Organizational Culture and University Responses to Parenting Students: A Case Study

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Abstract:

This case study examines implications of a university's culture on advocating for supportive policies and programs for parenting students. Four themes illuminated several key tensions within the institution that affected support for parenting students: the lack of formal policy, an emphasis on faculty practices around accommodations, concerns about differential treatment, and the problematization of parenting students. Findings are used to suggest future avenues for investigation and advocacy strategies that incorporate organizational culture.

Keywords: Parenting students | Support services | Organizational culture | College students | Parenting

Article:

Research on family-friendly policies and climates in academia (Anderson, Morgan, & Wilson, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendell, 2004) have primarily focused on the needs and expectations of faculty and staff. Student concerns are rarely represented, but when they are, it is usually within the context of students as employees with most cases limited to graduate students (Sallee, Zare, & Lester, 2009; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009) or single mothers (Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Haleman, 2004; Yakaboski, 2010). The purpose of this case study was to explore one university's response around support of parenting students in order to advocate for resources and policy changes for this population. For the purposes of this study, the term "parenting students" includes traditional-aged (18 to 24) and nontraditional-aged undergraduates and graduate students who were pregnant and /or parenting.

Few universities directly address the needs and experiences of parenting students even though doing so may result in beneficial outcomes for universities including: lower attrition rates, higher enrollment rates, higher retention rates, and increased revenue. Addressing the needs of parenting students may also foster student achievement, increasing the opportunity for academic success among this population, and potentially improving universities' academic standings. As the enrollment of nontraditional college students continues to increase and access to higher education becomes a more pressing need for economic security, awareness of and sensitivity to

possible barriers for these students warrants focused attention (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Haleman, 2004).

Students as Parents

In the United States, over one quarter of all undergraduate students are parenting; of those, 71% are female and over half are single (Miller, Gault, & Thorman, 2011). Parenting students are more likely to be low-income, first generation students, and with greater financial obligations, mostly due to the cost of childcare (Miller et al., 2014). Over 40% of parenting students work full-time and more than half report spending at least 30 hours a week engaged in care-giving (Miller et al., 2011).

Parenting students have unique needs that, when left unaddressed, can severely limit their ability to complete postsecondary education. One study found 52% of parenting students left higher education before degree attainment (at six years), compared to 31.7% of their non-parenting counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). Barriers to degree completion include affordability and availability of childcare (NCES, 2002). As the prevalence of parenting students has increased, the availability of campus-based childcare has declined (Miller et al., 2014). Other structural barriers include a lack of campus housing and insufficient program flexibility (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Brown & Amankwaa, 2007; Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Yakaboski, 2010).

Federal law protects pregnant and parenting students from discrimination and assures equal access to education. Students' rights under Title IX include taking a "reasonable" period of leave for childbirth. This leave can be applied to academic programs, campus employment, and athletic positions and scholarships (National Women's Law Center, 2012). Although the policy extends to both pregnant and parenting students, most applications focus on issues of pregnancy. Since parenting is not considered a "temporary disability," provisions may not be perceived as applicable to common challenges faced by parenting students, such as missing classes due to lack of childcare (Brown & Nichols, 2013). Issues facing parenting students, instead, are often positioned outside of institutional responsibility and are construed in terms of optional support services.

Several recent initiatives aimed to increase support for parenting students. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) identified parenting students as a priority. Schumacher (2013) provided examples of programs that cover a gambit of support, including: inclusivity on campus, academic support, childcare services, financial aid, housing, interpersonal support services, and community resources. Federal programs, such as the Pregnancy Assistance Fund (IWPR, 2012) and Obama's "Moms Return to School" initiative, have also called attention to this issue.

The Role of Organizational Culture in Promoting Change

Tierney (2008) suggested, "an organization's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it and concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level" (p. 24). Understanding the culture of the university and the

perceptions of stakeholders to affect institutional change is imperative. Change processes can be thwarted when members do not see the relevance of the proposed change for their institution and/or when the proposed change violates cultural norms (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Advocates seeking to implement change around issues of work–life balance or to institute family-friendly policies may identify areas of potential resistance and strategies for presenting potentially controversial concepts by first examining institutional culture (Lester, 2013).

Studies on the relationship between organizational culture and family-friendly issues in higher education have predominately focused on faculty and staff experiences. Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2006) found female faculty's perspectives on mothering within the academe were strongly tied to both the specific requirements and the culture of an individual institution. Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Twombly (2007) later found the culture of community colleges was perceived as more "balanced" and family-friendly compared to four-year colleges and universities. Sallee (2013) examined "father-friendly" versus "family-friendly" universities through the lens of gender norms and institutional culture. She found gendered norms around expectations of parenting were associated with the degree to which universities enacted both formal and informal policies to help male faculty balance the responsibilities of fatherhood and work.

Like faculty (and staff), parenting students must also balance competing responsibilities including parenting, education, and often employment (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Estes, 2011). Several studies have examined graduate students' experiences of work–life balance in academia (Martinez, Ordu, Della Sala, & McFarlane, 2013; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Stimpson & Filer, 2011). Few have examined how institutional policies and practices affect parenting students' negotiation of this balance and none were found that examined organizational culture and family-friendly policies and practices for parenting students. This study examined stakeholder perceptions and attitudes towards providing support for parenting students within one Mid-Atlantic state university [MASU] to better understand how to advocate for programs and policies that would support parenting students. The research questions were: What are stakeholders' (faculty, staff, and students') perceptions and attitudes around providing support for parenting students at MASU? How do stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions reflect the underlying organizational culture at MASU?

Conceptual Framework

Tierney's (2008) interpretivist framework of organizational culture was used to guide the study. Tierney suggests organizational culture is not a static reality but is socially constructed by members within an organization. He argued for three central components of an interpretive research design of organizational culture. The first, to gather multiple perspectives from within the organization was accomplished by interviewing parenting students, non-parenting students, faculty, and staff from across the different units within MASU. The second, to conduct a longitudinal and historical analysis (Tierney specifies the importance of including a full academic year in the study of organizational culture in higher education). The current study covered one academic year at MASU and included an examination of the university's history and traditions. The third, to include institutional portraits, was addressed through rich description of the case and highlighting of voices of multiple constituencies.

Tierney (2008) argued "the purpose of our theoretical models is not merely to describe the world, but to change it" (p. 65). An advocacy approach develops research questions around specific social issues, acknowledges knowledge is not neutral but reflective of power imbalances within society, and contains an action agenda (Creswell, 2013). In the current study, the research questions focused on a specific social issue within higher education, methods were designed to include and promote the voices of a marginalized and underrepresented population, and there was a stated aim of using study findings to increase an understanding of the role of organizational culture in advocating for change.

Methods

An exploratory single case study design was chosen as it facilitated gathering information from multiple sources with varied perspectives. Study goals were to comprehensively represent the institution's response to parenting students and to discover potential avenues and approaches for advocacy (Yin, 2003). This case study was bounded by a single university, MASU, which was selected opportunistically. When the study began, MASU was in the process of re-examining several family-friendly policies and resources for faculty and staff, but issues around parenting students were not being considered. This campus-wide discussion provided a unique opportunity to examine current perceptions and practices regarding parenting students. The case study includes data generated from informal conversations and in-depth interviews with faculty, staff, and students. Published and publically available documents on institutional history, policies, and procedures were reviewed to flesh out emerging themes.

Participants were recruited using both active and passive methods. Active methods included word of mouth, recruitment in 13 classrooms and direct e-mail to faculty and staff. Passive methods included advertising in the school paper and an adult student listserv, and distributing fliers in well-trafficked spots across campus. Altogether 102 people were contacted or contacted the study and 56 (55%) completed interviews, with the highest response rate from parenting students.

Following recruitment, interviews were scheduled with a trained interviewer in a neutral on campus location. Interviews were conducted in the 2009–2010 academic year. Recruitment and interviewing continued until saturation was achieved for all participant subtypes. Participants provided written consent prior to beginning the interview. The study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interview guides covered experiences of being a parenting student at the university or interacting with parenting students, as well as specific challenges and benefits. Participants were also asked to describe available resources, policies, and programs for parenting students and ones they felt were needed in the university. Parenting students were asked which resources and programs they had used. Participant demographic characteristics were also gathered.

Description of Participants

Table 1 shows the breakdown of interviews by participant type. The majority (70%) of participants were female and 61% identified as White/Caucasian. Age ranges among the students were 18–22 for non-parenting and 18–39 for parenting students. Twenty percent of faculty and staff had worked at MASU for 10 years or more and 77% were parents themselves. Compared to the overall student and faculty populations, students of Color and female faculty were over-represented. Representation was achieved across MASU schools and colleges during the data collection year, with the exception of an undergraduate honors college. Five of the staff participants were administrators in schools or centers and the rest held positions in both general (e.g., library) or student (e.g., student affairs) support services.

Table 1. Sample Demographics by type of Participant

Type		Female	White	Black	Other	Undergrad
	n	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Parenting Students	24	16 (67)	12 (50)	12 (50)	0 (0)	18 (75)
Non-Parenting Students	6	5 (83)	2 (33)	2 (33)	2 (33)	6 (100)
Faculty	15	9 (60)	11 (73)	4 (27)	0 (0)	–
Staff	11	9 (82)	9 (82)	9	3	–
Total	56	39 (70)	34 (61)	27	5	24 (43)

Analysis

Transcripts were uploaded into Atlas.ti to help with organization and retrieval of text. A team approach was undertaken throughout the analytic process. First, transcripts were read several times by each team member. Then brief episodic profiles highlighting key issues within transcripts were developed and shared. Based upon initial readings, episodic profiles, and study aims, a codebook was developed jointly. A priori, or pre-existing, codes were developed from initial interview questions and previous studies that guided study aims. Transcripts were coded by two team members with discrepancies resolved through discussion. From this process, several themes emerged that highlighted tensions around stakeholders' concerns with implementing policies to support parenting students. As these themes emerged, institutional documents, including published and unpublished policies, procedures, mission statements, meeting minutes, and historical references were reviewed to provide a context for understanding participants' perspectives. Consistent memoing, a process in which researchers record their ideas and possible emergent codes, was completed at the code, transcript, and theme levels (Creswell, 2013).

Early in the process, bracketing memos, developed to identify and explore authors' relationships to the topic and data were shared and discussed. This process provided a starting point for actively incorporating the positionality of each team member within the study. Authors positioned themselves as teachers of parenting students, as being/having been a parenting student, having been a nonparenting student, and having been the child of a parenting student. The experience of being a parenting student elicited the strongest reactions to the data. Issues that emerged from this process included: shame, need for privacy, visibility and invisibility of

parenting as a student, and challenges and struggles of combining pregnancy/parenting with educational requirements. Individual reflections were woven into discussions and reactions to the data were recorded and shared throughout the analysis. Exploring their positionality strengthened authors' desire to advocate for the population and guided the examination of organizational culture as a key factor in an advocacy plan.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. Although efforts were made to include members across the campus, data are over-represented by parenting students, students of Color, and female faculty. Parenting students were the most likely to respond to passive recruitment efforts, possibly indicating their desire to have their voices heard. Only a handful of nonparenting students responded to more active recruitment efforts, possibly indicating a perceived lack of relevance of the topic to their school experiences. Many faculty participants taught in professional schools and/or departments that emphasize social justice and have a larger percentage of non-traditional students. While the data include faculty working in more traditional disciplines, such as physical sciences, there are many departments (e.g., history, economics) without representation in the study. Potentially, faculty participation was reflective of personal interest in the topic and over-represented by faculty who have more interactions with parenting students. Also, the data may be dated; attitudes towards parenting students may have changed and educational advances, such as increases in online programming and the creation of Title IX coordinator positions, have occurred. These changes may have an effect on organizational culture over time. In addition, this is a single case study. Future studies should include longitudinal and multi-case designs to increase the transferability of findings. In spite of these limitations, this study is one of the first to examine a university's response to parenting students and offers a valuable contribution to the literature for understanding how these responses are shaped by organizational culture.

Results

To answer the research questions, a case description positioned within Tierney's (2008) framework is presented followed by a description of four themes (Practice Over Policy, Differential Treatment, Faculty–Student Relations, and Problematizing Parenting Students) that emerged from the analysis.

Case Description

Environment

Environment may be defined as the physical location of the university, the population it serves, its placement in a larger institutional system, and the economic and political forces that shape it (Tierney, 2008). As a construct of culture, environment is dependent upon member definitions of and attitudes towards a university. MASU is a mid-sized regional state university in a small liberal city within a fairly conservative southern state. MASU was founded as a normal school in the late 1880s and became a women's college in the early 1930s and a co-educational institution in the mid-1960s. Normal schools were colleges/universities that provided teacher training and represented broadening educational opportunities for populations not traditionally associated

with the pursuit of university/college, namely people of Color, women, and students from lower income families (Ogren, 2003). From its inception as a normal school through its current designation as a regional state university, MASU has a long history of serving non-traditional and commuter students.

At the time of the study, there were both internal (e.g., recent changes to administration and leadership) and external (e.g., changing higher education norms and a weak economic context) influences to MASU's environment. Budget cuts are an important context to this study as student support services were at-risk of being defunded. During the study, the Office of Adult Services was cut and then later reinstated as the Office of Adult and Commuter Students with limited staffing. While this office was not specifically designed to serve the needs of parenting students, it included parenting students as constituents since, regardless of age, parenting students are considered adult or nontraditional students. Although MASU did not provide specialized services to parenting students during the study, it provided services and recognition to a number of other specialized student populations (e.g., veterans, first generation students).

Online course availability at MASU was burgeoning during the study, although many "core" or required courses were not yet available and availability varied widely among majors and disciplines. Also, there was a push to create online distance education programs that were generally unavailable to on-campus students. Although parenting students who were able to take advantage of online courses reported they were helpful (Brown & Nichols, 2013), many still had to negotiate on-campus schedules because of the lack of breadth and/or accessibility of online courses in their majors.

Mission

Per Tierney (2008), the mission of a university includes both the official stated values of the university and the informal perceptions of its members. MASU is described as a "learner-centered public research institution" and its stated mission focused on being "inclusive" and "responsive," while seeking to make "a difference in the lives of students and the communities it serves." The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classified MASU as a "research university with high research activity…[and]…community engagement." There was a history of close faculty–student interaction and a commitment to community service/engagement from both faculty and students.

Informally, members perceived MASU as a place where students are cared for and where students' unique needs are addressed on a case-by-case basis. Faculty and staff offered examples of and reflections on the diverse challenges MASU students faced and felt the university's mission was to help students navigate these challenges. MASU embraced a "culture of care" in its response to students. This "culture of care" was perceived by parenting students as being supported by faculty and many described accommodations faculty had made.

Socialization

How members of a university interact with one another and become integrated into the institution is reflected in Tierney's (2008) definition of socialization. In the current case, socialization was

seen in faculty's assumptions of autonomy, particularly in the classroom. Several participants expressed that flexibility towards or accommodation of parenting students would be difficult to encourage or enforce among faculty as a whole and related this to issues of faculty's socialization as autonomous agents in the classroom.

While there was a strong desire among faculty for increased university-level support and information around parenting issues, some participants maintained ultimately the responsibility for classroom management and decision-making resided with individual faculty. Tension between faculty desire for increased university oversight and policy and the desire to maintain control over classroom policies was evident throughout the staff and faculty interviews.

Information

According to Tierney (2008), information refers to both members' perception of what is considered knowledge and how that information is communicated. Parenting student and faculty beliefs and comfort level regarding the divulging and discussing of family-related concerns became important information-related issues in the current case. Some faculty members described going out of their way to discuss parenting issues with students and reported multiple, detailed interactions that took place in the classroom, through advising, and in research activities. Other faculty members did not provide detailed discussions of accommodations for or interactions with parenting students and acknowledged this information was not a part of their teaching experience. Parenting students also expressed varying comfort levels around sharing personal information with faculty.

Strategy

The impetus and responsibility for organizational change are included in Tierney's (2008) definition of strategy. Tensions between top-down and bottom-up/grassroots approaches to change exist at most institutions of higher education (Kezar, 2011). Although many participants felt the administration should assume responsibility for any proposed policies or programs, there was a strong belief within MASU that change should occur from the bottom-up. This belief was evidenced by several initiatives related to family friendliness that emerged on the campus early in 2009 and served as an impetus for this study.

Independent of each, a faculty group and a staff group started building a case to increase resources and address policies around family-friendly issues. Eventually the two groups joined forces and presented a joint report to the university's chancellor who reinstated a defunct Benefits Committee to address the issues. The Benefits Committee created a flex-time program for staff and then turned its attention to providing back-up childcare to MASU employees during the county schools' teacher workdays. A second initiative was the creation of a lactation room on campus. Previously the university had no space specifically designated for lactating women. A small workgroup consisting of faculty, staff, and students formed to advocate for the room and develop procedures for its use. After a successful launch, space was sought and found for four additional lactation rooms across campus. A third initiative, started while this study was still in progress, aimed to create a parenting student organization on campus. The first steps of this initiative, spear-headed by a parenting student with support from an administrator and a faculty

member, included sending out a survey to the student population to assess interest in such a group. Although they received strong support for the organization it failed to come to fruition, primarily due to competing time demands faced by the parenting student.

Leadership

Finally, Tierney (2008) defined leadership as the formal and informal leaders of the university. Shortly before the start of the study, MASU underwent a leadership change gaining a new chancellor and provost. Several participants mentioned the new chancellor as the formal leader who should address parenting issues. As MASU did not have any formal department or program charged with providing services for parenting students, there was a pervasive sense of confusion and uncertainty among participants around leadership. None of the faculty or staff felt they personally, or the group they represented, were the appropriate point person/group for any related endeavors.

Themes

During the analysis, four distinct themes emerged from our examination of stakeholder perceptions and attitudes. These themes include: an emphasis on enacting practice over establishing policy to meet parenting students' needs; concerns over the possibility of providing differential treatment in meeting the needs of parenting students; differential experiences and attitudes regarding the appropriateness of faculty–student interactions around parenting issues; and stakeholder perceptions of the characteristics of parenting students as being problematic. These themes are described below along with the ways in which they both support and reflect the organizational culture of MASU.

Practice Over Policy

Most participants acknowledged decisions were made at the practice level, particularly through faculty–student interactions, and noted a lack of institutional-level policies. As one White female faculty member suggested, these practices generally occurred at the intersection of faculty/student relationships and interactions:

I haven't seen anything at the organizational level … sadly. I have seen some professors in my department do some pretty remarkable things though. I've seen them watch young kids while their parents are taking make-up tests … and occupy our students' kids while our students … were doing defences. … everything I've seen has been informal …

Another White female administrator noted, "We don't have good policies. … I worry about it sometimes, you know the advisor who is not open to pregnancy or parenting, that they can be punitive." A White male faculty member, who expressed extremely liberal attitudes towards accommodating all students, acknowledged not all faculty shared these views and that, in the absence of policy, differing ideologies created problems for students. He was not, however, in favor of instituting policy that governed faculty behavior towards students and instead felt a bottom-up and dialogic approach to changing faculty attitudes would be more successful.

There were no definitive guidelines described for *how* faculty should determine an appropriate accommodation. Several participants used terms like "reasonable parameters" when describing accommodations, but there was no discussion about how a faculty member might determine what was reasonable. Most participants felt faculty should be flexible while still maintaining high student work and conduct standards, but it was left up to each faculty member to decide how this would be accomplished.

Differential Treatment

While there was fairly pervasive recognition among study participants that parenting students might have distinct needs, there was a reluctance to create, advocate for, or even acknowledge parenting students are (or should be) treated differently than non-parenting students. Many participants espoused practice-level accommodations for *all* students (depending on specific individual need) rather than designing accommodation policies for parenting students.

Participants expressed concerns with policies and programs showing differential treatment for parenting students. Several students described the tenuous relationship between faculty offering accommodations and the potentially damaging effects of perceptions that faculty were showing favoritism. As a White female undergraduate explained, "[Professors] don't want to feel like they're favoring one student over another. … no professor wants that feeling or for some student to accuse them of favoring another student."

The desire to *not* differentiate between groups of students appeared to arise, in part, through non-discriminatory interpretations of the aforementioned "culture of care." Several participants provided examples of unique situations that may require accommodations for students who were not parenting. Unique situations included students with disabilities, students with aged parents, and students experiencing a financial crisis. Developing a stated policy for parenting students was construed as unfair to non-parenting students who have other types of responsibilities, such as "caring for parents who have Alzheimer's," or whose spouses "…have lost their jobs and they've been forced to go back to work." Some participants wondered if differential treatment might even be illegal.

Other participants felt differential treatment would be problematic because of the feminist struggle around normalizing pregnancy and parenting, which suggested women should *not* be treated differently when pregnant or parenting. While they perceived similarities between pregnant and disabled students in terms of accommodations and potential policies, they were not comfortable categorizing pregnancy as a disability, even though many used it as an example.

At the same time, participants acknowledged differential accommodations for parenting students existed across departments. As a White female administrator explained, some departments are a more "friendly place … to get pregnant," than others. This participant appeared resigned to inter-departmental differences conceding, "it's the nature of the beast."

Faculty–Student Relations

Meeting parenting students' needs through faculty–student interactions required reciprocal communication. The degree to which this occurred varied greatly among participants. Some

parenting students explicitly mentioned the need to communicate their unique circumstances as parenting students with professors and advisors and most reported being upfront with faculty allowed for greater flexibility when conflicts arose. However, several reported concerns, such as a Black female undergraduate who experienced an emergency C-section and was unable to complete her assignments. After spending time in the ICU, she noted her "teacher wasn't very understanding about it, he still wanted me to meet the deadlines and do the work … as if I was at home or in class."

Not all students were comfortable sharing personal information with faculty. As one White female undergraduate described:

Having to have to give up information to instructors to me is always problematic. … its setting up the dynamic where you have to tell your professors that you are [a] parent or that you're pregnant kind of doesn't protect your privacy even if it gets you privileges.

Several faculty participants noted the importance of establishing relationships with students to facilitate requests for accommodations. One White female administrator described the unique relationship that develops between an advisor and advisee:

Compare it to the physician-patient relationship. [It] relies on two people trusting each other and working together. Like Dr. X is your advisor, so you're working with her outside of the realm of any regulations … it's not like unionized or something. It's a special relationship.

Other faculty participants seemed unaware of the issues faced by parenting students and/or did not endorse these issues as pertinent in their classrooms. One faculty member reported no student had ever asked her for accommodations while another taught mostly male students and felt this was the reason he did not need to make any accommodations for parenting students. A third reported students "find their own way to do that [breastfeeding/pumping]" when discussing the need for a lactation room, since no students had ever asked him about one.

Problematizing Parenting Students

Stakeholders' perceptions of parenting students illuminated how parenting students were problematized at MASU. Parenting students were largely assumed to be undergraduates, young or traditional-aged, single, with unplanned pregnancies. These assumptions served as a lens through which faculty, staff, and non-parenting students saw the needs and challenges of parenting students.

None of the participants openly judged students for becoming parents, but a few felt other faculty or staff may be judgmental because of morals against single or young motherhood. One White female staff member stated: "I think for a lot of people, it's probably … overcoming like your personal … biases (chuckle). … a lot of people … have an ideal of what … a family should look like." Another White female employee was more explicit noting, "there seems to be some … social stigma around … either unplanned or out of wedlock pregnancies." Several parenting students who were pregnant while on campus confirmed this moral judgment. A Black female undergraduate reported, "being pregnant on campus is not fun (laughter) … well not my instructors but other instructors who would see me on campus would … give me dirty looks …."

There was also a sense from some participants that "responsible" parenting students deserve assistance, implying others do not. As one Black female faculty member explained:

I think some faculty are like "So? You should be able to do this, you're the one that chose to have a kid." I think especially for young single moms there's a stigma that goes along with things like "You're pregnant so you should've learned not to be pregnant. It's not my fault that you came across this."

Discussion

By examining stakeholders' perceptions of how parenting students could or should be supported at MASU within the context of organizational culture, the study sought to better understand (a) how change related to parenting students might occur and (b) how organizational culture could be used to identify barriers and facilitators to creating a family-friendly campus for all students. At MASU, organizational culture is dynamic and informed by conflicts between top-down and bottom-up approaches to change. The culture is bounded by the history and traditions of being a normal school and a women's college; having a learner-centered mission that predicates a culture of care; its location in the "Bible-belt" of America; and the need to be competitive in the ever-changing world of higher education. A lack of university-wide policies created a practice-based response to parenting student needs that involved faculty–student communication and accommodations. Lack of formal policy meant practice dominated, placing the locus of responsibility on individuals instead of on the institution.

Members of MASU disagreed on the approach to providing support services for parenting students. Some considered support as a function of leadership and perceived faculty and staff as powerless to institute policy-level change. Others believed the culture of faculty autonomy meant policy-level changes would never be accepted or enacted by faculty. Regardless of how the lack of policy was articulated, overall, members of MASU did not believe parenting students could be supported at a policy level. Providing examples of successful policy-level accommodations and support from other institutions, such as those identified in the IWPR working paper (Schumacher, 2013), might be a key initial strategy for advocating for change.

Many participants positioned parenting student needs as a student responsibility. That is, individual students (often with no institutional support) were responsible for reaching out to faculty (and/or staff). The study uncovered a member-wide expectation that parenting students should speak up for themselves, either individually with professors and advisors or collectively by creating an organization to address their issues. While the individual approach worked for many of the parenting students, the one attempt at collective action did not prove effective as evidenced by the parenting student who tried but ultimately failed to start an organization. Although this student had some staff and faculty support, placing the onus on the student was particularly problematic as parenting students already suffer from a lack of time to devote to extracurricular activities (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Wyatt, 2011).

Several problems stemming from a practice-based strategy for supporting parenting students were identified. Without formal policies, organizations, or programs in place for parenting students, none of their concerns were conceptualized on a larger scale. Issues parenting students

voiced as important and relevant outside of the classroom, such as transportation and registration (Brown & Nichols, 2013), remain unacknowledged and unresolved.

The data clearly demonstrated examples of faculty who did not invite interactions with parenting students and therefore did not foster personal relationships. In the absence of policy, practice cannot work unless all faculty members embrace the decision to accommodate students individually and then apply this decision to parenting students. Some students were uncomfortable disclosing personal information to faculty and/or did not want to have their family responsibilities seen as an excuse for an inability to comply with faculty expectations. At MASU, the strategy for dealing with issues encountered by parenting students through practice instead of policy appears insufficient to meet students' needs.

Most staff and faculty participants argued policies were unnecessary because of the university's informal mission around the "culture of care." Several also argued that instituting policies for this population would be wrong because it would create differential treatment of students by group (rather than differential treatment on an individual basis). Of interest, both arguments occurred within the context of an institution that provides policies, resources, and initiatives for special subpopulations of students such as veterans, athletes, and first generation college students. This paradoxical stance begs an important question: What is different about parenting students? One possibility, suggested by the data, involves assumptions held regarding the demographics of parenting students and the association of these assumptions with moral values. Moral values regarding unintended pregnancies and single parenthood surfaced in campus-wide perceptions of parenting students. Pregnancy and parenthood were associated with issues of responsibility particularly around who should be helped (who deserves help) and who should not be (who is responsible for their own situation). Previous research highlighted the experiences of stigmatization on single mothers in higher education (Haleman, 2004). The current study suggests these stereotypes may be extended to all parenting students. A reliance on practice may also operationalize bias based on favoritism shown to students who may appear more deserving due to societal norms surrounding who should and who should not be parenting. Advocates may need to first assess perceptions of parenting students by stakeholders and possibly educate university members on prevalence and/or diversity of parenting students on their campus.

Implications for Practice

Results highlight a lack of policies and support services available to meet the needs of parenting students that led to variation in practices and placed significant burden on parenting students, faculty, and staff. Campus perceptions centered on young single mothers and did not account for the diversity in sex, age, and marital status of the parenting students who participated in the study. Understanding how needs of parenting students are perceived and fit within MASU's culture can aid in efforts to advocate for change on their behalf.

Defining and acknowledging tensions that currently exist at MASU around practice versus policy accommodations for parenting students; between bottom-up and top-down approaches to change; and between individualized accommodations for all students versus recognizing and supporting specific groups of students can help inform efforts to advocate on parenting students' behalf.

Further, identifying cultural issues embedded in assumptions around the identity of parenting students and moral beliefs regarding who deserves to be helped can provide a starting point for addressing change.

While the current case study speaks directly to potential advocacy pathways at MASU, the findings transfer to other institutions seeking to make change. Findings highlight the need to examine organizational culture around a specific issue prior to developing advocacy efforts. Understanding organizational culture and how it influences the process of change within the university is paramount to facilitating change necessary to meet the needs of current and future students (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Advocates for parenting students within an institution may best serve this population by examining stakeholders' perceptions of the population and how messages of change might be interpreted based on their organizational culture.

This study provides an initial step in understanding how organizational culture manifests at the university to create an institutional climate that several informants described as family un-friendly. Future work includes investigating change strategies to assist the university in recognizing parenting students as a specialized group of and then developing strategies to accommodate parenting students' needs.

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