

**UC Women's Center: Success Challenge Grant  
Student Parent Final Report  
March 2006**

**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 28 **peer institutions** providing 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 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, 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).

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

Our goal is to help student parents feel like they have a sense of connection to UC 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 quickly. Others will require additional research and development to accomplish.

**Primary Recommendation - Develop additional childcare services.** Student parents expressed their need for flexible, on-site/drop-in services, as well as childcare for sick children. Multiple child care venues and structures with different prices (student parents 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 resource – designate an office, provide staff funding 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 help.*
- *Collect student parents identifying data – collect annual data via student registration forms confirming the significant size of this 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.*

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#### **Background**

Ever since K. Patricia Cross published her book, *Adults as Learner* (1981) the topic of non-traditional students has drawn attention from education and government officials. Non-traditional students are usually defined as adults 25 years of age and older and those who attend part-time although, the term is not a precise one. Some definitions, including the definition used at UC, are more expansive to include: students who attend part time for at least part of the academic year while working full time (35 hours or more per week), have dependents other than a spouse (usually children), and/or is a single parent (either not married or married but separated (Harju & Eppler, 1997).

As the non-traditional student population grows, little substantial research had been done, especially within higher education (Sissel, Hansman & Kasworm, 2001). The definition of non-traditional students tends to remain age based without other consideration, such as social or economic status. In addition, subgroups of various types of non-traditional students including student parents have not been studied. For purposes of this report, we assume student parents are a subset of non-traditional students.

Historical traditions of "residential selective" higher education continues to create environments that cater to full-time, residential youths only. Few institutions provide a truly egalitarian environment that offers open access and support of all students (Choy, 2002). *Yet, in a 2002 report by the National Center for Education Statistics 73% of all undergraduates at 2 and 4 year schools were in some way "non-traditional. The author notes this is not a new trend, it is a trend that emerged in the 1970s* (Harju & Eppler, 1997).

Non-traditional students may have rusty study skills. They may feel isolated from the college community physically and emotionally since they usually commute and have little time to linger after class. The environment on campus is often unsupportive. Non-traditional students may experience difficulties due to a significant lapse of time between high school and college, or between previous college experiences; this lapse can exacerbate student's low self-confidence (Fairchild, 2003). However, research shows that despite these difficulties, nontraditional students have stronger learning goals and a stronger work ethic, compared to traditional students (Kirby, Biever, Martinez & Gomez, 2004). Nontraditional student's motivation to learn is directly linked to personal satisfaction and school and family support in their pursuit of education (Fairchild, 2003).

Non-traditional students have a much richer life experience, due to their age, employment, and multiple roles in life. But, due to these multiple, and often competing roles, they may face several common problems in their efforts to obtain a university degree. The non-traditional students often experience guilt from being away from his/her family and for taking resources away from their family to be used for their education. Conflicting roles and time conflicts often heighten the nontraditional student's stress level. In addition, many institutions are not structured to accommodate non-traditional students (Shiber, 1999).

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Advocates of adult learning for non-traditional students suggest institutions establish a network of specialized staff to support students' needs. Nontraditional students may need assistance in library usage, research and study skills. In addition, logistical support such as a quiet study area will help non-traditional students in their education. Advanced distance learning network and accelerated programs are mentioned as well to cater to non-traditional students' needs. Since nontraditional students may have additional questions and need for assistance, the university should provide in-depth, relevant and comprehensive communications to these students. (Cox & Pratt, 2002)

Throughout the literature, problem areas and challenges to nontraditional students and institutions can serve as a starting point in addressing the needs of student parents. However, deficiency in addressing student parents' specific needs is obvious. First, an age-based definition of non-traditional students leaves out a great proportion of student parents who are traditionally between the ages of 18-24, an increasing demographic on campus. Second, problems encountered by non-traditional students are amplified if they are a student parent. For example, student parents may have emergencies involving childcare that requires them to miss class. Even a well-intended quiet study area in the library may not address the needs of student parents who have to take their children to campus. Campus logistics are often less than friendly for nursing mothers, or parents with young children in need of a diaper change. Hence, the issues that student parents face requires a separate and in-depth study; other than that which is included in an examination of non-traditional students.

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## Findings

### Summary of Focus Groups

In November 2004, UC Women's Center conducted four student parent focus group interviews among Clermont College, Uptown Campus and Raymond Walters College, with 22 participants in total. Participants were recruited via various campus ListServ and mass flyers as well as direct emails. The participants' ages range from early 20's to early 40's, and on average had an interval of 7 years before they return to college education.

Most participants were full-time students with young children under the age of 5 that required day care; at least half were single parents. Participants generally have financial concerns and more than one-third were unemployed. Approximately two-thirds of the participants from Clermont College and Raymond Walters College were welfare recipients, while Uptown Campus participants, though under financial pressure, do not qualify for welfare due to either international student status or income over the government requirement.

Student parent participants enter or return to college for various reasons. Most anticipated a chance for a better life and increased income potential once they finish their college education. Some also mentioned that by pursuing higher education they would serve as an example for their children.

Upon initial return to college, participants described their first impression as overwhelmed. While feeling excited about college, a sense of isolation from the traditional students echoed among all participants. They mentioned that they felt neglected by the college since most services are geared toward traditional students.

One of the issues raised by participants was access to information on class materials, UC's educational policies, and general UC information. In particular, Clermont College and Raymond Walters College participants expressed concern that UC information is mainly computer based and several indicated limited access to a computer. Uptown participants appeared to be comfortable with access to web-based information.

Classroom policies and practices and participant interaction with professors and peers were concerns. For participants with work experience, some general education courses are said to be "out-of-touch" with their life experiences. The participants noted the lack of consistency between faculty for make-up exams and leaves of absence, such as maternity leave. They must negotiate with professors individually when these types of issues arise. In addition, they are concerned with mandatory attendance policies and/or additional required educational activities outside regular class hours. Student parents sometimes have childcare arrangements that prevent them from fulfilling such requirements. Participants noted a discrepancy in the degree of professors' awareness of student parents' special circumstances. Participants feel disconnected from their peers due to lack of time for interaction, and often feel stigmatized because of their parental status.

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Childcare is a source of concern and anxiety for student parent participants. Most cannot afford childcare and rely on friends, relatives or parents for sporadic childcare. Most participants expressed a need for a "significant" childcare scholarship or government subsidy. Raymond Walters student parents seemed more satisfied, mentioning their on-site childcare center, while participants from the other two locations stressed the need for on-campus and flexible and/or episodic childcare.

Unless family members live close, most participants feel they lack a support system. Because student parents are limited in the amount of time spent on campus, they feel they "don't know anybody" on campus who can help them.

Housing is another area where participants hope to receive information and/or subsidies. Campus housing is generally perceived as too costly for participants from Uptown campus, while participants from other campuses mention a need to receive referrals about affordable and safe locations with access to public transportation.

Participants expressed a need for UC to sponsor more family friendly activities. In addition, they noted a need for more physical support, such as bigger chairs for expectant mothers, changing tables in designated bathrooms, and designated locations for breast-feeding/pumping that are private.

### **Results from Web-based Survey**

#### Procedures:

The findings from the focus groups interviews were used to design the campus-wide web survey. All UC undergraduates received an e-mail in the second week of spring quarter 2005. The e-mail contained a link to a web-based survey, and approximately 2,000 students filled out the survey online. In addition, some hard-copy surveys were placed in strategic spots on campus, where student parents were likely to be found. The total number of respondents was 2,119; statistical analysis revealed no differences between those who filled out the hard-copy surveys versus those who responded online.

#### Demographics:

The first eight questions on the survey were presented to all respondents, in order to determine if student parents differ systematically from student non-parents. Question 8 is the key filter question in this section, showing that among all respondents, 25% are parents. Moreover, nearly three-fourths (72%) of survey respondents to this survey are female, and an even greater percentage of parents (83%) are females.

On one hand, student parents are similar to non-parents. That is, more than nine of ten members of both groups are in-state students, and an equally high proportion of both groups are undergraduates.

On the other hand, there are marked differences between parent and non-parents. For, example, student parents are more likely to be non-traditional students (only one in four are younger than 24 compared with 89% of non-parents). Second, being older, student parents are more likely to

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be married (49%) than non-parents (5%). Third, and perhaps most importantly, *student parents may be harder to reach than non-parents*. More than half of student parents take classes on the branch campuses (e.g., Raymond Walters, Clermont), and student parents are more likely to be part-time students (35%) than are non-parents (9%).

*The information in the four sections below pertains only to the 539 students who indicated that they were parents on Q. 8.*

### Section 1:

This section of the survey examined household composition and child-care needs of student parents. Most student parents have only one child (46%), and another 28% had two children. The majority of parents (54%) live in intact families (i.e., living with both their spouse/partner and children), while 27% are single parents.

Importantly, more than half of the student parents (52%) stated a need for child-care services. It is not clear, however, whether these responses indicate a desire for expanded child-care services or reflect the potential negative consequences should their current arrangements fail. *It is noteworthy, though many parents (39%) rely on other family members for the care of their children, while in classes, and a substantial proportion use a day care center (25%).*

Heavy reliance on relative childcare is a reflection of the economic situations of student parents. *Nearly one-third of student parents are not working, and another 30% work part-time.* Despite limited resources (or perhaps because of limited federal and state initiatives), it appears that most (69%) student parents pursue their educations *without* the benefit of government subsidies. Rather, it appears that student parents are reliant on UC financial packages (49% receive full financial aid while 29% receive partial financial aid) to fund their education. In all likelihood, many student parents are borrowing against their future incomes to finance their educations. This statement is supported by the figures in section 3, question 2, which shows that only 12% of student parents receive either partial or full scholarships for their education.

### Section 2:

Through Blackboard and the One Stop student service center, UC has made a concerted effort to provide easily accessible information to students about their classes, student services, and other relevant information. The results in this section indicate some success in these initiatives.

Almost nine in ten student parents have access to the Internet to obtain UC information and only 11% have limited Internet access. Despite their primary attendance at branch campus (with fewer computer labs than in Uptown) and their part-time status (see the demographics section above), one-half of student parents use Blackboard to obtain information about a specific class, and 75% of student parents go to the UC website when they want to obtain information about UC services.

It is heartening to find that only 3% of respondents have no way to find information about specific classes and/or UC services. It is noteworthy that more than half (58%) say it is "very

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easy" or "easy" to find access information about UC, in contrast to only 8% who say it is "difficult" or "very difficult."

### Section 3:

This section of the survey examined success or failure as a student, and the impact of parenthood on those outcomes.

At the outset, it is important to note that *almost two-thirds of respondents have a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and 76% expect to complete their degrees in 4 years or less.* Possibly, these figures reflect an overall supportive environment in the classroom. One-half of respondents said most of their professors were aware of their status as parents. Whether or not professors were aware that students had children, only 12% of professors were unsupportive of student parents' needs, in contrast to the 30% who were supportive.

Nevertheless, being a parent poses some problems for meeting one's educational goals. For example, participating in required educational activities outside the classroom is somewhat typical at UC, and 43% of students had parental obligations that prevented them from taking part in these activities. *Perhaps most alarming, is the clear majority of student parents (71%) have postponed their educations because of their parental responsibilities.*

While we do not have data on the experiences of non-parents who have postponed their educations for various reasons, the figure above does seem quite high. It would suggest that student parents would welcome policy initiatives that eliminate the conflict between care giving and studying.

### Section 4:

This section of the report examined more closely the obstacles students face while pursuing their educations at UC. Respondents were presented nine items and asked to check all that applied to them. For checked items, the respondents were further asked to check an item that more closely detailed how that item was a barrier to educational success.

Given that respondents could mention all applicable barriers, a rank order of the items can be obtained by looking at the total number of respondents who check an item. For example, the most-often cited barrier to a successful education was the lack of study time (item 2), mentioned by 522 of the 539 student parents. Of those who mentioned this item, 39% said that watching their kids prevented them from studying and another 34% cited conflicts with work. Interestingly, the second-most cited barrier to getting an education at UC was family responsibilities (item 6), in which 80% of those with family responsibilities said it was difficulty to balance multiple and competing roles.

The next two most frequently cited barriers to obtaining an education appear to be related. Among the 466 respondents who cited financial problems (item 3), 25% explicitly mentioned child-care expenses as the source of their financial problems. Similarly, of the 460 respondents who cited problems with child care (item 1), 35% mentioned its cost as the primary problem with childcare.

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Childcare is a major concern of student parents (just as it is for working parents). Not only is childcare costly but, parents require childcare for sustained blocks of time in order to pursue their studies. Figures show that only 41% of parents need child care for 4 hours or less, therefore the remaining 59% require child care for most of the day (in fact, one-fifth of parents require 8 or more hours per day of child care) in order to pursue their educational goals.

The cost and demand for child care become more salient as an educational barrier when considering student parents have already cited multiple and competing roles as a barrier to educational success (item 6), and 352 respondents cited the lack of support system for their family situations (item 5). Given these results, it is somewhat encouraging that only about 16% of respondents rated UC's "family-friendliness" as "poor" or "below average" (question 1 at the beginning of this section). Yet, at the same time, most (43%) respondents rated UC's family friendliness as just "average," suggesting that ANY policy initiatives that ease the strain on student parents would be welcomed.

The final three barriers to educational success mentioned by student parents pertain to experiences inside and outside the classroom. Item 7 refers to being unable to get classes, and was mentioned by 433 student parents. Next on the list of barriers, was housing (item 8), and most people who check this item cited its high cost. The item that was cited least often was computer/technical problems (item 4).

### **Responses**

The following is a short summary of responses to the open-ended questions from the Student parent web survey:

#### 4.3 Examples on how parental responsibilities interfered with student parent's education:

Due to the nature of this question, the majority of responses are negative, as expected. Student parents, particularly single ones, struggle with multiple roles as parent, employee, student, and partner, etc. It seems student parents do not have sufficient support systems. Many aspects of childcare are a concern: the availability of childcare, its proximity to campus, and the financial burden of childcare expenses are often mentioned. In addition, student parents note that the lack of childcare for their study time hinders their ability to perform well in their education.

Other areas of concern include the limited number of class offerings per year, and the timing of classes with fewer evening/weekend classes. Student parents find required work outside class time, such as group projects, difficult to manage.

The most difficult situation occurs when student parents' children get sick. Student parents overwhelmingly mentioned how difficult it is to maintain attendance requirements of the professor and, at the same time, juggle the care of sick children.

#### 4.4 Positive or negative experience on campus as a student parent:

Overall respondents were slightly more negative than positive (negative: 103, positive: 93) and the majority of the comments had to do with faculty and their behavior toward student parents in

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the classroom context. Regarding interactions with professors and peers, student parents are more likely to have slightly positive reactions. However, in regards to campus logistics and class offerings, they considered their experiences negative ones. In particular, student parents perceive Uptown Campus as an environment designed for traditional students only. They think the campus is not family-friendly, examples including the difficulty of maneuvering children up and down stairs, lack of breastfeeding and diapering space, and no parent/child study area in the library or on campus generally. In addition, they mentioned that there are very few family events on campus.

### 4.5 Student parents' description of UC campus climate toward student parents:

Student parents' perception of the UC climate toward student parents is more negative than positive by a ratio of 5 to 4. For every four student parents who think UC is a positive environment for student parents, five disagree. The Uptown campus is perceived to be the least student parent friendly. Student parents tend to think that the university neglects them. The inconsistency of faculty and university policy toward student parents is a source of concern.

However, there is also a significant portion of responding student parents (23.5%) who have a neutral perception. These student parents either do not have significant student parent related experiences on campus, or do not think that student parents should be treated any differently from other UC students.

### 4.6 Student parents' recommendations for change:

Student parents who responded to the survey suggest the following as areas that UC should address.

#### Childcare:

Student parents would like to have on-site campus childcare that is affordable and that offers a drop-in option. For those who take weekend and/or evening classes, extended childcare hours are necessary. Sick childcare or emergency childcare is needed as well.

#### Class offerings:

Student parents would like UC to offer more on-line courses. They would like to have more options for evening/weekend/accelerated classes as well.

#### Financial Assistance:

More financial aid tailored to the non-traditional and student parents is requested, especially considering their additional expenses such as childcare. Student parents, especially single parents, are looking for more need based grants, scholarships, and tuition remission.

#### Support and Support Groups:

Student parents would like to have campus "advocates" for student parent related issues at all campuses and support groups on campus, as well as on-line message or discussion boards.

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#### Facilities:

Private space on campus for nursing mothers and diaper changing facilities are important concerns of student parents. Campus should offer more ramps and fewer stairs in order for student parents with young children to maneuver strollers. Play areas on campus are requested. Campus offices should offer extended business hours for those who can only be on campus in the evening or during the weekends.

#### Classroom Policies:

Currently, student parents have to negotiate attendance/make-up exam individually with professors. They suggest the establishment of (more) consistent policies about absences that are responsive to the demands of parenting including uniform policies about pregnancy/maternity leaves. Outside class required activities should be adjusted in consideration of student parents' time constraint.

#### Information Access:

There should be more information on UC Websites catering to student parents. Orientation designed for student parents should be offered.

#### Dependent Healthcare:

Affordable health insurance for dependents is needed. Currently, UC's healthcare policy is perceived to be too expensive. Parents who were pregnant while in school noted some difficulty with UC's health care coverage.

#### Other:

Affordable on or near campus housing, parking, and textbooks are among the financial concerns of responding student parents.

### **Summary of Peer Institutions**

The peer institution matrix identifies best practices and benchmarks student parent programs and services at other institutions. Data was collected about traditional issues affecting student parents – housing and childcare – as well as services student parents at UC identified as important.

#### Selection of Peer Institutions:

The selection of peer institutions is primarily based on characteristics similar to UC: public, urban, and mostly in industrial states (CA, IL, IN, MA, MI, MO, NJ, NY, OH, PA, TX, and WI) as defined by the US Department of Labor. Urban public institutions in neighboring states (KY, WV, and as far as IA and TN) and in some agricultural states (FL, NE and MN) are among those investigated in the matrix. In most states, an institution that is most similar to UC was selected. In Ohio, all public universities were compared except Miami University. In neighboring Kentucky and Michigan, more than one institution is included. In addition to UC, the peer institution matrix incorporates 28 other universities.

#### Comparison Basis for Peer Institutions:

Twenty-two services and programs were identified as important by UC student parents through focus groups and in individual interviews. These services are categorized under 6 areas:

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**academic services, family housing, childcare, campus recreation, counseling services and other support services.** The following table details the services included in the matrix period.

Issue Areas	Related Services
Academic Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic advising services</li> <li>• Library – research training services</li> </ul>
Family Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus family residential hall/apartment</li> <li>• Residential hall childcare support</li> </ul>
Childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare service</li> <li>• Childcare discount</li> <li>• Childcare financial aid</li> <li>• Childcare referral service</li> <li>• Early childhood development program</li> <li>• Dependent school referral</li> </ul>
Campus Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus recreation/fitness center family membership</li> <li>• Campus recreation/fitness center student parent program</li> <li>• Campus recreation/fitness center childcare services</li> <li>• University family activity calendar</li> </ul>
Counseling Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career counseling</li> <li>• Life skill counseling</li> <li>• Psychological health counseling</li> </ul>
Other Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of living analysis</li> <li>• Relocation information</li> <li>• Transportation – bus line information</li> <li>• Transportation – carpool information</li> <li>• Student parent support group</li> </ul>

The assumption for the matrix is that the more services available, the more beneficial for student parents regardless of whether these services are directly promoted to student parents.

The quality of services was not scrutinized since it is difficult to make an equitable comparison without actual student parents/users evaluating the services or without uniform standards. However in person or telephone interviews were conducted to verify the content of services at the University of Minnesota, institutions within Ohio, Northern Kentucky University and the University of Pittsburgh.

Benchmark for Best Practice:

None of the institutions investigated provided all 22 services/programs. The University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, provided the most with 21 services offered. The only service unavailable at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities is childcare services at the university

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recreation/fitness center although it provides an excellent youth program for community members at large. Many sources identified the University of Minnesota – Twin City as the best practice against which to benchmark.

Academic Services:

Both academic advising and library skills training are most evenly offered. Of all 29 institutions, only one university does not specifically list an academic advising service on its web site. Five universities, one of them in Ohio, do not list research training services or programs for their libraries. However, most universities offer such academic services with traditional students in mind. Only Ohio State University offers an alternative academic advising service that is explicitly for single-parent students.

Family Housing:

University family housing is one of the areas where significant discrepancy occurs. Half of all peer institutions do not offer university housing for married students or student parents. University of Pittsburgh stands out as one institution that offers family housing, but does not encourage students to utilize this option. On its housing website, it suggests that student parents and married students may find more appropriate apartments off campus.

On the contrary, Iowa State University and University of Minnesota – Twin Cities not only offer family housing (Iowa) or systemic (MN) residential hall childcare services but, also offer student parents assistance with their need to study or while taking care of errands. Both Iowa and University of Minnesota – Twin Cities are particularly student parent friendly in the area of family housing.

All universities that offer family housing have strict rules regarding supervision. Either a parent or a guardian must be present if children use facilities or services in the residential hall.

Childcare:

The matrix does not distinguish between on-campus and off-campus childcare facilities. The childcare service is either university owned or affiliated. Seven universities, including two in Ohio, do not have childcare facilities. Of the universities that do not offer childcare services, only one, the University of Akron offers a childcare referral service.

Most university childcare services are open to staff, faculty, students, and the community in general. University of Minnesota – Twin Cities specifically, offers its childcare services to student parents, providing discounts as well as financial aid, in addition to referrals should the student parents choose to use other facilities. Most other universities either offer minor discounts or financial aid to their students. Most financial aid programs have specific government requirements, while the discount is minimum. Five universities, (in addition to University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and the University of Cincinnati) offer both financial aid and student parent discounts, though the amount is minimal.

Most early childhood education programs, if offered, are combined with childcare services. A few universities offer independent early childhood education programs (teacher training

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facilities), including UC's Arlitt Center. Twelve universities do not offer any early childhood development programs, including three in Ohio.

The U.C. Child Care Center, Inc. serves as the primary childcare center for University of Cincinnati students, faculty and staff. The center provides child care and early childhood education to 149 children ages 3 months to 8 years, year round. The center is located off campus in Clifton but is accessible to both east and west campuses. The center serves as a training site for students in the College of Education Early Childhood Education Program. Unfortunately, the center usually runs at full capacity and provides primarily full time childcare. The waiting list for infant and/or toddler care is one year and the center has limited spaces for part-time and flexible care for student parents.

Six universities, including University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, offer school referral information for staff/faculty members and student parents. The only Ohio institution that offers such services is Kent State University.

Campus Recreation:

Sixteen universities, including the University of Cincinnati and two additional Ohio universities, have no spousal or family membership available to students at their campus recreation center. Northern Kentucky University, University of Houston, and University of Nebraska offer paid, near-by or on-site childcare services when members use their facility. These three institutions, along with University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, offer family-friendly youth programs for their members.

While there are memberships available to UC family member, at the campus recreation center, these memberships are relatively expensive.

Counseling Services:

As in academic advising and library services orientation, counseling services are evenly offered. All peer institutions offer career and psychological health counseling services, and all but four institutions list life skill services on their websites. However, these four institutions cover life skill services, such as stress relief and time management, in their psychological health counseling centers. Ohio State University's Access Collaborative Program offers career and life skill programs for its single student parent populations. University of Cincinnati's Career Development Center assists student parents with counseling services as well. Counseling services, in general, are offered to all students. Based on research, institutions generally do not track the users of such services by traditional or non-traditional (including student parent) status.

Other Support Services:

Only three institutions offer a cost of living analysis on the institution's website. Bowling Green State University and Ohio State University have a "salary converter" to provide students a comparison of living standards in their area, while the University of Minnesota has a detailed comparison included in their "relocation packet" that is offered, upon request, to staff/faculty and/or students. This packet includes information on childcare, education, housing, moving, spouse/partner employment, and diversity of the surrounding community. It also compares the

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cost of living in Minnesota with other states in the United States. None of the services were designed for student parents exclusively. However, these are useful tools for those who need the information. UC's Human Resources has begun offering a relocation package to newly hired faculty or staff.

Only three institutions offer both bus line and carpool information. They are Iowa State University, University of Kentucky, and University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. Nine other institutions, including University of Cincinnati's International Student Services Office (ISSO) website, offer either a short description of bus lines or link to area Department of Transportation for bus line information. Seventeen institutions do not offer any information on transportation.

Eight institutions offer website information on student parent support group activities. Student parent support groups differ in quality and the frequency of their occurrences. Most of the eight institutions' programs are either "MOMS" programs sponsored by the institution's Women's Center, including University of Cincinnati Women's Center, or programs focused on childcare relief. Ohio State University's Access Collaborative program offer services for single-parent students, while University of Minnesota – Twin Cities have a "Student Parent HELP Center" website.

### Ranking:

The University of Minnesota – Twin Cities offers 21 programs in total, of which 9 are specifically designed for student parents. As previously mentioned, it has a help center web site dedicated to student parents.

UC offers eleven services out of twenty-two. Among all twenty-nine institutions, UC ranks tenth. Ohio institutions, in general, provide an average number of services, with only a few exceptions.

Within the State of Ohio, University of Cincinnati is ranked 3 after Ohio State University and Kent State University, both ranked number one with twelve services.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Develop Flexible, On-site, Drop-in Childcare Services***

With the exception of Raymond Walters College, student parents do not have access to affordable and on-site childcare facility. The need to conduct a cost-effective and feasibility investigation to relocate or establish branch on-site childcare center is great.

If relocation and/or branch center establishment is beyond reach, collaboration with early childhood education programs may provide alternatives for on-site childcare for student parents. For example, students in an early childhood education program may obtain hands on experience by volunteering or through a co-op program, while student parents benefit from the on-site childcare.

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Student parents may face sick child emergency, and/or evening and weekend childcare needs when they take classes during extended hours. Therefore, episodic and flexible hour services, including extended hours, government regulation, and liability are items that will require investigated as well.

### ***Disseminate information on UC resources***

Two products of this Success Challenge Grant are a UC Resource Guide and the Peer Institute Matrix. The resource guide offers a concise yet comprehensive overview of campus services that student parents may find useful. UC Women's Center will collaborate with colleges, departments, libraries, and campus housing for placement of the resource guide pamphlets. In addition, the resource guide will be placed on the UC Women's Center Website, with a direct link to/from UC main page for Internet access.

The Peer Institution Matrix is a reference for UC to benchmark current practices and for future planning. The UC Women's Center will disseminate the matrix summary to all departments that require such information.

One of the issues student parents raise is peer attitude and behavior toward them. Within the regular incoming student orientation, it would be beneficial to add an element of diversity training, advising incoming students on the variety of students – including non-traditional students and student parents, on campus as well as establishing sensitivity training for freshman students.

A stand-alone orientation for student parents will be favorable. *This requires advanced identification of student parents* for this program to succeed. In the event that UC obtains accurate data on incoming student parents, special sessions for student parents can be coordinated and offered on a family-friendly schedule and manner. For example, children of student parents are welcome to participate. Information on useful resources for student parents should be included in such orientations.

***Identify a fulltime resource for student parent support and services.*** The non-traditional population, including student parents, is estimated to increase. Currently, 25% of UC's undergraduate students are parents with dependents. With such a large population, it is important for a designated resource to plan and coordinate services and advocacy for student parents. This resource can coordinate and provide support programs, including a web discussion forum and other family-friendly programs, for student parents at UC.

In addition, a fulltime resource can track the student parent population and monitor their retention as a long term UC objective. This, again, requires accurate data on who student parents are at UC. This resource can investigate, along with UC decision makers, and based on findings of the survey/focus group and Peer Institution Matrix determine how UC will address the issues affecting student parents.

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Moreover, should UC decision makers determine a course of action to serve student parents, it is essential to have a focal point, such as this resource, for coordination among all appropriate functions at UC.

The aforementioned initiatives are areas UC can address within a short time frame. However, there are areas that require further consideration and an investigative process for feasibility as well as planning. These areas worthy of considerations are as follow:

### ***Increase Class Offerings***

With the development of technology, it is important to evaluate the availability of distance-learning, and increase the number of on-line courses offered.

Regarding campus classes, understanding it is impossible to cater to every student's schedule, more sections for required courses for degree programs can help reduce the frustration of student parents, or students in general, and helps accelerating student graduation rate. More weekend/evening/weekend classes shall serve the same purpose.

***Collect student parent identifying data.*** Currently, the exact percentage of student parents at UC is unknown. Best estimates are based on financial aid data and the Success Challenge 2005 student parent web survey response rate. For the academic year 2005-06, financial aid reported that of all 19,841 *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)* applications, 24% of students (4,845) reported having dependents. However, not all student parents request financial aid. The web-based survey response indicates student parents represent 25% of all respondents.

Tracking student parent data is important. A large proportion of student parents who participated in the Success Challenge Grant interviews and/or survey expressed the perception that UC neglects them. One of the most repeated sentiments is that the university simply does not "care to know" who they are. Data collection of students' parental status, which student parents did not consider as a privacy issue based on focus group and individual interview responses, would demonstrate UC's interest in knowing who student parents are and help address their sense of alienation. Data would assist student services in promoting targeted services. In addition, having an accurate percentage of the student parent population can be used to advocate for changes in policies and a more responsive faculty and staff. UC can become a leader in addressing student parents as a slice of the increasing non-traditional segment. The survey noted that 71% of student parents have had to postpone their education due to family responsibilities. Understanding this population could significantly increase retention and timely graduation of a student population with GPAs of 3.0 or over.

Collecting student parent identifying data should be relatively easy. One suggestion is to add a field in the registrar's form(s) to include parental status. This information will ensure that the data will remain current. Another suggestion is to add the same field in the admission application. However, this method may or may not continuously capture any change in status once students are enrolled at UC. We urge UC decision makers to consider this initiative as a top priority.

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*Educate faculty and administrators about student parents.* When responding to student parent's experience on campus, the majority of the comments had to do with faculty and their behavior toward student parents in a classroom context. Five of nine respondents reported above average or positive experiences in their interactions with faculty members. However, four out of nine respondents had negative experiences with faculty members. For some respondents, they described a "don't tell" policy in fear of stigmatization as to their parental status. The inconsistency of student attendance policy among faculty members, their attitude and behavior toward student parents can be contributed to the lack of awareness of student parents' status and needs, but, sometimes a lack of sensitivity as well. Faculty members have the greatest influence upon student parents' retention and graduation. Hence, faculty awareness and support for student parents is deterministic to student parent's educational success.

This workshop should be conducted no less than once an academic year, and ideally, more frequently. The content of the workshop should address student parent awareness and retention assistance. In addition, **faculty's student attendance policy** flexibility should be one of the discussion topics, along with adjusting or limiting required activities out-side classroom context with other alternatives, such as Blackboard communication.

Additionally, **UC staff workshop on student parents** is recommended. Increasing awareness of student parents' needs can greatly enhance UC staff members' ability to serve this population.

### *Improve Campus Logistics and Accessibility*

UC decision makers should consider the possibility of modifying certain existing bathroom facilities into a child-friendly area for diaper changes. We recommend designating at least one male and one female bathroom to be adapted with changing station in each building. In addition, a space in each building to be used by nursing mothers should be considered.

Campus recreation and fitness center should offer open membership for family members with reduced fee. Family membership are available however, the memberships are relatively expensive. In addition, children and family programming should be made available.

Regarding family-friendly activity room and stroller-accessible ramps, UC should consider including such logistical designs in the future construction projects.

Once advanced identification of student parents is established and cost-benefit analysis conducted, UC may consider if student parents can receive substantial discounts on childcare, campus housing, parking, and dependent healthcare insurance.

## Appendices

1. **Excel file on Peer Institution Matrix** (request information at [Tamika.Odum@uc.edu](mailto:Tamika.Odum@uc.edu) )
2. **Verbatim with Table File**(request information at [Tamika.Odum@uc.edu](mailto:Tamika.Odum@uc.edu) )

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- 3. Resource Guide File [www.uc.edu/ucwc](http://www.uc.edu/ucwc)**
- 4. Advisory Committee Membership List**

Appendix 7

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<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Full Name</b>	<b>E-mail</b>
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