

**UC Women's Center
Success Challenge Student Parent Grant
Executive Summary
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**Edited By
UC Women's Center**

Authored by David Maume, Associate Professor Department of Sociology University of Cincinnati and Aileen Wang, Doctorate Student Department of Political Science University of Cincinnati

The University of Cincinnati's Women's Center would like to thank members of the Student Parent advisory committee, faculty, staff and survey participants, your hard work and diligence has made an invaluable contribution to the University of Cincinnati. Please direct all questions or for a copy of the report in its entirety to: UC's Women's Center at 556-4401 or Tamika.Odum@uc.edu.

UC Women's Center Success Challenge Student Parent Grant Executive Summary

Study Goals

- In support of the UC|21 goal to increase student retention and graduation rates, the UC Women's Center received a *Success Challenge Grant* for the purpose of determining the number of undergraduate UC students with dependent children, measuring the stressors and barriers they encounter, and identifying existing UC programs that assist student parents.

Procedures

- To address the study goals, we gathered data on UC's student parent population. First, we convened **focus groups**, in which ~30 student parents talked about their experiences and concerns. Second, we sent a **web-based survey** to all UC undergraduates, and received over 2,000 responses. Of these, 539 respondents were student parents and they provided additional information on their experiences at UC.
- We convened an advisory committee of representatives from UC units (see Appendix 4) involved with and concerned about student parents.
- We collected data on how 28 **peer institutions** provided an array of 22 services aimed at supporting student parents (see Appendix 1).

Findings

- Information from two independent sources (the web-based survey and data from the UC financial aid office) confirms that student parents constitute **one-fourth of all undergraduates** at UC. Not surprisingly, the typical student parent is female, unmarried, and slightly older than the typical undergraduate student. In addition, 59% of student parents take classes on the branch campuses, and two-thirds of them are full-time students.
- **71% of student parents have postponed their educations** because of their parental responsibilities. This finding is alarming because students who postpone their schooling are less likely to complete their degrees.
- Student parents identified a number of **barriers to their educational success** including: the lack of study time and difficulty in balancing curricular and parental demands, the high cost and inaccessibility of childcare, other financial concerns (including housing), and a prevailing sense of isolation from faculty, administrators, and services that were either unaware of or inattentive to their needs as parents. In the body of this report we provide survey estimates of the breadth of these barriers (pp. 9 - 10), and quotes from focus group participants that illustrate the severity of these barriers (Appendix 2).

- In comparison to 28 peer institutions, **UC ranks 10th** in the number of services it provides. In Ohio, UC ranks behind Ohio State and Kent State in the number of support services for student parents.

Our goal is to help student parents feel like they have a sense of place by providing the resources they need to succeed. Providing family friendly programs and facilities would help student parent feel comfortable in our UC community. To alleviate the burdens experienced by student parents and in support of the UC-21 goals to **Place Students at the Center and Establish a Sense of “Place”** we recommend that action be taken in the following areas;

Several of these recommendations can be implemented yet this year. Others will require additional research and development to accomplish.

Primary Recommendation - Develop additional childcare services. Students parents note their need for flexible, on-site, and drop-in services as well as childcare for sick children. Multiple child care venues and structures with different prices (student parent discount programs), hours of operation and significant subsidy are critical to support not only undergraduates but graduate students, faculty and staff.

Other recommendations:

- *Disseminate information on UC resources- services and programs currently exist to support student parents and must be packaged and promoted to them in a way they can access and use. For example, orientations for non-traditional students would increase use of existing services and minimize the anonymity and sense of isolation reported by student parents.*
- *Identify a central fulltime resource – designate an office and create an interactive website as a “clearinghouse” for student parents (concerns). This would alleviate isolation and improve their use of UC services*
- *Increase class offerings – distance learning, accelerated classes (ASAP), ease of transfer from branch campuses, and evening/weekend classes will all help*
- *Collect student parent identifying data – have the registrar collect annual data confirming the significant size of this population, we will be able to marshal significant support for addressing this at –risk population*
- *Educate faculty, students and administrators – student parents commented that classroom practices and policies are geared toward the traditional student with little understanding of how these practices impact the educational success of student parents*

Conclusion

“ The University of Cincinnati is a public comprehensive system of learning and research...the university system is designed to serve a diverse student body with a broad range of interest and goals.” A significant portion (25%) of the UC student body are student-parents. These students have unique circumstances and barriers that other students do not face. It is vital for the university to implement a plan to provide student-parents a sense of connection to the university and the resources necessary for them to succeed in achieving academic success.