

In press: *Gifted Child Quarterly*

A place to be celebrated and understood:

The impact of early university entrance from parents' points of view

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### Abstract

This study surveyed 181 parents of students enrolled in one of two early entrance programs at the University of Washington: the Early Entrance Program for students who entered prior to age 15 and the UW Academy for Young Scholars for students who matriculated after Grade 10. The purpose was to understand parents' perspectives on the early entrance experience, including reasons for choosing early entrance, satisfaction with their children's program, perceived advantages and disadvantages of early entrance, and the effect of early entrance on family relationships. Ninety-five parents participated, with the majority reporting great satisfaction with multiple aspects of their and their children's experience. Early Entrance Program parents expressed a slightly higher degree of satisfaction than did Academy parents. This study suggests that early university entrance is a very attractive option for parents willing to follow the lead of their talented and ambitious adolescents.

### Putting the Research to Use

Our research indicates that early entrance programs are very attractive options for parents of academically advanced students who have out-paced available secondary programs. They are especially appealing to highly educated parents who are willing to follow the lead of their ambitious and talented adolescents in making this educational choice, and who are prepared to trust their students' judgment. Early entrance programs are not inevitably initially successful; as our study demonstrates, they benefit greatly from ongoing program evaluation and analysis. Key components of effective early entrance programs include intensive advising, community building, thoughtful selection of students, active engagement by students and faculty, and a welcoming college or university environment. Careful attention to the informational needs of parents is also important, particularly about the social and emotional transitions that they and their children are likely to experience. The Robinson Center at the University of Washington has demonstrated with two different programs that early university entrance is prized by students, parents, university officials, and state education agencies. These and similar programs might well be replicated in other areas around the country given active partnerships among all concerned parties.

Two distinct early university entrance programs are accessible to academically advanced secondary students at the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle: the Early Entrance Program (EEP) and the Academy for Young Scholars (Academy). In 1977, the EEP was created by the UW's Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars (Robinson Center) so that gifted young scholars could accelerate their education by entering the university prior to age 15. Then, in 2001, the Academy joined the EEP as a second early entrance option for students after Grade 10, admitting its first cohort of 35 students in Autumn 2002.

Since the inception of the EEP in 1977, the Robinson Center has conducted a variety of studies to better understand and provide for the intellectual, academic, social, and emotional well-being of early entrance students as well as to guide program development (Noble & Childers, in press). In 2006, with four cohorts of students in both programs, we carried out the first comparative study of the similarities and differences in patterns of education, affiliation, and aspiration between Early Entrance students (EEPers) and Academy students (ACADs), and the first formal evaluation of the Academy (Noble, Childers, & Vaughan, submitted). At the same time, we conducted the first formal survey of their parents' experiences. We wanted to explore parents' reasons for accepting early university entrance as an appropriate educational option for their children, their concerns about various aspects of the experience, and their satisfaction with components of their children's program, including transition services and psychological support. Because the EEP and Academy have unique program structures, we also wanted to investigate group difference by program affiliation in parents' responses.

The majority of research on early entrance to college or university has focused on student perspectives and outcomes. No systematic study of parental experience of and satisfaction with early entrance programs has been reported in the literature. Only one study has looked at parents whose children were enrolled in an early entrance program at the time of data collection. Muratori, Collangelo, and Assouline (2003) surveyed parents of the first cohort of the National Academy of Arts, Science, and Engineering at the University of Iowa at two points during students' first semester in an effort to better understand students' experiences during that time. Parents' perspectives were primarily tapped to speak to students' experiences; they are not considered on their own as important sources of information about early entrance nor were data on parents' responses reported. The only other source of information is a handbook that identifies common areas of parental concern, such as their children's readiness for the social aspects of college life, mastery of study skills to manage the academic demands of university, and whether students will be adversely affected by missing out on high school experiences such as dances or varsity sports (Muratori, 2007).

Most parents of early entrance students at the UW have been highly involved in planning their children's elementary and secondary education. Although previous research suggested that the most important factors in students' desire to attend university early did not include parental pressure but rather their own passion for learning and their unhappiness with their current schooling (Noble, Vaughan, Chan, Childers, Chow, Federow, & Hughes, 2007; Noble, Arndt, Nichol森, Sletten, & Zamora, 1999; Noble & Smyth, 1995; Noble, Robinson, & Gundersen, 1993; Noble & Drummond, 1992), adolescents' educational decisions are rarely devoid of parental influence or input. After

all, parents are important sources of financial and emotional support for many young people. Because of their influence and because of the rarity of early university entrance programs, it is important to identify the reasons why parents allow their children to choose this option.

Research suggests that for parents of gifted adolescents, educational planning is an important area of concern (Yoo & Moon, 2006). Thus, it is likely that parents whose children enter university early continue to be aware of and concerned about aspects of educational planning, including decisions about majors and career pathways. Although we anticipated that EEP and Academy parents would share the apprehensions identified by Muratori (2007), we also sought to decipher the ways in which their concerns about educational planning might differ depending on program affiliation and the age at which their children entered the university.

Finally, given that parents are an important constituency for early entrance programs, it is important to know whether they are satisfied with the multiple aspects of their children's educational acceleration. Such information should inform program development; this was, thus, another of the current study's goals. Although the present study is largely descriptive because of the scarcity of information about parents' assessments of their children's early university entrance, we anticipated that it would point toward hypotheses that would guide future research.

#### About the EEP and the Academy

EEP and Academy students share key personnel, including an Academic counselor and a licensed psychologist (also the Robinson Center Director) who are

available to counsel students, as well as social events, lounge space, and a seminar for first year students taught by Robinson Center faculty and staff. New parents from both programs are welcomed at separate Orientation events where they are introduced to university policies and procedures, the Robinson Center's advising philosophy, and the social and emotional issues that they and their children might encounter during the first year. Parents from both programs are encouraged to connect with one another, although only the EEP has a formal parent association. The EEP and the Academy differ on application processes and transition programs. Information about these two programmatic elements will contextualize significant group differences found in this study and reported below.

#### Admission Process

##### EEP

Applicants to EEP submit ACT scores along with grades from their two most recent years of schooling. For those who are academically prepared for early entrance, in-depth references are discussed with two or three of each applicant's current teachers, preferably one from language arts/social studies and the other from math/science. Each applicant and her or his parent/s spend a full day attending the preparatory Transition School (TS) on campus and visiting with current TS and EEP students. At the end of that day, interviews are held with parent/s and student, separately and together. Each year approximately 25% of applicants are accepted to TS, which limits its class size to 16.

##### Academy

Applicants to the Academy submit a standard UW Freshman application; the ACT college entrance examination; two confidential, written teacher recommendations; their mid-year sophomore high school transcript; and an essay required for Honors consideration. During the first year of the Academy all applicants were interviewed prior to acceptance to the program; however, for the second and subsequent years a decision was made to drop the interview because it did not yield the most useful information. A composite ranking is constructed based on each applicant's cumulative high school grade point average at the conclusion of first semester, sophomore year; the ACT composite score; teacher recommendation scores; an index of the intensity of each student's secondary curriculum; and an essay score. The 35 top-ranked applicants are then invited to enroll in the Academy. All prospective Academy students are encouraged to spend a day at UW shadowing ACADs from previous years prior to accepting an offer of admission. Each year approximately 30% of applicants are offered admission; after the first year, acceptance rates have exceeded 90%.

### Transition Programming

#### EEP

Before enrolling in the UW as freshman, EEPers participate in Transition School (TS). Most of secondary school is compressed into three academic quarters in TS, which follows the UW academic calendar. For their first two quarters in the program, students take five courses: English (writing and literature), history (medieval and modern western civilization, and US history), physics, pre-calculus, and ethics. During the third TS quarter, physics and ethics are replaced with a five-credit university course of their choice

so that students can take this class while still under the protective umbrella of TS faculty and staff. There is a clearly defined policy for dismissal from TS to ensure students' readiness for university level work. When students graduate from TS at the end of the year, they become full-time UW undergraduates and known to the community as EEPers.

### Academy

Since ACADs, unlike EEPers, enter UW after having completed two years of high school, they do not need the full year of academic preparation offered by TS. Still, some preparation to help them transition smoothly into the academic and social life of the UW is necessary. For this reason, a bridge program called "Jump Start" was created. Jump Start has evolved over the five years of the Academy's existence, fueled in part by ongoing program evaluation based on student focus groups (Noble, Vaughan, Chan, Federow, & Hughes, 2005). The Jump Start program currently comprises a two-day orientation program known as "Academy Camp," and two bridge courses, which include an Honors seminar and a linked writing composition course. Other components of ACADs' transition to the UW include regular academic advising appointments with the Academic counselor, social events, and a first year seminar shared with EEPers that helps students to explore their interests and possible majors.

### Methods

#### *Participants*

All parents of EEP and Academy students enrolled as UW undergraduates during the period 2002-2006 were invited to participate anonymously in this study. A letter describing the study and requesting participation was sent to 181 families, of whom 52% (nEEP= 31, nACAD= 64) returned completed questionnaires. This response rate was

achieved by two subsequent letters over a one-month period of time. Given the anonymous nature of this study, more direct methods of recruiting participants were not possible.

### *Instrument*

The authors designed an eight-page, 28-item questionnaire that focused on parents' assessments of their students' experiences of early university entrance, the reaction of their family and friends to their decision to allow their students to enroll in the EEP or the Academy, and their educational and career aspirations for their students. Participants were asked a variety of open-ended and Likert-scaled questions; the latter used a four point scale to discourage neutral responses. Sample questions included: When your student first enrolled full-time at the UW, how concerned were you about the following issues: younger age, difficulty navigating the UW system, personal safety on campus, possible negative impact on family relationships? Has your student's participation in the EEP or the Academy changed your family rules or norms? How did your friends and family react to your decision to enroll your student in the EEP or the Academy? Is the EEP or the Academy living up to your expectations? Is there something you wish your student were doing differently? What are the advantages and disadvantages of early entrance from your perspective? What advice would you give to other parents considering early university entrance for their students? Parents were advised that they did not have to answer every question and to avoid identifying their child. Although a questionnaire and self-addressed, stamped envelope were sent to all prospective participants, a secure, anonymous, electronic version was also made available via the Internet.

### *Data Analysis*

Because open-ended responses were extremely varied and defied categorization, they were reviewed by the authors and selected by consensus to illustrate statistical findings. Quantitative data were summarized using descriptive statistics; cross-tabulations and Pearson Chi-Square tests of significance were used to determine the presence of differences between groups based on participation in the EEP or the Academy. We chose to use a 4-point likert scale in order to ascertain nuances among degrees of satisfaction, importance, and concern and to discourage neutral responses. In some cases the expected cell frequencies were not greater than 5, which may result in a loss of statistical power. Only statistically significant group differences are reported below. Where EEP and Academy parents did not differ on responses, we treat them as one group. Total percentages are reported in the narrative. Group percentages are reported in the tables.

### Results

After presenting demographic information and data about respondents, we organize the results around six principal categories of inquiry:

1. What factors were important to you in choosing to enroll your student in the EEP or the Academy?
2. When your student first enrolled full-time at the UW, what issues were you most concerned about? Were any of your worries realized?
3. Has your student's participation in the EEP or the Academy changed your family rules or norms? How has participation affected your student's relationship with siblings and extended family members?

4. How did your family and friends react to your decision to enroll your student in the EEP or the Academy?
5. What are your educational and career aspirations for your student? Is there something that you wish she or he was doing differently?
6. How satisfied are you with the EEP or the Academy? What are the advantages and disadvantages of early university entrance from your perspective? What advice would you give to other parents considering the EEP or the Academy for their students?

### *Demographic Information*

Respondents comprised 95 parents (nEEP=31, nACAD=64). In order to accommodate different family configurations, we designated parents as “Parent 1” and “Parent 2.” The majority of respondents are, not surprisingly, well educated. Thirty-three percent of Parent 1s (nEEP=10, nACAD=21) and 34% of Parent 2s (nEEP=6, nACAD=26) have 4-year degrees; 55% of Parent 1s (nEEP=17, nACAD=35) and 52% of Parent 2s (nEEP=19, nACAD=30) have postgraduate degrees. Parents are employed in a wide variety of occupations, including forestry, psychology, medicine, K-12 and university education, acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine, software engineering, law, finance, science, nursing, library and information services, and retail. Nine percent of parents are primarily or exclusively homemakers. Thirty-seven percent of Parent 1s (nEEP=14, nACAD=21) and 37% of Parent 2s (nEEP=13, nACAD=22) were born outside the US in countries that include China, Taiwan, Russia, India, and Africa. No ethnic data were requested in order to preserve respondents’ anonymity. When asked how they had first heard about the EEP or the Academy, 47% reported direct contacts

from the Robinson Center, 19% were told by friends or acquaintances and 6% by their children, 6% received information from their children's schools, and 5% had seen information about the programs in the media. Eight percent learned about the programs from other sources.

*Principal Questions*

1. *What factors were important to you in deciding to enroll your student in EEP or the Academy?*

Insert Table 1 about here.

As Table 1 indicates, parents' reasons reflected their children's educational needs. In rank order, the three factors most often seen as "very important" or "important" by both groups were: students wanting to come (98%; nEEP=30, nACAD=63), students not being challenged, academically or intellectually, in their previous schools (75%; nEEP=28, nACAD=43), and students' social unhappiness in previous schools (44%; nEEP=18, nACAD=24). Thirty-eight percent of respondents (nEEP=14, nACAD=22) felt that participating in the EEP or the Academy would be a "very important" or "important" asset to their children's future career, and 37% (nEEP=12, nACAD=23) felt the prestige of the EEP or the Academy to be "very important" or "important." Only one significant difference occurred between EEP and Academy parents' responses to this question. As compared to Academy parents, more EEP parents reported students' social unhappiness in previous schooling to be a "very important" factor in their decision to pursue early entrance [Chi-Square (3, N = 92) = 14.214,  $p < .004$ ]. More EEP parents than Academy parents reported as "very important" the fact that their students had not been challenged

intellectually in their previous schooling, but this finding only approached significance [Chi-Square (3, N = 95) = 7.460,  $p < .06$ ].

2. *When your student first enrolled full-time at the UW, what issues were you most concerned about? Were any of your worries realized?*

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 lists the initial concerns that parents had about a variety of issues that their children would confront at the university level. In rank order, the three issues about which respondents said they were “very concerned” or “concerned” were: students’ younger age as a social hindrance (39%; nEEP=11, nACAD=26); students’ difficulty with career and life goals (34%; nEEP=10, nACAD=22); and students’ difficulty navigating the UW system (32%; nEEP=7, nACAD=23). The majority of respondents (77%; nEEP=28, nACAD=60) were not concerned about the possible negative impact of early entrance on family relationships. There were no significant differences between the groups, although EEP parents reported less concern about age differences even though their children are younger than Academy students.

When we asked parents whether any of their worries had been realized, 32% (nEEP=9, nACAD=21) said “yes”. Although no pattern emerged from their open-ended comments, some of their remarks were illustrative.

I think I am still concerned about these issues – I am a parent, after all!! - but can see my student growing, learning to make choices, learning to ask for help, etc. For me, meeting the program staff was probably what convinced me this would be a good, safe

place for my student!

My student has had some problems making academic decisions and has been slow to get involved at the University and take the initiative in planning and expanding his activities – but it's getting better.

While excelling academically, she has a hard time figuring out what she actually would like to do, what classes to take, what would be her life goals...

Some respondents worried that the Robinson Center was not doing enough to help their children. These parents said their children needed “more guidance,” more specific advising, “firmer advising,” and more help developing a “future orientation.” As one parent observed,

My student is just now, in 4th year, thinking beyond the current quarter in terms of preparing for the future – student wishes his grades were better for grad school admissions and had looked into internships for more experience.

*3. Has your student's participation in the EEP or the Academy changed your family rules or norms?*

Sixty-two percent of respondents (nEEP=20, nACAD=39) said no, whereas 37% (nEEP=11, nACAD=24) had experienced such change. The transition from secondary student to university undergraduate is often a difficult transition, even for traditional-aged students. As one respondent said, “At 14, our child was living the life of an 18 yr old, at 15, a 19 yr old, etc.” Early entrants have more freedom and autonomy at an earlier age than their peers and questions arise as to whether the student is a high school student by virtue of age or a college student by virtue of enrollment at UW. Many respondents wondered “What are the rules?” “Should there be a curfew and, if so, when should it be?” “What chores should a student be responsible for?” “What is ‘age-appropriate behavior’ in light of early entrance?” “The UW is not a neighborhood school,” one parent reflected, and this adds a level of complexity to family dynamics several years earlier than it might otherwise have occurred.

Parents feel differing levels of comfort about their children’s newfound freedom, and this can lead to conflict when students want more than their parents believe they should have. Because their children are now university students, parents are much less involved in their educational development and decision-making and thus experience more disconnection from these important areas of their children’s lives. As their oversight of their children’s academic progress and social lives decreases, they wonder about the quality and quantity of advising students receive at the university, how differential rates of emotional and social maturation will affect their children’s academic progress, and how their children will rise to the challenge of having to make many difficult choices in a relatively brief period of time. When gifted students struggle academically, as some do during the transition from secondary school to university and often for the first time in

their academic careers, or when early entrants stay late at the university to study or socialize, parents wonder whether, when, and how to intervene.

I have let my student have more autonomy than I would have otherwise done given their age. I tend to be a fairly strict parent with curfews, destinations, and the like, but once the student was in college I felt most of the decisions needed to be theirs. This was also the advice of the Robinson Center and previous parents in orientation and I appreciated being able to mentally prepare for it.

“But I’m a college student so I should be able to do whatever I want.” This attitude has been difficult on the family and with the relationship we have with her.

Our student has left the family routine earlier than she would have – specifically ceasing to eat with the family at dinner time, preferring to eat alone in her room while surfing the net, etc. This may have happened anyway though. It’s just our sense she pulled away sooner than should/would have.

Another area that could be affected by a student’s early entrance is her or his sibling relationships. For respondents who had more than one child, 47% (nEEP=12, nACAD=33) reported no change. Sixteen percent (nEEP=9, nACAD=6) said that their

children's relationships with siblings had improved, but only 9% (nEEP=3, nACAD=6) felt that these relationships had suffered.

His younger sibling has blossomed with the additional space and peace at home. Once separated our son got some perspective and realized he had been pretty overbearing and at times mean to his sibling.

I think it had the potential of creating resentment in the older sibling who had worked so hard for 4 years through high school, but sibling has a generous spirit and is delighted to see EEP student so excited about school and applying himself.

Here again, it's possible this would have happened anyway, but our student is so busy with UW that she has very little time to spend with her sibling and even keeping up with what is going on in her sib's life, so they are probably not as close as they were and don't share as much as they did – this has hurt the younger sib more than our student.

There have been times when I think my student's older brother has been a bit jealous about the extra attention given to the Academy sibling. The other brother is similarly gifted intellectually, but not

as well organized or successful academically. On the other hand, I think the fact that the younger sibling has entered University earlier than would have otherwise have been the case has also meant that they have more in common than might otherwise have been the case. They have a good relationship!

Relationships with extended family members can also be affected, although the degree to which this happens depends on the dynamics of each particular family. Seventy-three percent of respondents (nEEP=18, nACAD=51) reported no change whereas 11% (nEEP=5, nACAD=5) saw these relationships improve and only 7% (nEEP=4, nACAD=3) saw them decline.

Extended family recognized student's potential and is happy student found TS/EEP and could 'take off' and not lose interest in learning and not lose zest for life.

Some have probably disagreed with our decision to participate in this program, others are just amazed at my student's abilities, but I think on the whole most of our extended family are pleased and supportive of our decision.

4. *How did your friends and family react to your decision to enroll your student in the EEP or the Academy?*

Thirteen percent of respondents (nEEP=4, nACAD=9) reported that friends were “very supportive,” 44% (nEEP=14, nACAD=28) said they were “supportive,” and 29% (nEEP=9, nACAD=19) said they were “somewhat supportive.” Only 7% (nEEP=3, nACAD=5) said that their friends were “not supportive.”

Some were thrilled and extremely supportive. Some thought we were crazy!

Some friends were astonished that we would allow our child to enter EEP for social reasons. However, they were unaware of the negative social environment often experienced by academically talented students in middle and high schools. There is no doubt that the decision of our student to enter EEP was the correct one. We are very grateful for the opportunity.

The friends who knew & understood the student and listened to what TS/EEP was about were very supportive and knew it would be right. The only unsupportive friends were those who were not informed about the program and who did not realize how much the student wanted to do it.

I had very mixed reactions, but overall supportive. The most supportive were parents of other students in gifted programs.

Some friends though it was against “letting a kid be a kid.”

Knowing our student and how bored she had been and how mature she’s always been helped them to be very understanding of her desire to challenge herself and were very supportive and/or somewhat supportive of her going to the UW.

In general, family reactions to early entrance were sanguine. Secondary school has a powerful hold on many people’s expectations and assumptions about “normal” adolescent development, which early university entrance contradicts. For 44% of respondents (nEEP=16, nACAD=26), family members were “very supportive;” for 36% (nEEP=8, nACAD=26), they were “supportive.” Only 3% (nEEP=1, nACAD=3) reported that their families were “not supportive.”

The major concern was whether or not this was truly the decision by our student. From my perspective, I cannot imagine a student being successful if it was not their choice. The challenges of EEP are very great. It is difficult to imagine that a student could be successful if s/he were somehow coerced into EEP.

I think our families were impressed that we were considering the options carefully and had concluded there were good reasons to either stay in high school or join the Academy, both were good

choices. They understood our letting our son decide what he wanted to do in that context. They also understood in a way he was a special needs kid and that it had always been a struggle to figure out what was best for him in school and they were supportive of our efforts. That has not changed – either the struggle or the support.

They saw TS/EEP as a way to not lose the student, but to inspire the student and to provide a limitless environment where student would be stimulated academically & socially, with peers who were also excited about life and learning.

Family members were a little perplexed at why our student wanted to do this. She is not the ‘scary smart’ type, but has always been on her own trajectory & locked in on this program. So they scratched their heads & were supportive.

Most of my family members would have gone to college early given the chance.

5. *What are your educational and career aspirations for your student? Is there something that you wish she or he was doing differently?*

This is a complex question that for most respondents defied easy answers. Parents expressed a wide range of aspirations for their children, with no particular pattern emerging. They hoped that their children would achieve good grades and earn places in good graduate or professional schools, discover their passions, explore, be challenged to attain their goals, be disciplined and self-sufficient, be life-long learners, be happy, and grow spiritually. Some respondents want their children to become professionals; others hope they will find challenging careers that they enjoy and that are intellectually satisfying, useful, and financially viable. Very few respondents specified particular fields for their students; most said it was up to their children, although as one parent told us, “We don’t have any clue about this.”

I’d like to see my student continue his education far enough that he gets to know interesting people in a variety of areas of his interest and to a level where he can converse and correspond and interact with anyone in the world he is interested in communicating with, without that door being closed.

To learn about self, the mind, the range of intellectual endeavor, “the world.” To find the student’s center and passions. To stretch outside of comfort zones. To become strong and flexible, intellectually and in life skills. To develop confidence and direction.

We expect our student and his friends to use their talents to benefit others who are less fortunate and make contributions to the major problems of the world. Define them as you will but generally they include: pure water, hunger, poverty, global conflict, energy, environment and others. These young students have achieved at a very high level and know how to be successful. With guidance it is likely that they will generate creative and innovative approaches to solutions to global problems.

To be a contented & compassionate person using gifts & abilities to contribute to society.

That she works in the field that she has chosen happily and successfully and that she finds her work challenging and stimulating.

That he be doing something fully engaging to him and worthwhile to our challenged world. That he be kind and compassionate toward others and himself. We would like him to be moderately economically secure so he can pursue his life goals without constant worry about finances but wealth isn't a goal for us at all.

We also asked parents if there was something that they wished their child was doing differently. Responses were as varied as the individuals involved and no one pattern emerged. The range of comments included: asking for more help; exercising more; eating more nutritionally; joining more clubs; making more friends; finding better roommates; going to bed earlier; feeling more motivated to work; not worrying about what to major in; spending more time studying; “not overloading herself with so many difficult classes;” and finding more involvement from professors.

6. *How satisfied are you with the EEP or the Academy?*

Insert Table 3 about here

As Table 3 indicates, 100% of EEP parents (n=30) and 76% of Academy parents (n=48) who responded to this question are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their students’ programs, with EEP parents expressing a significantly higher degree of satisfaction [Chi-Square (3, N = 93) = 12.728,  $p < .006$ ]. EEP parents were also significantly more satisfied with the various aspects of the program, including the application process [Chi-Square (2, N = 94) = 10.387,  $p < .007$ ], transition programs [Chi-Square (3, N = 85) = 14.352,  $p < .003$ ], academic advising [Chi-Square (3, N = 93) = 9.449,  $p < .024$ ], psychological support [Chi-Square (3, N = 92) = 20.041,  $p < .001$ ], and social support/peer group [Chi-Square (3, N = 91) = 14.747,  $p < .003$ ].

When asked whether they would consider the EEP or the Academy for their other children, if appropriate, 79% (nEEP=18, nACAD=27) said “yes,” whereas 11% (nEEP=3, nACAD=9) said “no.” Thirty-six percent of respondents (nEEP= 10, nACAD= 24) had no other children.

Two open-ended questions asked respondents to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of EEP or the Academy from their perspective. Parents expressed a wide range of ideas. The academic challenge of early entrance was mentioned as an advantage, as were the lack of “busy work” and access to research opportunities, the Honors Program, and interesting professors and UW community members. Respondents praised the availability of a peer group and a wide range of friends and social experiences for their children, as well as opportunities for their children to mature more quickly, develop a higher level of self esteem, and learn to be self-motivated. Parents also appreciated the availability of counseling, advising and mentoring at the Robinson Center, both academically and personally, from “people who understand these students deeply.”

The Academy has given our student the opportunity to meet intellectual challenges and develop some depth, at an age when the brain is undergoing significant growth – rather than stagnating in a shallow environment. It has also been a great benefit to associate with an appropriate peer group and find like minds.

The big advantage from our point of view is offering these very bright students options. These very bright, a bit eccentric kids like our son are never an easy fit in any traditional school environment and these programs broaden their options.

Leaving the horridness of high school and finding a niche of peers, a place to be celebrated & understood.

His being home, allowing us to continue to have an impact on his development and the pleasure of his company.

1) High self esteem from being selected and succeeding at the UW; 2) intellectual challenge available for the asking/taking – boredom kept to a minimum; 3) competitive nature allowed to blossom to disprove any naysayers or doubters; 4) ability confirmed by pitting herself against difficulties and triumphing; 5) provides (we think) competitive advantage in obtaining choice internships, jobs, grad school admit.; 6) excitement of being in the adult world earlier than most & loving it.

There is tremendous opportunity for a student to identify one or more areas of strong interest, and to develop very strong understanding and skills related to those areas. This stimulates, rather than squashes, creativity, study skills, work ethic, and confidence.

It is a great escape for sensitive people from a trying experience in high school which becomes predominantly a

social experience and lacking in academics for gifted students.

It allows the cornerstone of the gifted student's self esteem to grow in a stimulating academic environment without been trampled by the 'culture of cool' where so much time is put into fitting in and being the same. This program is ideal for students who don't want to be the same and have something special academically and will thrive in an academic environment.

Some disadvantages were also identified by respondents. Some parents said that because their children had to understand and make life goals at a younger age, they were burdened by a sense of pressure to do so. Similarly, because many of their children socialized with older students, they had to learn to make wise choices earlier than they would have had to do so had they remained in secondary school. Some parents felt their children were missing out on high school dances and graduation, and some regretted what they perceived as their child's abrupt disconnection from family and their former social lives. Some parents had to adjust to an emptier nest sooner than would otherwise have been the case, a situation that brought some sadness in its wake.

Maybe for dating. Especially bad for younger boys. 20 yr old girls don't want to go to the movies with them. ☺

I feel as if I must "let go" much more quickly of closeness/parental involvement. High school friendships are cut short. Not a lot of

discretionary time with commute factored in. Less tendency to look into arts and drama because of perception of being a small fish in a big pond.

As parents, we have lost several years of time to influence, mold, and shape our child with our values. We've had to allow younger, independent peers to take over that gap. We have to trust our child earlier in life that she make good decisions.

I think it is important all people are aware of a wide spectrum of people in the world. I was very impressed with the choice of topic of this history of public education for the shared course for the fall quarter my son entered the program.

Uncomfortable though it may be for many of these kids, they do need to see their privilege in context. I think this course should start every academy class. I also think it is important for these kids to understand their position as not only the gifted with capabilities but challenged in the same and different ways than other teenagers. It is not pure advantage to be bright and it is good for them to see a bumpy road as normal and not spend too much time focusing on the most visible success stories of the programs.

They lose their identity. They once were the kids at the top of their classes and now they are just another college student. The grades they got in high school are harder to get. Therefore, they think they are a failure because they're not getting the grades they were used to. And if they slip too much then you are out of the Honors Program. In other words...the expectations they put on themselves are huge.

We also asked parents whether the EEP or the Academy was living up to their expectations and to explain their responses. Forty percent of respondents (nEEP=19, nACAD=19) said "completely" and 35% (nEEP=7, nACAD=26) said "mostly." Only 2% (nACAD=3) said "not at all." Several respondents had never seen their gifted children struggle academically before entering university and they themselves struggled with whether they had made the best or right decision. Some parents complained that the advising and guidance provided by the Robinson Center was "too hands off," or that their children did not receive enough personal attention. Some wished for more academic orientation and study skills instruction and wanted us to be "tougher" on their children. Some parents saw their children struggling socially to find a place at the UW and blamed the program if they chose not to socialize at the Robinson Center. Some expressed concerns about navigating the UW bureaucracy, particularly Housing and Food Services and Student Financial Aid, and a few complained that professors were treating their students as adults whereas parents still saw them children. One parent criticized the Academy and the UW for being too liberal.

Yet, the majority of respondents were delighted with the opportunities afforded their children and wanted us to know how grateful they were. In fact, one of the results of this survey of particular interest to us was the fact that all indices of parental satisfaction with the Academy had improved by the end of the fourth year, with all respondents reporting satisfaction.

The line between helping along the way and hand-holding is a fine one. In my opinion, EEP really helps the students develop their academic and social skills and, on the other hand, provides room for mistakes and growth.

Our student is thriving, she has been extremely well prepared for the rigors of college, she has made friends, found a major she's excited about and found time for extra curricular activities as well. The program is a godsend for students like her and we feel very fortunate this program is available.

Sometimes I want my student to be more ready to accept adult responsibilities than is currently the case, but this is not a failing of the Academy – or of my student – but rather the normal process of maturing!

Very pleased this program has allowed my child to grow

academically and socially, and without question has helped her grow up in all areas.

The university has been a wonderful place for our child. He has professors that care very deeply for their students and good friends from the very first academy experience.

We love everything about the academy. It has exceeded our expectations. We expected academic enrichment, but got a whole life improving environment. The extraordinary UW experience and the emotional & psychological support of the academy have combined into a perfect whole.

Finally, we asked respondents what advice they would give to other parents who were considering the EEP or the Academy for their children. A number of important suggestions were made.

Make sure it is what the student wants. Help them learn to work. Talk to other parents and students. Listen to kids.

Make sure the student is emotionally able to handle the new environment, not just academically capable.

It has to be what the student wants. You need to be able to support them while at the same time stepping back allowing them to take advice from their professors and make their own way.

Think carefully about the needs of your student. If he/she is happy in high school, leave them there. If not, talk to parents in the program to learn pros & cons.

If you have any hesitation, don't do it. This is an all or none proposition. You have to release your child early, let go, let them grow. Trust in the foundation you laid.

### Discussion

All Robinson Center programs are works in progress and the EEP and Academy are no exceptions. Over the many years that the opportunity for early entrance has been offered to gifted young scholars at UW, first through the EEP and then through the Academy, we have learned much through our research about what works well or not at all, and we have always put the results of our learning into effect. The EEP, now in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, has evolved significantly, sometimes painfully, since its first two students were admitted in 1977 (see Noble et al., 2007, for details). Adding and adjusting parent orientation meetings and implementing an EEP parent support group were important parts of this evolution. Given these changes, it is heartening that current EEP parents are

unanimous in their positive assessment of the program and their appreciation for its faculty and staff.

The Academy has also gone through a considerable evolution over its five years of existence and this developmental process may be reflected in Academy parents' generally lower levels of satisfaction with the program. Among the changes that have been implemented over the past five years is the ability of current Academy candidates to shadow older ACADs for a day before deciding whether to accept an offer of admission. This option was not available for the first Academy cohort. Another is a more comprehensive parent orientation at the start of the academic year that includes a discussion of our pertinent research findings about the early entrance experience for students and parents. Both these additions give parents a better idea about what to expect from the Academy and the social, emotional, and academic challenges that they and their children may encounter during the first year.

Another significant modification occurred in the Jump Start transition program. During the first year, Jump Start included five Academy courses but this changed to two courses for the second cohort and three for subsequent cohorts. Our original conclusion, that we needed to offer fewer Academy courses for the second cohort based on student complaints in the first, resulted in dissatisfaction among many second-cohort students and may be reflected in their parents' responses. We reconsidered this decision and introduced, for the third cohort, a seminar that helps first year ACADs and EEPers to explore their individual preferences, interests, values, and ambitions, craft a plan to choose majors, test the plan using a framework based on the scientific method, reflect on the results of that test, and imagine reformulations of the plan.

A major challenge for the Academy was the presence of four different academic counselors in its first four years. Some parents of students in the first three Academy cohorts felt that student advising was insufficient or lackadaisical. Over time we learned how to balance students' needs for independence with their needs for guidance; this resulted in changes to our advising policies, which now require all first and second year students to meet with the Advisor on a regular basis.

The EEP and the Academy are different programs in terms of student age at entry, the number of years of secondary school students attended prior to enrolling at UW, the intensity of their first year requirements, and parents' needs for information. It has taken us time to understand how ACADs fit within the culture of the EEP, but as the Academy has matured all students have forged new bonds. Within the Robinson Center, EEPers and ACADs still have separate identities, but there is now much more interaction and cohesion than there was initially.

One surprising finding was that EEP parents expressed somewhat less concern about their students' younger age at university than did Academy parents. At first this seems counterintuitive, but it may reflect the greater intensity of EEPers' transition experience. During the nine months of TS, EEP parents come to know faculty and staff well because they interact with them on a regular basis; thus, they develop great trust in the Robinson Center's judgment regarding student advising and related matters. In contrast, Academy parents generally interact with faculty and staff infrequently and often only during a half-day orientation at the beginning of students' first year; this may be reflected in their increased concern about their children being younger than traditional-aged UW students. A perhaps related finding was the significant difference between EEP

and Academy parents in terms of their overall satisfaction with their respective programs. Although the majority of both groups were satisfied, no EEP parent was less than satisfied, whereas five Academy parents were not satisfied. As the Academy matures we may see increased parental satisfaction with the program as a result of the programmatic changes reported above. This will be explored in our next parent survey, scheduled for 2011.

As we anticipated when we undertook this study, several directions for future research emerged from this study. One is the issue of parents following their children's lead when it comes to early university entrance. Parents of EEPers (81%) were significantly more likely to choose early entrance because their children were unhappy socially in middle school [Chi-Square (3, N=92) = 14.214,  $p < .004$ ], whereas 46% of Academy parents said that this was not an important factor in their decision to enroll their students in the Academy. This suggests that different levels of acceleration may better fit different kinds of students, and that parents must be sensitive to the issue of fit for their children. In open-ended responses some parents said that the students themselves should be the driving force behind the decision to enter university early in order for the experience to be successful, whereas others felt that, as parents, they should have the final say. How this difference might affect early entrance students' academic outcomes and psychological adjustment during their university careers and after graduation will be examined in future research.

Two additional issues may also prove to be fruitful research directions. Several parents commented that early university entrance placed them in opposition to their friends, their culture, and sometimes to their extended family. The pressure of negative

attitudes on the part of friends and family can inhibit some parents from allowing their gifted children to pursue this educational option. What parents can do and have done to resist this pressure remains to be explored. Another question involves parents' levels of comfort with the predictable crises that take place in most undergraduates' lives. These crises might include: lower grades than students are used to achieving in secondary school; the pressure to choose majors and career paths; making decisions about social lives; and becoming increasingly independent. Parents of gifted students, who are used to being actively involved in overseeing their children's educational trajectories, must learn to disengage from their children's lives at the university level. For parents of early entrants, this disengagement comes several years earlier than it does for parents of traditional-aged students. In future studies we hope to elucidate those crises that may be unique to early entrants' parents and those that are common to all undergraduates' parents.

### *Limitations*

Although we were pleased that the response rate was over 50% we wished that it were higher; the anonymous nature of the study, however, precluded telephone contact or more active encouragement. The survey was long and response fatigue may have been a factor in parents' choice not to participate. Respondents may be over-representative of parents who are either more identified with or disaffected from the EEP or the Academy. Because there are currently no comparison groups against which to measure our findings, we cannot contrast EEP and Academy parents' experiences with those of parents whose children attend early entrance programs at other institutions. Finally, the authors are all

intimately involved with building and sustaining both programs and know the students well; thus, data interpretation may have been biased by the makeup of the research team.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the results of this study that the UW Academy for Young Scholars has, like the Early Entrance Program, assumed a vital role in the education of gifted young scholars in Washington State. Its successful launch in 2001 drew upon the accomplishments of many individuals over the past 30 years. Dr. Halbert and Dr. Nancy Robinson's vision in creating the EEP at UW and their success in lobbying the Washington State Legislature for support via public education funding laid the groundwork. Subsequent years of work by Robinson Center faculty and staff to establish, strengthen, and refine TS and EEP, to develop summer programs for gifted students, to create a regional academic talent search for academically advanced students in Grades 5-8, and to provide leadership for gifted education throughout the State of Washington, gave the Academy the history, programmatic depth, integrity, and recruitment tools that made the concept very appealing to outstanding high school sophomores and their discerning parents. Equally important were the active collaboration of the UW Honors Program and the support of the UW central administration. The EEP and the Academy will continue to evolve in the coming years and to find new, perhaps better ways of reaching out to and educating some of the best and brightest students in the state, and of insuring a high level of parental satisfaction with our programs. Yet the results of this study strongly suggest that both programs are prized by the overwhelming majority of parents who have entrusted their children's higher education to our care. We leave the last words for them.

I think you guys are doing an excellent job. You're available for the students. You are great mentors that parents can trust. You make it fun for the students – at least one son is excited about school every day.

We/I can't think of anything more the Robinson Center could have done for us. They made themselves available anytime and responded promptly and always with heart, understanding, and sympathy.

I am amazed at the enthusiasm and eagerness my Academy student exhibits. Thanks so much for this wonderful opportunity!

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Table 1

*Factors important in choosing to enroll our student in the EEP or Academy*

Student wanted to come <sup>1</sup>	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
EEP Parents	29 (97%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Academy Parents	56 (87%)	7 (11%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
<hr/>				
Socially unhappy in previous school <sup>2</sup>				
EEP Parents	12 (39%)	6 (19%)	7 (23%)	6 (19%)
Academy Parents	6 (10%)	18 (29%)	9 (15%)	28 (46%)
<hr/>				
Not being challenged academically or intellectually <sup>3</sup>				
EEP Parents	20 (64%)	8 (26%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Academy Parents	26 (41%)	17 (27%)	15 (23%)	6 (9%)
<hr/>				
Acceleration might help future career <sup>4</sup>				
EEP Parents	4 (13%)	10 (32%)	7 (23%)	10 (32%)
Academy Parents	10 (15%)	12 (19%)	21 (33%)	21 (33%)
<hr/>				
Economic value of UW vs. previous school <sup>5</sup>				
EEP Parents	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	8 (26%)	20 (64%)
Academy Parents	3 (5%)	13 (21%)	8 (13%)	38 (61%)
<hr/>				
Economic value of UW vs. other colleges <sup>6</sup>				
EEP Parents	2 (7%)	4 (13%)	11 (35%)	14 (45%)
Academy Parents	4 (6%)	17 (27%)	20 (31%)	23 (36%)
<hr/>				
Prestige of EEP or the Academy <sup>7</sup>				
EEP Parents	6 (19%)	6 (19%)	11 (36%)	8 (26%)
Academy Parents	6 (9%)	17 (27%)	23 (36%)	18 (28%)

Note 1. Chi-square (df = 2, n = 94) = 2.046, NS

2. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 92) = 14.214, p < .004

3. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 7.460, p < .06

4. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 2.494, NS

5. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 93) = 4.859, NS
6. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 2.335, NS
7. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 2.137, NS

Table 2

*Parents first concerns about full-time enrollment for their early entering student*

Younger age would be a social hindrance <sup>1</sup>	Very Concerned	Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not Concerned
EEP Parents	4 (13%)	7 (22%)	8 (26%)	12 (39%)
Academy Parents	8 (13%)	18 (28%)	27 (42%)	11 (17%)
<hr/>				
Difficulty navigating the UW system <sup>2</sup>				
EEP Parents	2 (6%)	5 (16%)	8 (26%)	16 (52%)
Academy Parents	7 (11%)	16 (25%)	21 (33%)	10 (31%)
<hr/>				
Difficulty with academic decisions <sup>3</sup>				
EEP Parents	3 (18%)	1 (6%)	4 (23%)	9 (53%)
Academy Parents	5 (13%)	9 (23%)	14 (36%)	11 (28%)
<hr/>				
Difficulty with career/ life goal decisions <sup>4</sup>				
EEP Parents	3 (10%)	7 (23%)	6 (20%)	14 (47%)
Academy Parents	6 (9%)	16 (25%)	16 (25%)	26 (41%)
<hr/>				
Personal safety on campus <sup>5</sup>				
EEP Parents	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	14 (45%)	13 (42%)
Academy Parents	6 (9%)	14 (22%)	18 (28%)	26 (41%)
<hr/>				
Possible negative impact on family relationships <sup>6</sup>				
EEP Parents	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	6 (19%)	22 (71%)
Academy Parents	0 (0%)	4 (6%)	9 (14%)	51 (80%)

Note 1. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 5.763, NS

2. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 3.808, NS

3. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 56) = 4.745, NS

4. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 94) = 0.425, NS

5. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 4.970, NS

6. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 95) = 5.069, NS

Table 3

*How satisfied are you with the EEP or the Academy?*

Application process <sup>1</sup>	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not Satisfied
EEP Parents	24 (77%)	7 (23%)	0	0
Academy Parents	27 (43%)	33 (52%)	3 (5%)	0
Transition programs <sup>2</sup>				
EEP Parents	22 (71%)	9 (29%)	0	0
Academy Parents	18 (33%)	23 (43%)	9 (17%)	4 (7%)
Academic advising <sup>3</sup>				
EEP Parents	12 (39%)	9 (29%)	9 (29%)	1 (3%)
Academy Parents	8 (13%)	23 (37%)	22 (35%)	9 (15%)
Psychological support <sup>4</sup>				
EEP Parents	14 (45%)	12 (39%)	4 (13%)	1 (3%)
Academy Parents	5 (8%)	25 (41%)	22 (36%)	9 (15%)
Social support /Peer group <sup>5</sup>				
EEP Parents	19 (61%)	8 (26%)	4 (13%)	0
Academy Parents	14 (23%)	22 (37%)	16 (27%)	8 (13%)
Overall experience <sup>6</sup>				
EEP Parents	20 (67%)	10 (33%)	0	0
Academy Parents	21 (33%)	27 (43%)	10 (16%)	5 (8%)

Note 1. Chi-square (df = 2, n = 94) = 10.387, p < .007

2. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 85) = 14.352, p < .003

3. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 93) = 9.499, p < .024

4. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 92) = 20.041, p < .001

5. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 91) = 14.747, p < .003

6. Chi-square (df = 3, n = 93) = 12.728, p < .006