

Pregnant and Parenting Students on Campus: Policy and Program Implications for a Growing Population

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Abstract:

The number of pregnant and parenting students in higher education is increasing. Research suggests this population experiences added pressure and stress while pursuing their education. Few resources exist for these students and the universities who provide services do not adequately promulgate them to the campus community. The research presented examines the policies and programmatic needs of pregnant and parenting students at a mid-Atlantic state university. Participants identified both tangible and intangible resources in which new or better policies and programs were needed to assist them in completing their degree. Study implications are discussed and recommendations for policy are presented.

Keywords: nontraditional students | higher education policy | qualitative research | pregnant students | parenting students

Article:

Introduction

Pregnant and parenting students, a subgroup of nontraditional students, are enrolling in higher education at numbers higher than previous decades. While the majority of students are still between the ages of 18-24, there has been a greater rise in non-traditional students in the past three decades. However, the change in enrollment has not always been met by a change in resource and program allocations to meet the unique needs of this population and assist them in obtaining their college degree. Using Bourdieu's cultural capital as a lens, this study presents the experiences of pregnant and parenting students at one university in their attempt to complete their degree. The findings center around the policy and programmatic areas which at times prevent them from reaching their goals, followed by a discussion of ways participants suggest addressing these needs and larger policy and programmatic issues resulting from these findings.

Finally, suggestions on how to proceed in future research and collegiate programming are offered.

Literature Review

Today more nontraditional students are enrolled in some form of higher education than ever before. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2007), adult or nontraditional students made up 38% of the 17.6 million people attending a college or university. Over the past three decades (1971-2000), the rate of adult students entering postsecondary education tripled while the rate for students 24 years or younger increased by only 51%. In fact, the traditional college student, defined as “one who earns a high school diploma, enrolls full time immediately after finishing high school, depends on parents for financial support, and either does not work during the school year or works part time” now makes up only 27% of the total college population (NCES, 2002).

In reality the face of the nontraditional student is wide and varied. Research has found that students can be described as a minimally, moderately or highly non-traditional based on a 7-point characteristic scale: (a) being older than the typical student (18-24), (b) attending school part-time, (c) working full-time, d) being independent, (e) having dependent(s), (f) being a single parent and/or (g) having a GED or high school completion certificate (Horn & Carrol, 1996). A nontraditional student can encompass almost any combination of the above, creating a breadth of possibilities. This paper focuses on the experiences of the pregnant and/or parenting student members of this population and their perception of school programs and policies which would assist them in completing their degree.

As the enrollment of nontraditional college students continues to increase and access to higher education becomes a more pressing need for economic security, awareness and sensitivity to possible barriers for these students needs to be considered. In 2006, Capella University released *Degrees of Opportunity*, a study of the value, motivation, and feasibility of pursuing higher education for adults ages 25 and older. Findings showed that while just over half of respondents indicated desire to pursue additional education, far fewer felt that they actually could. The most common barrier cited was the ability to juggle school, familial, and work responsibilities. Finally, The National Center for Education Statistics found that of the adult students who enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program between 1989 and 1990, only 31% had completed their program, compared to 54% of their traditional counterparts (2002).

One subpopulation who may experience increased difficulty in completing their degree is pregnant and parenting (P&P) students. The NCES reports that approximately 53% of nontraditional students support more than one dependent and 29% are single parents between the age of 30 and 40 (2002); it is not known how many parenting students are of traditional college student age. Aside from this report and a few isolated studies, there is no definitive count of how many P&P students are attending school. However, as the rate of nontraditional students increases, it is almost certain that the rate of P&P students will follow. To prepare for, attract and

retain this population, schools need to become more versed in the policy and programmatic elements which will assist P&P students in degree completion. It is theorized that extra services and programs are needed to assist pregnant and parenting students in successfully negotiating their multiple roles but little literature is found addressing this area.

Unfortunately, information on pregnant and parenting students is sparse in the literature. A full literature search revealed that this population has largely gone unnoticed by the academic community, with the majority of published research focusing on either undergraduate single mothers or graduate students. Studies conducted with primarily single mothers (Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Brown & Amakwaa, 2007; Yakaboski, 2010) found this population reported feeling stigmatized by the larger campus population, which resulted in experiences of isolation. While self-identifying sometimes created camaraderie with other students, some found that this led to marginalization in the classroom or stereotyping of the experience. This stereotyping included the ideas that most single mothers are welfare recipients and single mothers are rewarded or receive a free ride through federal assistance programs. Further, P&P students are often defined by their parenting role rather than by their role as a student (Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Brown & Amankwaa, 2007). Many felt this became the sole focus of their fellow students in conversation, thus limiting their interactions with peers.

Across both undergraduate and graduate populations, structural limitations issues were found within schools that restricted students' ability to meet their needs. One issue reported was the mismatch between pedagogical strategies used within classrooms, such as group work or attendance to outside programs, and the schedules and time demands inherent in the lives of parenting students (Duquaine-Watson, 2007). Other issues included: overall lack of program flexibility (Cujec, 2000; Yakaboski, 2010), lack of available housing for pregnant and parenting students (Cohen, 2005; McCormack, 2007), lack of lactation facilities on campus (Springer, Parker & Levitan-Reid, 2009) and the difficulty in obtaining childcare for young children (Brown & Amakwaa, 2007; Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2001; Duquaine-Watson, 2007). In all instances, P&P students discussed how these structural impediments created or augmented financial, transportation, and access barriers.

Finally, it was found that even when resources were available for pregnant and parenting students, there was little to no knowledge about their existence. As The Feminists for Life of America's report "Perception is Reality" discusses, there is either a ". . . genuine lack of resources on campus, or there is ignorance about existing resources even among student activists who are most vested in supporting services for pregnant and parenting students" (2008, p. 1). This study, designed to assess student awareness of campus pregnant and parenting resources nationwide, found parenting students are largely unaware of the availability of housing and/or financial aid resources directed at them. Finally, what information that is available is often not successfully disseminated within its target population. While these studies are the first steps in describing and understanding this understudied population, there is a large gap in existing knowledge where more research is needed. First, the majority of the studies described above

focus on two populations: community college students and graduate students. Based on the most recent enrollment data, degree seeking undergraduate enrollment (17.5 million students) exceeded that of both graduate school (2.86 million students) and community college enrollment (6.8 million students) (NCES, 2010; American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). Therefore, much of what is known can not necessarily be applied to those at a four-year institution.

Second, the existing knowledge has been focused solely on the experiences of mothers who are attending schools, with little acknowledgement to what the father might be experiencing. Because formal statistics do not exist describing the parenting student population in schools, not including fathers in the research is an oversight which needs to be addressed. It would behoove researchers to understand how the issue of parenting affects fathers and what their unique needs are to enable them to reach their academic goals.

Finally, most studies have focused on low-wage earners and minority participants. This creates doubt in how far the current body of knowledge can be extrapolated and applied to other populations. A greater effort needs to exist in order to understand if their story is universal or if people of different race and income level experience these issues differently.

Programs and Policies Targeting Pregnant and Parenting Students

Before beginning our research, we conducted a wider internet search to uncover other collegiate services offered to pregnant and parenting students that were not highlighted in the academic literature. This was done to understand what other schools have done to address the needs of pregnant and parenting students and inform the development of the study and interview protocol. We found several online resources, including College Mom Magazine and the Association for NonTraditional Students in Higher Education (ANTSHE), which have been developed to assist students and foster a sense of community in this population. In addition, several schools were found to have instituted policies (pregnancy parking, academic leave, etc) to assist P&P students in achieving their academic goals. Below are the practices, policies and programs which informed the study's design.

Among University-level programs, there were found to be several common efforts and programs for pregnant and parenting students. Both Stanford and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offer on-campus daycare services (The Stanford Daily, 2006), with Chapel Hill offering subsidized childcare for students on campus (personal communication, 2010). Paid maternity leave for faculty, staff, post-docs and graduate students employed at both schools is offered (The Stanford Daily, 2006; personal communication, 2010). At Stanford, the university offers dependent insurance to graduate students through the student insurance plan and provides some graduate student housing for married students and families. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a guide was developed detailing family friendly services on and around campus, financial aid services, childcare facilities, healthcare options, legal aid, housing,

pregnancy support, nursing support, social support services and transportation. The university also offers funds to subsidized childcare for students on campus.

There are also close to a dozen lactation rooms available across campus for students, faculty and staff and one housing community specifically for graduate students, married couples and those with children. However, while these formal policies are notable, one study conducted with graduate directors of sociology programs across the nation found that most policies and resources provided are informal and decided on a case-by-case basis (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

On the National Level, initiatives have been developed to assist single mothers and some fathers to return to school and/or reach their academic goals. One effort to assist pregnant and parenting students includes the now defunct Elizabeth Cady Stanton Pregnant and Parenting Student Services Act of 2007. This Act sought to bring services to the underserved by encouraging,

. . . eligible institutions of higher education to establish and operate pregnant and parenting student services offices for pregnant students, parenting students, prospective parenting student who are anticipating a birth or adoption, and student who are placing or have place a child for adoption. (Govtrack.us, 2007)

Introduced February 15, 2007 by Representative Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) and 12 co-sponsors, the bill was referred to and died in committee. In spite of its death, this proposed act serves as the first formal federal recognition of the need to assist this population.

In 2009, three of President Obama's first official acts were to increase the limits of federal Pell Grants from \$4050 to \$5100, which can be obtained by single mothers. The last two came as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (U.S. Congress, 2009). The first was the American Opportunity Tax Credit program which created a \$4000 refundable tax credit to help students and families pay for postsecondary education. The second, dubbed Obama's 'Moms Return to School' government grant, provides funds for mothers to attend school online while caring for their children and reducing the need for child care expenses during class time. These policies and actions demonstrate an increased national awareness of the need to provide and support this growing student population.

Finally, the National Collegiate Athletic Association has developed and released a policy surrounding the treatment of pregnant and parenting student athletes. The policy works to protect the student athlete and her decision to have an abortion or carry out her pregnancy. The policy requires that the athletic trainer work with the regular physician to ensure that the athlete is given proper prenatal care, that appropriate measures are taken to ensure a successful pregnancy and that any benefits or team standing (including scholarships) are not lost while the athlete cares for her child. Specific regulations include the gradual decline in athlete participation as the pregnancy nears the second trimester, a way to extend the athlete's career an additional year in

cases of pregnancy and similar to maternity leave, the policy grants the athlete a minimum of 6 to 8 weeks leave from the team after the birth to recover and bond with the child (NCAA, 2008).

Importance of Targeting this Population

In spite of the “invisible” nature of this population, it is vitally important to create programs and policies geared towards pregnant and parenting students. The NCES (2002) has projected that nontraditional students will represent 35-38% of the undergraduate population in the next 15 years. With P&P students accounting for over 50% of nontraditional students, special consideration needs to be taken to provide for their needs and assist them in reaching their academic goals. One study found that over 60% of parenting students will eventually leave higher education, compared to just 37% of their non-parenting counterparts (NCES, 2002). Just a few of the beneficial outcomes for universities include: lower attrition rate, higher retention rate and more funds coming into the university. For the students, it will assist them in providing for their family and achieving their dreams.

In an effort to better understand the resources, policies and programs needed to assist pregnant and parenting students in meeting their academic goals, a case study was developed at a Mid-Atlantic State University (MASU), with an overarching paradigm of advocacy. This paradigm is often used by researchers to avoid imposing structural laws and theories on a population or topic of which little is known (Creswell 2007). Rather, the advocacy paradigm, “. . . should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The case study approach was selected as it can be used to gather information from multiple sources, with the goal of painting a comprehensive picture of one university’s approach to supporting pregnant and parenting students. The case study was bounded by a single university and includes data gathered from informal conversations and in-depth interviews with faculty, staff, and students (both pregnant and parenting and non-pregnant and parenting) as well as key informants from other universities that have implemented family-friendly policies for pregnant and parenting students. In addition, published and publically available documents on institutional history, policies, and procedures were reviewed. This paper reports on analyses conducted with the pregnant and parenting student interviews only in order to understand the experiences of this population as well as their perceived needs for academic success and thereby uncover ways the university can better meet these needs. For the purposes of this study, pregnant or parenting students were defined as students pursuing either a part-time or full-time undergraduate or graduate education and who are either a) expecting a child within the current academic school year or b) currently have a child for which they are responsible for rearing.

Theoretical Framework

In order to encapsulate the findings, Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction was utilized to frame the experiences of the participants. Cultural capital was developed by sociologist Pierre

Bourdieu to assist in explaining social inequality in the educational process. Cultural capital or the worth one's cultural group places on the acquired skills and artifacts an individual possesses that are used to order a person or a group in society (Bourdieu, 1984; Ovinck & Veasey, 2011; Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

However, the development of cultural capital and the effect it exerts on an individual's performance is influenced by other elements. Bourdieu states that an individual's cultural capital and the value placed on it is not an independent entity but also directly affected by their *habitus* (1984) and *field* (setting where one is at). *Habitus* is the internalization of one's life experiences, which ultimately impacts the perceptions and actions people have in their daily lives (Ovinck & Veasey, 2011; Bourdieu, 1984; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). In the case of this study, the field refers to the Middle Atlantic State University where the study was conducted. Therefore, what is seen as a barrier or hindrance to education by one participant may be inconsequential or irrelevant to the next.

Further, previous research suggests that habitus and cultural capital is a relevant framework from which to view the results. As demonstrated in the literature review, not all pregnant and parenting students have access to these resources and the type and degree of assistance varies between the type of student and institution one attends. One's cultural capital when they enter school to get education and ultimately acquire more capital is invariably affected by one's habitus and overall life chances. Further, research suggests that students with children are devalued or made to be outsiders by the rest of the campus population, thereby lowering their current cultural capital. This study represents one of the first attempts to examine, from the perceptions of pregnant and parenting students, this population's experiences attempting to gain more cultural capital and highlights the resources and elements they need to do so.

Methods

The current study draws on the strengths of exploratory research, which is used to better understand and define a problem for which little is known. Using Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction as an analytical lens, information regarding the available, used and needed programs, policies and resources for pregnant and parenting students was collated. The policy implications of these findings, possible solutions and examples of current practices are discussed.

Impetus for the Study

The interest in understanding the experiences of pregnant and parenting students developed in Spring 2009. The campus had gathered a committee to examine family friendly policies for faculty and staff but the question of students' needs was left unaddressed. The idea to examine student experiences was presented within a doctoral course taught by the second author. As a class project, doctoral students conducted a literature search and helped design the larger case study. An informal investigation into campus policies and resources revealed few formal policies or programs available to assist this population in their academic endeavors. It was also found that

while records were kept on the number of adult students (defined as 24 years or older) attending the university, similar statistics were not kept on pregnant and parenting students enrolled. Internal funding was sought and a smaller group of interested doctoral, masters and undergraduate students conducted the case study from which this study is drawn.

The authors decided to conduct a qualitative study on the population because there was little to no existing formal information on the population of interest. Qualitative research “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell 2007 p. 37). Further, qualitative research paints a contextual picture of a problem to provide a rich description of how the phenomenon is being experienced. While there is some information available on parenting students, much of it has been isolated to community college students or women of color. This article presents the first published attempt to understand the experiences of not only undergraduate and graduate students, but mothers and fathers as well. This makes the qualitative approach ideal for this research study because of the lack of information on how students in higher education, particularly those at a four-year institution, experience parenthood.

Because the interest for this study grew from the University’s effort to develop family friendly policies, a case study approach was deemed to be appropriate. A case study refers to research of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell 2007, p.73). Multiple groups of individuals were sought to investigate the experience of having pregnant and parenting students on campus, including faculty, staff, administrators, non-pregnant or parenting students and parenting students. Additionally, the policies and programs available on campus for the population were explored.

Key informants from other university previously identified as having policies and programs were contacted to understand more about how their efforts got started and the success of their programs on their respective campuses. Finally, information gained from interviews, such as local resources, were investigated as they arose. The case was isolated to a Mid-Atlantic State University (MASU) during the 2009-2010 school years. MASU has the most diverse student population of any campus within the state system (Camara, 2007). According to the MASU’s web site, in Fall 2009, 17,455 undergraduate students and 3,851 graduate students were enrolled in classes, with a total student body of 21,306 (2011). Of these students, 65.5% self-identified as white and 21% as black, 3% Asian, and 4% multiracial. Further, approximately 64% of students were undergraduates, 13% masters students and 4% doctoral students. Finally, the years attended for students varied, with 8% of undergraduate students, 4% of masters’ students and 29% of students entering their fifth or more year(s) of education at the start of the 2009-2010 school year.

Of these students, approximately 25% are classified as adult students, defined as those who are either over the age of 24 or parenting a child of their own (B. Graham & J. Gullo, personal communication, April 7, 2009). Of all undergraduates enrolled at MASU in Spring 2009, 2,483 students had been identified as adult students. However, it is not known how many parenting students are enrolled in the university at any given time as the appropriate office (Office of Adult Services; OAS) did not actively seek out the students but rather relied on self-identification. (B. Graham & J. Gullo, personal communication, April 7, 2009).

Data Collection

The research study was sought to answer two guiding questions: What is the climate (social, organizational, and physical) for pregnant and parenting students at MASU? and What new programs, policies, and procedures would benefit pregnant and parenting students at MASU? Interview questions were phrased to understand the lived experiences of pregnant and parenting students on campus, as well as the perceptions of others towards this population. Questions centered around the benefits and challenges of being a pregnant and parenting student, the available and needed resources on campus, the perception of others towards them, and what they felt was needed to increase their academic success.

Recruitment. Twenty-seven pregnant and parenting students were identified, with a total of 24 completing interviews during the 2009-2010 school year. Participants were recruited using both active and passive methods. Active methods included word of mouth, recruitment in 13 classrooms, with extra credit offered in 5 (4 of which were general education classes) and passive methods were advertising in the school paper and through the adult student list-serve, and fliers were left in the student counseling center, advising offices and other well trafficked spots across campus.

Once participants were recruited, interview times were scheduled with one of five trained interviewers. Efforts were made to select neutral and nonthreatening locations for the interviews. All but four student interviews were conducted in one of the university library's private collaborator spaces. Three of the four, all graduate students, were conducted in their or the first author's office at their request and the last was conducted offsite at the participant's request. The interviewers consisted of 2 female graduate student and 3 undergraduate female students. The second author, the principal investigator and a professor at the university conducted one interview with a graduate student who could not be accommodated by the schedule of any of the interviewers. The participant was not a student of the professor nor had they met prior to the interview. Interviewers were recruited and extensively trained by the principal investigator in both interviewing techniques and transcription methods prior to the start of the study.

All participants provided written consent to participate in the study prior to beginning the interview and the study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to an hour, with a mean time of 25 minutes. Interviews were audio-

recorded with digital recorders. In addition, interviewers took notes during the interview process, which were then written up into memos immediately following the interview. Two interviews, both fathers, one undergraduate and one graduate, were lost due to digital error. However, interview notes and memos were analyzed and found to be consistent with themes and issues from the rest of the sample. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the total number of transcription pages was 293.

The interview guide covered overall experiences of being a pregnant and/or parenting student at the university as well as specific challenges and benefits. Participants were also asked to describe the resources and programs that they knew were available, that they currently use or have used, as well as ones they felt are needed in the university. At the end of the interview students were also asked to supply demographic characteristics such as age, race, marital status, employment status, and program of study.

Participant demographics. Study participants included 24 pregnant and parenting students, consisting of undergraduate and graduate students. Students self-identified as either Black/African American or White, except for one participant who identified as White Latina. Table 1 below displays the breakdown by demographics.

Participants included 8 fathers and 16 mothers, 6 of which were expecting a child and 21 who had a child. These categories were not mutually exclusive, as a small handful of participants reported having one child and expecting the arrival of another sometime during the school year.

Analysis

Transcripts were uploaded into Atlas.-ti to help with organization and retrieval of text and to support the analyses. A team approach was undertaken by the first and second authors throughout the analytic process. First, each transcript was read several times in full by the both members of the team. The first author then developed brief narrative profiles that highlighted key issues within each transcript. Based upon the initial readings, the brief narrative profiles, and the original research questions, a codebook was developed jointly by the two authors. A priori, or pre-existing, codes were developed from the initial interview questions and previous studies which guided the development of the research question. All initial coding was completed by the first author, with the second author reviewing all coding selections. Discrepancies between the coding were resolved through discussion. The coding process resulted in several emergent codes from tangential themes that were discussed and incorporated into the codebook. The final codebook consisted of 10 a priori and emergent codes. Consistent memoing, the process in which researchers record their ideas, possible emergent codes and analysis of data throughout coding, was completed at the code, transcript, and theme levels that guided the authors throughout the process (Crosby, Diclemente, & Salazar, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

Table 1. Participants by Demographics and Parenting Status.

Pseudonym	Sex	Race	Educational level	Marital status	Parenting status	No. children
Kathleen	Female	White	Undergraduate	Married	Parenting	2
Megan	Female	Black	Undergraduate	Single	Parenting	2
Sally	Female	Black	Undergraduate	Partnered	Pregnant	1
Diane	Female	Black	Graduate	Married	Parenting	1
Dominique	Female	Black	Undergraduate	Single	Pregnant	1
Pryce	Female	Black	Undergraduate	Partnered	Both	2
Willow	Female	Black	Graduate	Married	Parenting	2
Erin	Female	Black	Undergraduate	Single	Parenting	1
Allison	Female	Black	Undergraduate	Married	Parenting	1
Heather	Female	White	Undergraduate	Married	Parenting	3
Wanda	Female	White	Undergraduate	Married	Parenting	2
Lauren	Female	Black	Graduate	Married	Parenting	1
Jacob	Male	White	Undergraduate	Married	Both	2
Isabelle	Female	White	Graduate	Married	Parenting	2
Eric	Male	White	Undergraduate	Single	Parenting	2
Nicholas	Male	White	Graduate	Married	Parenting	2
Mason	Male	White	Graduate	Married	Parenting	2
Claire	Female	White	Undergraduate	Married	Parenting	3
Parker	Male	White	Undergraduate	Married	Parenting	2
Harper	Female	Black	Undergraduate	Single	Parenting	1

Once transcripts were coded, an embedded analysis pertaining to programs and policies for pregnant and parenting students took place. Categorical aggregation for analysis and interpretation was selected as the goal was to determine what issues and policies were relevant and meaningful to the P&P students (Stake, 1995). The process began by analyzing each individual story to determine what issues, policies and/or programs affected their ability to meet their educational goals. Once these themes and topics for each individual were identified, they were compared across transcripts to determine common ground among the participants. Finally, these instances were compiled and a general description for each theme was created (Stake, 1995). Pseudonyms were created to reflect the ethnic and/or racial makeup of their name to assist the reader in connecting more personally with the experiences of the participants.

To interpret the findings, Bordieu's theory of social reproduction was applied. Particular attention was paid to the individuals' habitus or internalization of their experiences and how this seemed to impact their overall experience at the MASU. Comparisons between social groups, such as race or gender, were done to determine if one group was socially devalued or affected disproportionately over another. These findings were then used to inform policy and program suggestions for future work in the area.

Reliability and Validity of Findings

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of study findings, several different approaches for each were taken. For validity, three approaches were taken: peer review, triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2007). First, monthly meetings were held with the research team to engage in peer review and debriefing. Team meetings were held to discuss issues in the field, offer advice on how to proceed in additional interviews and refinements to the interview protocol were completed. Second, triangulation was used to verify the data. This was done by first reviewing the literature to formulate questions and probes surrounding the experience of being a pregnant and parenting student and by researching existing policies and programs which have been developed to serve this population. Finally, four participants agreed to member check the article. Member-checking is a technique used by researchers to ensure the credibility of the findings and interpretations of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). Their feedback was incorporated into the article.

To ensure the reliability of findings, several methods were undertaken. First, all interviews were recorded and had field notes taken by the researcher. Second, verbatim transcription was done by the researcher to avoid misinterpretation of findings. Finally, the codes were developed as a team and meetings were held to discuss any discrepancies or questions regarding the specific definitions of each. Refinements were made as needed and previous coding was adjusted to reflect these changes.

Limitations

While a breadth of knowledge was obtained from this study, there were few limitations. First, a couple of interviews were recorded but the file was either lost or corrupted on the recorder. This necessitated the use of field and interview notes for some of the analysis. While every effort was made to capture the thoughts and experiences of participants, it is possible some of it was not fully elucidated as a result. Second, the male voice is underrepresented in this study. While efforts were made to identify and locate parenting male students, we were only successful in recruiting eight for the study. Further, the voices of African American fathers are missing as none were successfully recruited into the study. Third, the research team did not include parenting students, which may have impacted the discourse of interviews. Additionally, some interviews were very brief (15 minutes) while others were significantly longer (1 hour). This difference could mean that more information could have been extrapolated from participants with shorter interviews or that the interviewers themselves had varying skill levels and ability to get participants comfortable with speaking. Finally, because of the lack of quantification of the population at MASU, there is no way to know how representative the final sample was of the student body. However, one of the goals of the study is to produce a survey to begin gathering information on this population, thus filling the current hole in our knowledge.

Findings

Four main themes emerged pertaining to resources, policies and programs for pregnant and parenting students: daycare on campus, financial aid, scheduling and classes, and transportation. Daycare on campus and financial aid were discussed at length by all participants, leading the authors to believe they are the utmost importance to the population. Each is discussed below.

Daycare on Campus

“I had thought that the daycare center here was a drop-in daycare kind of thing that could potentially be handy rather than really expensive and having to be like an all-day school kind of thing.” (Jacob, married father of 2)

When asked about resources on campus, most students replied they did not know what was available other than almost all P&P students were aware of the presence of the on-campus daycare center run by the early childhood development program. However, the presence of this resource did not equate to use for any of the students. As many discussed, there was about at least a year-long wait for admittance to the program. In addition to students, the list consists of faculty, staff and community members. Via word of mouth, students had heard that not only was the waitlist extensive but because it was run by MASU’s early development department, the administrators would chose students that would provide the best makeup for learning among the students. This appears to have prevented many P&P students from even applying and those who did apply reported being on the waiting list for an extended period of time. As Wanda, a white undergraduate mother of two stated, “I’ve been on the waiting list for the child care facility here on campus next to, um, the science building down there by _____ - I’ve been on there for like 3 years now.” In fact, only Lauren, an African American graduate student mother of one, reported being accepted into the program. However, she opted not to use the service because her mother was providing free childcare to her son.

As a result of the lack of childcare on campus, students had to resort to alternative day care for their children. Many spoke of putting their children in private daycare, which were perceived as extremely expensive. As Erin, a black female undergraduate mother of one pointed out, private care cost her “. . . like almost 800, 900 dollars a month.” This in fact was not unusual, as some compared it to having a second mortgage. Even those who were able to cut the costs felt the strain of child care in other ways. In particular, Mason, a married graduate father hired undergrads to provide in- home daycare for his two young daughters but often experienced gaps in care when they would move on to closer or better paying jobs. This necessitated him to miss class until a replacement(s) could be found.

Others were fortunate enough to have family or friends in the area ready and willing to assist in caring for the child. Dominique was living with her childhood best friend, who offered to watch the baby while she finished her last year of school. Similarly, Harper, an unmarried undergraduate mother of one lived with her family while attending school because her parents

wanted to help her accomplish her educational goals. The presence and assistance from loved ones also helped relieve stress because someone they knew and trusted was watching their child.

However, this arrangement was not always perfect. Diane, a married graduate mother had her mother, who lived approximately an hour away from campus, watch her daughter 3 days of week. This meant that her daughter was under the care and supervision of the grandmother for 72 hours straight, leaving Diane with no physical contact during that time. Lauren reported living with her parents and son in MASU's city while her husband lived in a city approximately an hour away during the work week in order to be close to his job. Finally, in a very unique situation, Claire's husband lived and worked out of town during the week, essentially making her a single mother of three the majority of the time.

In spite of careful planning by students, the majority of them reported having instances where they had to bring their child(ren) to campus. In addition to MASU's long waiting list, the daycare was for full-time use only. Many students recognized the need, either for themselves or other parenting students, for a drop-in service. Most students expressed apprehension about missing classes because they attributed their education as a means to provide for themselves and their family and feared falling behind. Bringing their child(ren) to school was often their only viable solution. This was particularly felt when work outside the classroom was needed. Sally stated that some classes, ". . . we need to we have to go see- either plays or we have to come for additional lectures, and I usually have to bring my son with me" because of the lack of available childcare during off hours.

Reactions of the greater university towards bringing children to campus differed across the participants. Some students reported having supportive professors, who would greet or acknowledge the child when they would come while others were not so fortunate. One white undergraduate father, Jacob, described how the professor made his three year old son feel welcome in class when he decided he wanted to go to school with dad:

Actually one time last semester, my son decided he really wanted to come to school with me, the class was _____. So he wanted to come to school with me. So I walked in and asked Mr. _____ if he was okay with me bringing a guest. He was like, oh yeah sure. So he came and sat next to me and one of my other friends gave him some stuff to color and yeah it was pretty cool.

However, another student reported failing a course due to the inflexibility of a professor when she went into labor prematurely. Some professors would not allow students to attend with their child in tow and some P&P students felt their peers were not receptive to their child. As Claire stated, ". . . I know that there are better study groups, better members of study groups than mine but I can't participate because they are either unable or unwilling to bend to my schedule or location requirements" associated with parenting.

Not surprisingly, the most common response to needed resources was day care. Claire felt that, “. . . if I could just bring them to daycare kids, maybe not the elementary school kid, here, drop them off at daycare, go to class, pick them up. You know, it’s so much easier. So much easier.” Some of the structures suggested were drop-off daycare, co-op daycare where parents volunteer their time, daycare funded through student fees and daycare for campus use only with priority to students. Many students spoke of how much having such a resource would provide them options when alternative forms of childcare did not work.

Financial aid

“Financial aid has been the biggest blessing . . . if I did not have it, I would not be here at all.” (Heather, a married undergraduate mother of three)

For most P&P students, the presence of financial aid was perceived as a godsend. There were several categories of financial aid discussed: loans, scholarships, grants, work-study or assistantships. In the case of loans, several students noted the increased cost-of-attendance calculation they received as parenting students. Heather observed, “. . . when you have a child, the government will give you additional money” for school. Similarly, Erin found that when she included her son on her financial aid form, “. . . money just started pouring in.” This funding increase in turn gave many P&P students the fiscal resources needed to attend school.

The availability of loans was also discussed by students. Erin stated she increased her loans to, “. . . make sure my son had all he needed.” Heather commented that it was financial aid and loans that allowed her to attend school. Megan stated that she doesn’t have any problems with money because, “financial aid has given me a substantial amount.” Others stated that they used financial aid to pay for childcare services both on and off campus. Students reported the loans giving them peace of mind, eliminating the need for several to work, and allowing them to both parent and attend school at once.

However, not all students were able to survive off of loans alone. When asked about resources, Allison commented she and her husband, “. . . live off financial aid and work 40 hours a week” to make ends meet. Erin, while taking out loans to provide for her and her son, took a side job working a 20-hour a week call center position to supplement the loan amount she received. Overall, only 5 of the students were not working at any outside employment. Of the working students, 11 were working part-time hours, either on-campus in work-study or assistantships or off-campus. Among students who worked part-time, the number of hours ranged from 3.5 to 40, with an average of 20 hours a week. Five students reported working full-time, with hours ranging from 35-40 hours a week and one student had three part-time jobs that totaled to 55 hours a week. Only 4 students reported being part-time students and 1 student was on a leave-of-absence. Students with the greatest number of both work and school hours were more likely to be traditional-aged undergraduates, single mothers, and to identify as Black or African American.

Only a few students seemed to acknowledge that they would eventually have to repay the loans. Those who did speak about needing to repay the funds stated that they tried to limit what they borrowed and/or of the dread they felt towards repaying it. Erin, who was completing her second degree in nursing, appeared to struggle with the idea of repayment, stating,

I increased a lot of my loans when they gave me the option. So when I finish school with this second degree I am going to owe so much money but hopefully with my two degrees, I [am] going to make a great, a good job.

Heather opted not to think about the repayment, saying, “it’s scary . . . I mean it’s really fantastic initially but then you know, ‘whoa, I got to return that money’.” Most other participants avoided discussing what would happen after graduation, making it unclear whether they understood that they would have to repay it or decided to ignore this fact for the time being.

There were a few P&P students that spoke of other types of financial aid. One undergraduate pregnant student and one parenting undergraduate had work-study positions to assist in the financing of their education. However, their two experiences were different. Diane spoke of the work being sporadic, with times of not much to do and others of immense pressure. Dominique spoke of the support that she was receiving from her supervisor, with him encouraging her to take care of herself during the pregnancy first and worry about the job second. Further, Dominique received assurances that her supervisor would keep her on after giving birth and would work around her schedule. Finally, Harper discussed receiving guardian assistance via the government in order to cover the high cost of child care.

The last form of financial aid received was school/department sponsored assistantships, which were isolated to graduate students. Four of the five graduate students reported receiving a school sponsored assistantship to fund their education and provide a small living stipend. While this alone may not have been enough to support their child, it appeared to be offset by the presence of a working spouse to cover the rest of the expenses. Willow and Mason worked off campus during their education, with one having had both an assistantship and a fulltime job during some of their career. The balancing of the assistantship and a full-time job, however, negatively impacted Willow and her ability to finish school. Work, combined with age and, “. . . no longer have[ing] that stamina that we did and still be able to effectively [work] and the guilt that you have in leaving your child,” created burnout and has made her unable to finish her comprehensive exams and start her dissertation.

Unfortunately, the financial aid was not always enough to provide for schooling and the family for one participant. Mason was forced to take a leave of absence from his doctoral program to provide for his family. As he described it, right now his number one priority is to be, “. . . an active father and a good husband” and the second to be employed. Mason appeared to miss school and the advantage it offered his daughters to be exposed to a learning environment but felt

providing financially for his family was number one. When asked when he planned to return to school, Mason's response was, "every day."

Structural Concerns

Structural concerns were discussed by several of the participants: however the prominent topics were housing and transportation. Housing appeared to affect the P&P students differently based on their marital status and level of support received by friends and family.

Undergraduate students, regardless of marital status, were most likely to discuss the need for on-campus housing. While not all reported needing the option, as they lived with friends or family, others seemed to desire it. Claire discussed the lack of nice, affordable housing near campus, requiring them to pay a large rent for a "dump" just around the corner. Harper stated that she was currently residing in a two-bedroom apartment with her mother, stepfather, half-brother and son off campus. Although she was living rent-free, she was planning to find her own place to become more independent and less of a burden on her family. As Harper put it, ". . . you have to learn how to juggle it all and how you are going to pay your but those are your responsibilities." Harper was unaware at the time of the interview that housing for parents did not exist on campus and spoke of making an appointment with Residential Life to explore the possibility of on-campus housing for her and her son.

There was one student in particular that was making the transition from pregnancy to parenthood during this interview process. Sally, a black undergraduate female, was pregnant, living in the dorms and expecting her child the coming spring. During her time in student housing, her floor knew she was pregnant and, ". . . they always checked [asked] 'are you okay'." Sally was aware that she would be unable to stay on campus once the baby was born. At the time of publication, she was forced to transfer to a community college and move back home because of the lack of student family housing. A follow-up phone interview with her revealed that if family housing was available on campus, she would have stayed at the university.

Housing was the last resource discussed by participants as being needed for themselves or others. For many P&P students, housing did not appear to be an issue. Many students spoke of living off campus with friends or residing in the family home. However, there were a few students who stated that if family housing were available they would partake in it. Finally, while many students stated housing was not an issue for them, they did acknowledge that it could be an issue for other students. While Allison was married and lived off-campus, she felt that, ". . . if you're a single parent and you need to be close to campus for transportation reasons or you don't have family or things like that, I think it [housing] would be helpful for them."

The second structural issue discussed revolved around available parking and transportation services. The university has been steadily admitting more students and building more dormitories to house them. However, because the university is located within city limits, this has led to the demolition of parking lots. The simultaneous increase in students and decrease in available

parking has affected all students as well as faculty and staff. This inconvenience resonated in several interviews with students. As Erin described it, “baby or no baby, parking is not a good thing at _____. I mean a parking permit, you can buy one and there is still no parking.”

The lack of parking, along with the need to walk across a large campus for classes, was particularly relevant for pregnant students. Erin discussed the extreme difficulty she had adjusting her first trimester to being pregnant and continuing course work. She stated that the combination of morning sickness, having a full course load and the fact that, “. . . parking is not especially friendly all the time” made her first trimester very stressful. Wanda stated that she was unable to get parking during her most recent pregnancy because, “. . . my time on the list wasn’t up yet.”

Parenting students often described starting their days very early, which in some cases translated into being on campus by 8am. In these cases parking was not an issue but as Wanda stated, “. . . any other time it’s horrible.” This lack of parking created stress and anxiety for several of the participants.

This parking difficulty led many students to seek alternative parking options. Options included using university-sponsored buses, parking in university lots off-campus and taking the ‘Park and Ride’ shuttle, or parking on the street and walking to campus. For most parenting students, taking the university-sponsored buses were not an option because they needed to drop-off and pick-up their children from off-site daycare or school. Wanda was also concerned about safety issues for her children: “. . . I would never take either of my kids on a Park and Ride bus there’s no seat belts, there’s no way for me to secure their car seat.” Problems associated with parking on the street or taking the Park and Ride shuttle revolved around timing and access. Some students were concerned about getting off campus quickly in the case of an emergency and others noted that the time it took to either walk to their off-site parked cars or take the shuttle created serious scheduling problems as they negotiated their class schedule with their children’s daycare or school schedule. As Claire lamented:

[it is] touch and go from the parking lot or from his school to the parking lot, waiting on the shuttle, getting the shuttle over here, walking to class. It’s a pain in my ass. [Stress in voice] and especially at the end of the day where Tuesdays and Thursdays, my class gets out at 1:45. And then I’ve got to walk all the way across campus to the shuttle. It takes 10 minutes. The shuttle ride, which can take 10 to 15 minutes, walk through the parking lot to my car, another 10 minutes and then have to somehow manage to get him by 2 o’clock. [Voice crack] I have 15 minutes and it’s just not doable most days. Most days I show up and his teacher is sitting there waiting on me.

A structural resource that had recently been provided at the university was a private lactation room. The room was made available to faculty, staff and students on a first-come, first-serve basis. However the majority of the students were not aware of this resource, which may have

been due to its location in the back of the library and the lack of advertising when it was first opened. Issues around nursing did not come up frequently for students, primarily because most not currently breastfeeding. Wanda did mention problems with public nursing prior to there being a lactation room

until this like new lactating room came out there was no place to go I would bring like both my little girls on campus and then I would have to sit there like in the [student center] and have like 50 million people walk by and give you the evil eye because you're breastfeeding your baby.

A few other students who brought their children to campus noted that it was not child-friendly and suggested structural changes such as adding a playground or having reduced priced meals in the cafeteria for children.

Class Scheduling and Course Sequence

The final main area of concern discussed by participants was the challenge of scheduling classes to fit the requirements of the program and their child's schedule. This problem was not only shared by the majority of participants but it appears to be compounded by many of the other topics discussed above.

The first way class scheduling appears to affect P&P students was in terms of course sequencing. Like many colleges and university programs nationwide, some of the programs required classes be taken in a certain order and a specific grade be achieved before the student is allowed to proceed with the major or minor of interest. This can present a challenge for any student but appears to be significantly felt by the participants. Heather discussed how these requirements have delayed her graduation by a year because,

I started in ESS but switched to Health Studies. um but um the classes are, like you have to take certain ones are offered in the fall, certain ones in the spring and with the scheduling conflicts that I have maybe with my children, I was not able to meet these um times spring or fall.

Another significant issue was conflicts between the time a specific class was scheduled and their children's schedules. As discussed above, Claire had to frequently rush across campus to meet the bus to be taken to the off-campus parking lot so that she could pick up her child on time. If late, she would frequently be penalized monetarily by the daycare facility. Difficulty getting their children ready in the morning eliminated early classes for some students and daycare pick-up hours eliminated evening classes for others.

Competing family demands also made promotion through their major difficult. A few students discussed how this conflict limited the number of classes they could take in a given semester,

thereby delaying their anticipated graduation date. Eric stated that when going to register for class:

...you don't have very many options. The less options you have for classes, um like I could only take 4 this semester because I waited so long to register, that everything that fit my schedule was already filled. So you, cuz you have to work with your, your work schedule, your family schedule and then your school schedule so you know in order to fit that all in and make it all work you need to register as early as possible to get the best availability.

Suggestions provided by students included offering more online classes and allowing parenting students to register early. Claire succinctly described the problem and solution by stating:

I wish they would let parents sign up for classes with seniors. Because most of the time parents are scheduling their classes during normal public school hours so that they can come take their classes while their kids are in school, because most of them can't afford the daycare or childcare to take the classes after normal school hours. So when I'm scheduling my classes, I'm saying okay well, I need my classes between 9 and 1. Most of the ones that I need are taken up during those time slots because the seniors, juniors and sophomores got there before I did. So I mean, if they... there are not enough parents to have that great of an effect on the seniors and the juniors registering for classes. However, there are enough seniors and juniors and sophomores to affect the availability of classes for the parents.

Finally, some students lived several miles away from campus, creating a larger barrier to scheduling classes. Compounded by the required class sequencing and the family's schedule, having a long distance to travel created additional issues for some parenting students. Heather, whose oldest son is 15, discussed the impact his coming-of-age has had; "that's just happened this past semester. In the past I've had to rush right home, you know to like get the kids off the bus and this and that. Um so I have not been involved in anything." Finally, Isabelle discussed how fortunate she has been to have a helpful and understanding husband as she completes her doctorate:

Stuart is amazing. So, as much as possible, um fortunately like I said because I live in [near-by city], the hour drive makes it difficult for me to say yeah, I can be at a 230 meeting. The kids get out of school at 3 so when that happens, I am able to call Stuart and say listen I have a meeting at 2:30, it just came up. Sorry. Can you pick up the kids? And so his schedule is flexible enough that he can do that.

Discussion

The experiences and perceptions of pregnant and parenting students offer much insight into needed policy and programming. As shown, there is a breadth of areas that need targeted efforts

in order to help ensure the success of parenting students in higher education. Specifically, these areas include: promulgation of current policies, analysis of existing policies and programs that have worked in other areas, and creation of new programs and policies.

One interesting element from the experiences above is the difference in experiences and cultural capital the parents have based on their marital status/family support, gender, race and class standing. While parents from all areas experienced difficulty, it varied greatly between these groups creating a subclass hierarchy within. For instance, the fathers interviewed discussed how they would help out their wives by taking the kids to school or rearrange their schedules to help out. It appears that many of them did not take as active a role in child-rearing than their partners. As a result, their current cultural capital appears to be greater and at least did not discuss being as limited in their options as the mothers.

Another source of subclass inequality existed between graduate students and undergraduate students. Graduate students appeared to have more flexibility in their scheduling, whereas the undergraduate had rigid time and scheduling requirements which may not have been imposed on others. Diane was able to arrange her schedule so that most, if not all, her educational demands were in the beginning of the week so at the end she could focus on her daughter while Claire discussed rushing from campus to daycare to pick up her kids because of being unable to arrange her classes accordingly. Further, most of the graduate students were employed through MASU and had tuition waivers while the undergraduates seemed to rely heavily on loans and grants which would eventually have to be repaid. This variance in resources and cultural capital related to academic level appear to facilitate the production of inequality within the subgroup of pregnant and parenting students.

Additionally, there were differences within the undergraduate parenting students. Black undergraduate students tended to be unmarried or single, while the white undergraduate mothers were all married. Additionally, the black mothers were younger than white mothers, who were more likely to be returning to school after having their children. This created a divide within the population, whereby traditional-aged Black students were more likely to work multiple jobs and/or several hours outside of school and attend classes in order to provide for their family.

However, the most significant, dividing factor between pregnant and parenting students is the marital status and/or family support they received. As discussed above, those who were not married felt pressured to work, seek financial aid and go to school in order to provide for their family. Megan, a single mother of two, discussed how she is the only one to take care of her children if they became sick. Further, she rates MASU as a bad school to attend because, “. . . just because of the lack of resources” for pregnant and parenting students.

While not necessarily to this degree, other single parents discussed the increased difficulty they had caring for themselves and their child. The mere presence of a partner or family eased their burden, regardless of class level. Isabelle discussed the willingness and flexibility of her husband

to help when needed, Dominique lived with her best friend who offered free child care while she completed her studies and Harper's parents were letting her and her son live at home while she went to school. Cultural capital in the form of social support, or lack thereof, created the largest social inequality within the group.

Regardless of these elements, all participants discussed difficulties in reaching their academic goals. As shown above, there appears to be a large gap between what is being provided and what is actually needed. For example, daycare is offered on campus but the service is shared by the faculty, staff, students and surrounding community. Further, the need is not necessarily for fulltime day care but the ability to drop children off for a few hours while the P&P students take care of their class duties. The campus community in general would likely benefit from the expansion of the service and the development of a drop-off daycare facility.

Additionally, parking and transportation is another area that, if addressed, the results would likely benefit the entire pregnant and parenting population, not just students. As detailed earlier, some campuses offer expectant mother or parents with infants reserved parking spaces. A similar policy on this campus appears would be both appreciated and used by the participants in this study. Further, child safety seats should be installed or made available on buses, similar to the one or two handicapped spots needed. Finally, the building of one or two more Park and Ride stops or extra buses during the school will assist P&P students in reaching their children quickly if the need arose.

Class scheduling and course sequencing appears to be of great concern to students. This issue is compounded by the lack of daycare, financial aid and parking on campus, which has kept students from graduating on time and, creating extra anxiety to an already stressful situation. To ease the problems of class scheduling, the university needs to consider adding either more online courses in the popular majors or modify the way in which classes are offered. Several of the programs are moving towards offering online courses as enrollment and demand for them increase. One mother, who was majoring in public health, said this increase is, “. . . exciting for adult students.”

Further, consideration needs to be given to allowing P&P students enroll register for classes early. As stated, they are often shut out of required class sections that fit their children's daycare schedule. These scheduling conflicts could be eased, in part, if they were allowed to register with the upper classmen. Finally, either a uniform policy addressing P&P students in the class or mentoring of faculty on meeting the needs of P&P students could help faculty-student interactions. Participants discussed a wide range of reactions by faculty and staff towards their dual role as a P&P student. While in some cases students felt their children were welcome and they could negotiate accommodations, other students had more negative reactions and many students were not comfortable bringing the topic up with faculty. A standard policy addressing this issue and/or faculty mentoring would prevent such discrepancies from happening in the future.

Finally, on-campus family housing needs to be explored. The lack of this service caused one pregnant participant to drop out after the birth of her child and it is unknown how many others have faced this dilemma. Several students reported knowledge that other universities have offer this service to their students and felt that it was a successful and highly-utilized resource. A few students expressed their enthusiasm by stating they would sign up immediately if such a service was offered. This would obviously help prevent or curb dropout associated with parenthood and help students graduate.

Policy and Program Implications

While the discussion above describes what needs to be considered at MASU, it was found that these challenges and issues were not unique to this campus population. As part of the larger case study, the interviewers spoke with key informants from other universities who have recognized the gaps in services for this population and have worked to fill it. One university developed a method to identify parenting students through analysis of the student's reporting of dependents on their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)s. While not necessarily capturing the full population, this method can serve as a good proxy measure to begin quantifying the group. This data can then be used to make projections for the development and creation of new services and the redirecting of funds to ensure the retention and graduation of pregnant and parenting students.

Another key informant spoke of a campus-wide movement to institute a small student fee for resources targeting pregnant and parenting students. The funds generated were used to create a subsidy for childcare. The university then contracted with a local agency which identifies and grades daycare centers in the area to provide good daycare for the students. A family expenditure cap was set at 10% for students, with the rest paid for from the funds. A dormitory was set up that provides housing for graduate students, married couples, and families. Lactation rooms were set up campus-wide to provide a safe and secure place for pumping or breastfeeding.

Additionally, there is a representative on the campus' presidential board to serve as the voice for the population and ensure that they are not overlooked as new policies and decisions are made. These measures and more have created a higher retention and graduation rate for pregnant and parenting students (93%) at this university than their nonparenting counterparts (86%).

Further, the NCAA policy on pregnant and parenting students provides a blueprint for the university to follow. In considering the needs of the mother while accounting for those of the school, a situation of mutual benefit can be achieved. A policy for maternity leave among students and extension of financial aid can assist students in caring not only for their child but continuing to provide incentive to complete their education. Further, it can include guidelines for student, faculty and staff interaction to ensure treatment is fair and consistent. MASU does not currently have formal guidelines for working with pregnant and parenting students, leaving it instead to the discretion of the individual. A policy would eliminate the ambiguity and at times anxiety and anger felt by pregnant and parenting students as they navigate their education.

A campus and university system agenda needs to be developed in order to ensure measures taken are institutionalized. A re-envisioned mission statement and goals need to be developed emphasizing the need and desire of the university system to recruit and retain this population. Further, many of the concerns presented in this study have been addressed at a sister school within the same university system. Efforts need to be made to share the success of these innovative measures and understand the failures already experienced by others to help the campus community start addressing the issues. Finally, creating an administrative policy at the system level would help facilitate a change in organizational culture and climate universities in developing programs and policies that would benefit this population.

While there are gaps in programs and services targeted specifically for pregnant and parenting students at the university, it cannot be said that some do not exist and models for replication are not present. Many students spoke of the Office of Adult Student Services being of use to them as they continued their education. While the office was closed during the 2009-2010 school year, the university recently hired a new staff person to handle the coordination of programs for adult and commuter students. Through education about the needs of this population and collaboration with other individuals at the university, new programming could be developed to assist pregnant and parenting students in their efforts to achieve academically and graduate on-time.

On the national front, congressional leaders need to reintroduce the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Pregnant and Parenting Student Services Act. As anecdotal evidence shows, successful programming and policy development for the inclusion of pregnant and parenting students at higher learning institutions can lead to a better than average retention to graduation rate when compared to others.

Further, universities who seek to address the concerns of pregnant and parenting students should look at the research done on family-friendly policies affecting faculty and staff. In particular, the book *Establishing the Family-Friendly Campus* (2009) was published documenting best practices used by universities nationwide. The book discusses the issue of flexible scheduling and daycare from the faculty perspective and how universities have worked to offer more services. Of note is discussion of emergency and back up care for students and personnel when their provider falls through or due to illness of the child or parent. One case example was given by the University of Arizona of providing a single mother student with childcare assistance and a team approach to arranging care of the student and child while the parent dealt with a personal crisis (p.46). This service was not isolated to students but rather they were included as part of the population able to access them.

Additionally, there is one chapter entitled *From Advocacy to Action: Making Graduate School Family Friendly*, which discussed the grassroots movement of graduate students at the University of Southern California. The chapter discusses the desire of graduate students school wide to extend family friendly policy to them and the steps they went about to make it happen. The chapter includes issues to consider when making such a change, including inclusion of all

students, making the policy specific but vague enough to cover all departments and the idea of gradual change throughout the process. This chapter could serve as a guide to student groups who wish to facilitate change rather than wait for it to occur.

Finally and perhaps the most important, pregnant and parenting students need to be involved in every stage of the process. Tokenism is to be discouraged and efforts to make them full partners in the transformation process are vital to its success. Because of the invisible nature of this population, targeted recruitment efforts, such as the use of message boards, listservs and classroom recruitment, might be necessary to begin identifying the early leaders within the group. Only they can speak to the needs and issues of parenting students.

Recommendations

The findings reviewed above make the case for increased programming and policy decisions that benefit pregnant and parenting students. However, it is likely that before administrators and other university leaders make changes, research about this population needs to increase. Researchers and academics need to first begin documenting the number of pregnant and parenting students currently seeking a college degree. We need to understand who they are and what their needs and experiences are in order to better develop programs and policies for them. The study presented above was isolated to one campus within a larger university system. Therefore, the findings can not necessarily be applied to other campuses nationwide or even within the same system.

However, it is important that both policy and programmatic efforts along with the research avenue are pursued at once. There is much to be done to assist pregnant and parenting students in achieving their academic goals. Only through understanding both the needs of pregnant and parenting students and implementing innovative policy and programmatic designed to facilitate academic success can this issue be resolved.

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