

Jena Garrett
Dr. Weiser
EAF 484
Illinois State University

When I chose to apply to the College Student Personnel program I knew I would be learning about how I can best help the students that I work with daily as well as the students I will work with in the future. It never crossed my mind that I myself would be placed in a category as one of the student populations that is underrepresented on a college campus. Today's typical American college student has a job, a family, and is enrolled part-time, or is a combination of two or more of those factors ("Typical College Students No Longer So Typical", 2010). I am all three, and after reading more on this topic, I no longer feel like an outlier; however, I was also not asked when I applied for the program how Illinois State University could assist me and my family during my time as a parent-student.

Parents who are students are seeking to build a better life for their children than one that they had and there are nearly 4.8 million of us. According to Nelson, Froehner, & Gault (2013) there are many positive outcomes for the children of a parent who continues to increase their education, such as higher earnings, but also access to resources and educational benefits down the road when their children attend school (Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013). As a professional in Higher Education, I absolutely do not take for granted the tuition assistantship opportunity that Illinois State University and various other public and private institutions offer children of their faculty and staff.

The long-term benefits of being an adult learner with a job and a family far outweigh the short-term benefits. In many cases, the mother is the primary caretaker for the children which puts a terrible stressor on them in addition to finding childcare while they are in class and financial aid to be able to help pay for the books and classes they are taking. Not to mention the strain it can put on the time they actually get to spend with their children. When I applied for grad school, no one asked me if I was a parent let alone if I needed help finding childcare. Parent-students tend to bend over backwards to make school fit around their lives while the school seems oblivious to the challenges of this

demographic. On the flip-side of that, I do believe that to be a successful student (parent or not), one must be creative and self-sufficient. Schools were created to cater to the traditional student, there is no denying this. As a non-traditional student, you must go in knowing that the system was not made for you. Maintaining this mindset has helped me be an advocate for myself because I know that few will speak up on my behalf.

I believe that there are ways to help the non-traditional parent-student financially. At both of the institutions I've worked for, there has been childcare available on campus for dependents of students, faculty, and staff; however, the facilities are small and the waitlists are long. Both facilities are also not meant for children under the age of 3. "While the number of enrolled students who have children has grown (increasing by 50 percent between 1995 and 2011, according to IWPR), the availability of childcare on campuses hasn't" (White, 2014). Not only has the availability of childcare not increased, but it is also becoming less affordable. To put it simply, approximately 33% of my net monthly pay goes towards daycare, and that is on the lower end of the cost spectrum for daycares in the Bloomington-Normal community. While I am thankful to be able to afford daycare, there are many students who cannot. 78% of single parent-students are considered low income and consistently have higher unmet financial need than their fellow students who do not have children (Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013). To help ease the financial burden of daycare, I would suggest a reduced-rate after-school program run by elementary education majors or by students who might be interested in obtaining practicum hours towards their education degree. While I'm sure this would have its own kinks to work through, it could be a positive and affordable option for those who need it.

If childcare cannot be provided by the institution, the other option could be to provide financial assistance for the cost of daycare. According to Bridget Terry Long (2017) in her article, *Helping Women to Succeed in Higher Education: Supporting Student-Parents with Child Care*, The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) "does not take child-care costs into account when calculating student need

and awarding financial aid". However, some states are working toward providing financial assistance, such as Minnesota's Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program which granted a maximum award of \$5,125 during the 2016-2017 year to help low-income undergraduate students (Terry, 2017). Helping to offset the cost of daycare, while it will not dissolve the issue of finding quality care, will help alleviate the burden of having additional financial responsibilities while the parent is in school.

References

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