

**Enriching the Mix:
Responding to the Needs of Student Parents
at the University of Michigan**

**Final Report to the Provost
from the Student Parent Task Force Appointed by
The Center for the Education of Women and
The Rackham School of Graduate Studies**

**Submitted June 2001
Revised December 2001**

Student Parent Task Force Members

James Bean, Associate Dean and Professor, College of Engineering

Jill Becker, Professor, Psychology, College of Literature, Science and the Arts

Brian Carter, Architecture Program Chair and Professor, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

Santiago Colas, Graduate Chair and Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures, College of Literature, Science and the Arts

Sandra Danziger, Professor, School of Social Work

Leslie de Pietro, Director, Family Care Resources Program

David Engelke, Assistant Dean, Program Director and Professor, Medical School

Susan Fisher-George, Senior Financial Aid Officer, Office of Financial Aid

Pamela Fowler, Director, Office of Financial Aid

Rachel Glick, Associate Dean and Clinical Assistant Professor, Medical School

Ada Sue Hinshaw, Dean and Professor, School of Nursing

Lisa Jackson, Graduate Student Parent, Biopsychology, College of Literature, Science and the Arts

Maricel Kann, Graduate Student Parent, Chemistry, College of Literature, Science and the Arts

James Mosher, Graduate Student Parent, Law School

Thelma K. Thomas, Associate Dean, Rackham Graduate School, Associate Professor, History of Art, College of Literature, Science and the Arts, and Associate Curator, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

Jeanne Wilt, Assistant Dean, Business School

Marilyn Woolfolk, Assistant Dean and Associate Professor, School of Dentistry

Chair: **Carol Hollenshead**, Director, Center for the Education of Women

Staff: **Jayne London**, Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives, Rackham Graduate School

Beth Sullivan, Policy Advocate, Center for the Education of Women

Section I: Executive Summary

**Enriching the Mix:
Responding to the Needs of Student Parents
at the University of Michigan**

Final Report to the Provost from the Student Parent Task Force

Enriching the Mix: Responding to the Needs of Student Parents at the University of Michigan

Introduction

Why should the University be concerned about issues affecting student parents? Do student parents face particular kinds of problems? Should the University develop specific policies or programs to address the needs of student parents?

The answer to these questions - and the discussion of student parents in its entirety - needs to take place within the larger context of diversity. The University of Michigan has boldly articulated the value it places on having a diverse student population. Like other groups of historically underrepresented students on campus, student parents bring unique experiences and perspectives that serve to enrich and enliven our academic and cultural environments. The presence of student parents on this campus has important benefits to other students, as well as to faculty and staff.

Here are just a few examples of the ways in which student parents enhance the learning environment:

- Because of student parents' need to balance a greater number of important responsibilities, their time spent on academic work tends to be more organized and focused.
- Students with parenting responsibilities tend to have a clearer sense of "the big picture" and how completion of their degree will meet certain goals for their life and their family.
- Parent scholars serve as role models for fellow students as they balance family and academic responsibilities.

As the Student Parent Task Force examined ways to improve the University experience for student parents, we came to realize that many of our recommendations will also improve the lives of other students, faculty and staff--whether they have children or not. Numerous management theorists (e.g., Covey, Senge) and practitioners have documented the important benefits organizations accrue when they acknowledge and support the outside interests of their employees. By respecting the outside interests, priorities and responsibilities that students, faculty and staff have that lie beyond their University work, UM can expect to benefit from a less stressed, more creative, more productive and more committed community.

Implementation of additional family-friendly policies and programs can also be a highly effective recruitment tool in attracting the best students, staff, and faculty to the University.

Since family issues remain disproportionately the concern of women, these efforts will also be likely to lead to an increase in the number of women in the academy. Women continue to be underrepresented in the science and engineering fields as well as in the more senior ranks in nearly all schools and colleges. Male students are also likely to appreciate family support services given that increasing numbers of men are taking an active role in parenting.

Background to the Task Force

The idea for this project grew from conversations between the Center for the Education of Women (CEW) and the Rackham School of Graduate Studies (Rackham) who shared a concern about the academic, social and personal well-being of student parents. Both units had been hearing from graduate student parents that:

- They have dual roles as parent and student, but feel the University neither acknowledges nor supports their role as parent;
- Graduate education is built upon the outdated expectation that students do not have family responsibilities;
- Having children is interpreted by many peers and faculty to mean these students are not truly committed to academic pursuits;
- Having family responsibilities marginalizes students both academically and socially; and
- The University lacks spaces that accommodate the presence of young children.

In 1997, CEW and Rackham jointly submitted a proposal to study the graduate student experience for students with parenting responsibilities. The stated goal of this project was to understand what policies and procedures act as barriers to the academic success of graduate student parents and whether these barriers can be removed without sacrificing the quality of our graduate programs. Funding for this proposal was received in 1998 through the Office of the Provost. Provost Cantor requested the study focus on:

- Exploring the effects on students and programs of liberalizing part-time enrollment policies;
- Determining the feasibility of offering health insurance to students not currently eligible; and
- Determining the best ways to promote faculty support and awareness of student parents' needs for flexibility and their desire to be valued.

In the first phase of this project, CEW and Rackham met with graduate student parents, associate deans for graduate studies, graduate chairs, and various administrators in the schools and colleges of the University of Michigan. The result of these discussions was summarized in the October 2000 report entitled "Graduate Student Parents: Enriching the Mix."

Task Force Charge and Process

The Student Parent Task Force was formed in Fall 2000 and met over the course of the 2000-01 academic year to develop recommendations that would address the concerns raised by student parents, faculty and administrators. The scope of the discussions was enlarged at this time to include all University students -- graduate, professional and undergraduate. The Task Force, chaired by CEW Director Carol Hollenshead, included a cross-section of the University: graduate and professional student parents, deans, associate deans, assistant deans, program and graduate chairs, and faculty, as well as staff from Rackham, CEW, the Office of Financial Aid and the Family Care Resources Program.

The Task Force began by reviewing past University studies and reports that focused on student parent issues. (See Attachment A.) In addition, various Task Force members attended a number of forums focusing on the needs of student parents. (See Attachment B.) The issues raised in these reports and student forums brought significant insights to the deliberations of the Task Force.

Task Force Recommendations

The Task Force recommendations listed below and detailed in Section II are organized thematically. Each recommendation described in Section II is supported with background information regarding the problem it seeks to address. If action has already been taken in response to a recommendation, the status of that effort is also noted. To the extent possible, approximate costs have been estimated for many of the recommendations.

In order to aid University leadership in reviewing the recommendations, the Task Force judged each recommendation on the basis of its potential impact on student parents, the urgency of need to which the recommendation responded, and the cost and relative ease with which the recommendation could be implemented. A list of prioritized groupings of Student Parent Task Force recommendations was developed from the results of this ranking exercise. This list is presented after the thematically organized list of recommendations.

The Task Force collected and reviewed a number of other worthwhile suggestions for improvements. Many of these ideas had merit, but for one reason or another did not seem to be as high in priority as the final recommendations described in Section II of the Task Force report. Because we believe there is value to senior leadership in seeing all items seriously considered for inclusion in the report, we have listed the remaining recommendations in Section III, "Other Issues for Consideration."

Thematic List of Student Parent Task Force Recommendations

1. Improve the Information We Collect and Distribute Regarding Student Parents

- 1A. Have a centralized means for obtaining, storing, and maintaining basic demographic information about students who have children so that the University can better direct information, programming, and other resources to these students.
- 1B. Develop and disseminate hard copy materials that can be used to educate the wider campus community about the needs of student parents and the resources that are available to assist them.
- 1C. Develop a student parent website to educate the campus community about resources that serve student parents.

2. Improve the Academic and Cultural Climate for Student Parents

- 2A. Develop a statement that puts the University on record as supporting family-friendly practices.
- 2B. Request that deans and department chairs engage in discussions with faculty about their attitudes toward and expectations of student parents as well as provide a summary report to the Provost of current policies and practices that affect the academic and cultural experience for their student parents
- 2C. Hold an annual ceremony that publicly recognizes and rewards units or individuals for successful programs they develop in support of families or work-life balance in general.

3. Increase the Flexibility of Academic Programs to Enable Student Parents to Meet their Academic and Family Needs

- 3A. Revise how the University defines “full-time” versus “part-time” enrollment so that students wanting to spread their course loads more evenly among the Fall, Winter and Spring/Summer terms are not disadvantaged.
- 3B. Encourage the development of part-time master’s programs in the various professional schools and colleges.
- 3C. Establish policies whereby graduate students can arrange with their department for short-term part-time study and/or extensions on the time limits to candidacy and degree for exceptional circumstances.

4. Increase the Availability of Quality Licensed Child Care in the Local and Campus Community

- 4A. Contract with the Child Care Network to increase the number of child care providers in the University area willing to care for infants and toddlers, as well as to provide evening care.

- 4B. Offer small start-up grants to new providers who commit to reserving spaces for the children of UM students, faculty, and staff.
 - 4C. Provide incentives for residents of Family Housing to become licensed child care providers.
 - 4D. Use all of the methods in Recommendations 4A-C to also increase the availability of evening child care, particularly during study periods and exam times.
 - 4E. Consider raising the salary levels of UM child care center teachers and directors in order to reduce high turnover and maintain quality child care capacity on campus.
 - 4F. Revise UM child care center wait list policy so that at least ten children of low-income students each year can gain access to UM center care.
- 5. Increase Funds to Help Students Pay for Child Care**
- 5A. Increase the amount of money directed to the Child Care Subsidy Program that is administered through the Office of Financial Aid.
 - 5B. Revise University travel reimbursement policy so that students, faculty, and staff can claim their additional child care fees as an allowable travel expense where this is compatible with federal, state, or private funding agency guidelines.
- 6. Encourage All Schools to Determine How to Best Address the Additional Financial Needs of Students Who Have High Monthly Expenses on a Regular Basis Due to Dependent Care or Other Unique Costs**
- 7. Expand and Improve Health Insurance Options and Information for Students and their Dependents.**
- 7A. Allow all University of Michigan students to purchase GradCare for themselves and their dependents.
 - 7B. Create the role of a student health insurance coordinator who has the responsibility and authority to coordinate all University- or UM student-sponsored insurance and health service offerings to students.
 - 7C. Allow the spouses/partners of current and recently graduated or disenrolled UM students to buy the UHS Prepaid Plan health insurance.
 - 7D. Review the copay structure for the three University-related clinics preferred under the domestic and international student insurance plans and lower instances of \$50 copays down to \$10.

8. Modify Buildings Across Campus to Accommodate the Needs of Students, Faculty and Staff Who Have Children.

8A. Install diaper changing tables in at least two bathrooms (one for men, one for women) in existing major campus buildings, especially those used by the public. In all new buildings and renovations, install changing tables in at least two bathrooms.

8B. Increase the number of lactation rooms on campus and require all new buildings to have a lactation room.

9. Provide Electronic Data Ports to All Family Housing Residents.

10. Appoint a Small Committee To Solicit Input About these Recommendations, Monitor Implementation of Student Parent Task Force Recommendations, and Continue to Address the Needs of Student Parents.

Prioritized Groupings of Student Parent Task Force Recommendations

Recommendations Considered to Have Primarily High Impact, High Urgency as Well as Low to Moderate Cost and Relatively Easy Implementation:

- 1A. Have a centralized means for obtaining, storing, and maintaining basic demographic information about students who have children so that the University can better direct information, programming, and other resources to these students.
- 1B. Develop and disseminate hard copy materials that can be used to educate the wider campus community about the needs of student parents and the resources that are available to assist them.
- 1C. Develop a student parent website to educate the campus community about resources that serve student parents.
- 2A. Develop a statement that puts the University on record as supporting family-friendly practices.
- 2B. Request that deans and department chairs engage in discussions with faculty about their attitudes toward and expectations of student parents as well as provide a summary report to the Provost of current policies and practices that affect the academic and cultural experience for their student parents
- 3C. Establish policies whereby graduate students can arrange with their department for short-term part-time study and/or extensions on the time limits to candidacy and degree for exceptional circumstances.
- 4F. Revise UM child care center wait list policy so that at least ten children of low-income students each year can gain access to UM center care.
- 8A. Install diaper changing tables in at least two bathrooms (one for men, one for women) in existing major campus buildings, especially those used by the public. In all new buildings and renovations, install changing tables in at least two bathrooms.
- 8B. Increase the number of lactation rooms on campus and require all new buildings to have a lactation room.
9. Provide electronic data ports to all Family Housing residents.
10. Appoint a small committee to solicit input about the Student Parent Task Force recommendations, monitor implementation of recommendations, and continue to address the needs of student parents.

Recommendations Considered to Have High Impact, High Urgency With Moderate Cost and More Difficult Implementation:

- 3A. Revise how the University defines “full-time” versus “part-time” enrollment so that students wanting to spread their course loads more evenly among the Fall, Winter and Spring/Summer terms are not disadvantaged.
- 3B. Encourage the development of part-time master’s programs in the professional schools and colleges.
- 4A. Contract with the Child Care Network to increase the number of child care providers in the University area willing to care for infants and toddlers, as well as to provide evening care.
- 4B. Offer small start-up grants to new providers who commit to reserving spaces for the children of UM students, faculty, and staff.
- 4C. Provide incentives for residents of Family Housing to become licensed child care providers.
- 4D. Use all of the methods in Recommendations 4A-C to also increase the availability of evening child care, particularly during study periods and exam times.
- 4E. Consider raising the salary levels of UM child care center teachers and directors in order to reduce high turnover and maintain quality child care capacity on campus.
- 5A. Increase the amount of money directed to the Child Care Subsidy Program that is administered through the Office of Financial Aid.
- 6. Encourage all schools to determine how to best address the additional financial needs of students who have high monthly expenses on a regular basis due to dependent care or other unique costs.
- 7A. Allow all University of Michigan students to purchase GradCare for themselves and their dependents.
- 7B. Create the role of a student health insurance coordinator who has the responsibility and authority to coordinate all University- or UM student-sponsored insurance and health service offerings to students.
- 7C. Allow the spouses/partners of current and recently graduated or disenrolled UM students to buy the UHS Prepaid Plan health insurance.

Recommendations Considered to Have Lesser Impact and Urgency With Moderate Cost and Moderately Easy Implementation:

- 2C. Hold an annual ceremony that publicly recognizes and rewards units or individuals for successful programs they develop in support of families or work-life balance in general.
- 5B. Revise University travel reimbursement policy so that students, faculty, and staff can claim their additional child care fees as an allowable travel expense where this is compatible with federal, state, or private funding agency guidelines.
- 7D. Review the copay structure for the three University-related clinics preferred under the domestic and international student insurance plans and lower instances of \$50 copays down to \$10.