

Supporting Students Who Are Moms

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February 19,
2020



Imagine constantly feeling pulled in multiple directions while trying to balance life as a college student and a mom. Keeping up with readings, devoting time to studying while also working to pay for childcare and tuition can often result in making choices that puts both roles in question. Whether a student mom is missing a child's soccer game for a course, or missing class because of a sick kid, these are all common struggles that students who are moms face every day. Student moms have a very challenging role to balance. The guilt of not being present as a mom with the constant student demand of papers, exams, and class expectations can leave student moms exhausted and at risk for dropping out.

The Difficulties Facing Student Moms

According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, single moms in college spend the equivalent of a full work day on child care and housework while spending less time on self-care activities like sleep and exercise, and have less time for studying (Clark, 2018). Due to the challenges associated with balancing both worlds, less than a third of single moms complete their degrees.

In order to look at these difficulties, a survey of 225 student moms was completed at a mid-size university. Three main thematic elements were consistent throughout the results. The student moms reported significant challenges in areas of success, school/life balance, and

childcare.

Regarding the area of success, the student moms indicated constantly feeling overwhelmed, feeling discriminated against for being a mom first, they often faced a lack of faculty mentors who were also moms, and they wondered if there could be more flexibility regarding program requirements. When discussing school/life balance, the student moms were concerned with missing extracurriculars of their children to be in class, and they had difficulty concentrating on school requirements due to the demands at home and the overall health of the family unit. In regards to the challenges related to childcare, the student moms noted limited childcare options on campus, the absence of kid-friendly spaces on campus for studying, the lack of maternity leave or policies for missed classwork when giving birth or caring for a newborn, and difficulty paying for childcare if family was not an option.

Supporting Student Moms in the Classroom

Whether a new mom or an older mom returning to the classroom, the challenges for student moms trying to complete a degree is daunting. However, there are some things we can do to help support student moms in our classroom. Many students who are moms may not know or feel comfortable advocating for their needs to their professor. Consider the following list of suggestions to support student moms in the university classroom:

- Consider talking about balancing home and school expectations at the beginning of each course so student moms feel comfortable discussing challenges that may arise during the semester (e.g., child is sick and daycare will not watch him).
- If you are a mom, discuss openly the challenges you face balancing the roles as both a mom and professor. Students feel more comfortable when they have mentors who understand the difficulties they are facing.
- Be aware of the scholarships and grants that are available, specifically for single moms or student moms, to help provide support for childcare or tuition costs.
- If you are a mom, consider becoming a mentor to a young mom on campus. We recently had a student who gave birth and had never changed a diaper before.
- When possible, add in flexibility within a program sequence due to demands of giving birth, breast-feeding, or child-rearing.
- Be supportive of campus initiatives that would provide childcare on campus, parent/family support services, or family friendly housing. One campus reported that those students that utilized the on-campus childcare center had an on-time graduation rate that was three times higher than those who did not have access to on-campus care (IWPR, 2018).
- View motherhood as part of diversity instead of a problem or inconvenience.
- Understand that students are not provided with the same protections as faculty or staff in regards to FMLA leave or maternity leave.

- Be conscious of the difficulties with limited study spaces on campus that are kid friendly and become aware of lactation areas that are available so you can advise students.
- Understand the challenges associated with simple tasks such as “just drop your paper off in my box” when not considering the difficulties of finding close parking, pushing a stroller across campus with lots of steps, or finding childcare in order to drive to campus to drop off the assignment.
- Encourage student moms to consider starting out as part-time students and help them develop both short and long-term goals related to school and timelines to completion. Connect student moms with other moms to provide support, swap childcare during class times, and develop a study routine that promotes success in the course as well as in the home setting.

Overall, in order to best support student moms in your classroom, try to understand the unique challenges they face, be sympathetic to family life demands, and most importantly, listen when those feelings of overwhelmingness pour out into the classroom. Seek to support the student moms where they are and help them get to where they want to be. The following is a list of supports available for student moms and single moms to help them complete their degree.

For Additional Information:

[Scholarship information specifically for Women](#)

[Information on grants, Medicaid applications and tax breaks for single moms](#)

[Resources and information regarding how to attend college as a student-parent](#)

[Support and resources available specifically for single parents](#)

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References:

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