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Mom Prom, families and the liberal arts

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Quad 136

Mom Prom, Families and the Liberal Arts

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Mom Prom, Families and the Liberal Arts



I had the great pleasure of attending the Mom Prom (with my mom!) a couple weeks ago. This is a fabulous Saint John's event that has been in existence for decades. It was originally developed by the Saint John's chapter of the Knights of Columbus to honor their moms, but eventually the Knights generously opened the event to all juniors and seniors. The event has become so popular with both moms and sons that overflow space was added this year and well over 300 Johnnies invited their moms to attend. What was most striking about the event for me was the delight that the mothers took in meeting and/or reconnecting with their sons' friends and the friends' mothers.

This event came on the heels of a number of other conversations with parents about their sons' experience at Saint John's. Several couples talked about the pleasure they took in visiting their sons while they studied abroad. Another mother told me of the pleasure she took in attending Br. David Paul's sculpture class with her son. Another couple described how much they enjoyed traveling with a Johnnie athletic team during a summer trip to Europe. Other parents have talked about how much they enjoyed having their sons' friends visit them over school holidays or having a group of Johnnies at their cabins or homes over the summer.

The common thread is parents sharing in their child's educational experience, developing ongoing relationships with their children's friends and becoming a part of the Saint John's (and Saint Benedict's) community. These connections to other Johnnies are not new—my parents continue to have contact with some of my classmates and even classmates' parents—but the more active participation in college activities on and off campus is what is newer and a great way for parents to have a better understanding of the holistic education we provide.

I suspect part of the change comes from smaller families. Parents are more likely to be able to afford visiting a study abroad program with only two children than if they had six. In addition, the parents of millennials simply **play a more active role in the lives of their children** throughout their education. This phenomena is occasionally referred to a helicopter parenting and can certainly have its downsides, but it has upsides too, especially for residential liberal arts colleges that can adeptly engage parents and make them part of the community.

I think there are practical implications for both the recruiting process and for the way programming is done when students are enrolled. Obviously the holistic educational experience we provide must be focused on our students, but the reality of

parental engagement is something schools can use to their advantage, to strengthen the broader community and even to improve the educational experience of students. In the best of all possible worlds, we recruit and retain families to the Saint Ben's and Saint John's community, not just students.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | April 24th, 2014 | Categories: [Alumni](#), [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).