blast/parent_connect2/

http://www.bw.edu/blast/parent_connect16/

Printed Sample Issues

Post Card

Parent Connect
Topics/Schedule

Web Pages Corresponding
To Parent Connect