

**Graduate Student Parents and Family Life
at the University of Chicago:
A Preliminary Report**

June 9, 2011

Submitted to the University Administration
by University of Chicago Graduate Students United

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I. The Importance of Quality Student-Parent and Family-Life Support

Quality student-parent and family-life support is essential to maintaining a healthy academic community. The importance of this kind of support is self-evident to graduate student families, but the effect on community life may be less apparent. In its efforts to promote and support a thriving and diverse academic community, the University of Chicago should devote special attention to understanding the needs of underserved groups such as graduate student parents.

II. The Experience of Graduate Student Parents

Graduate student parents at the University of Chicago come from a variety of backgrounds and are an important component of the community diversity that is valued by top-tier universities. Many of these parents have found that pairing student life with parental responsibilities constitutes a great personal challenge, and is sometimes impossible. Appendix A to this report includes personal statements by various graduate student parents; the general concerns and problems that have been identified in the production of this report are summarized here.

The lack of quality and affordable child care has put many graduate student parents in the precarious position of having to choose between quality, consistency and affordability of child care. One graduate student parent can only afford to put her daughter in child care for three days a month on her current graduate student budget. Because of quality related issues, she has had to change child care providers three times since moving to Chicago 10 months ago. Additionally she finds it difficult to develop her ideas and pursue her research, an essential part of successful scholarship, while juggling child care responsibilities with her husband, who is also a student. Another graduate student parent has never been able to place his children in day care because he and his partner simply could not afford it.

healthcare for dependents is also another graduate student parent concern that has lead to enormous economic and social burdens. One graduate student parent has had to take out loans in order to make support her family early in their graduate school experience. Many graduate student parents are being put in a position where they must choose between being parents and being students. This dichotomy is not only unacceptable but completely unrealistic. One graduate student parent and her husband must work at night while her daughter sleeps in order to meet the minimally adequate standards required by their graduate student responsibilities.

Graduate student parents have been forced to be resilient and creative in coming up with solutions to the family life issues that have been insufficiently supported by the University. By utilizing parent co-operatives, among other approaches, some graduate student parents have been able to navigate the challenges they face. Nonetheless, even these alternatives require significant time and financial resources that are an impediment to moving forward in their studies. Current solutions pursued by graduate student parents include:

- The formation of student-parent co-operatives and the use of space provided by the University's Family Resources Center (hereafter FRC). In this way, some graduate student parents have been able to navigate the institutional and economic difficulties presented by the lack of *affordable* and *readily available* (there are often long waitlists for more affordable programs) childcare services at the University and in the Hyde Park community. Graduate student parents have also come together as a community through the Student Parent Organization and the Student Parent Listerv to share ideas about how to find care for their families in a situation where there are few affordable choices that allow them to also continue with their academic work. However, not all graduate student parents are aware of such resources; there is little information (if any) on the actual number of graduate student parents at the University, and whether they are adequately informed about the resources open to them.

- The use of the income-based childcare and healthcare subsidies for families offered by the State of Illinois. While these programs have been helpful for some, the programs are income-based and not universally available for all types of students. Furthermore, for subsidized child healthcare, many area hospitals do *not* accept the plan, presenting further challenges to already-burdened student parents. The University continues to encourage the use of such state-funded programs, meant for low-income working families. In doing so, however, it abdicates its own responsibility as an institution with adequate financial resources to invest in affordable health and childcare services for the University community of students and employees.

- Saving money by moving out of Hyde Park, where rents are high, to more affordable locations. However, graduate student parents then sacrifice their ready access to the University and risk relative isolation from the academic community.

In short, graduate student parents are a resourceful group and have found ways around the dearth of options available to them and their children at the University of Chicago. Nonetheless, it is time for the University to implement a set of affordable family-friendly programs, as many of our less well-off peer institutions have done, rather than leaving graduate student parents on their own to make difficult choices and search desperately for affordable resources.

III. Shortcomings of the University of Chicago Graduate Student Parent Policy

The existence of a Graduate Student Parent Policy at the University of Chicago, as outlined in the Student Manual,¹ is to be commended. However, as it currently stands this policy fails to adequately meet the needs of graduate student parents, let alone clearly define the University rules and regulations related to maternity and paternity

¹ <http://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/university/index.shtml>

leave, childcare, and family life for graduate student parents. The shortcomings of the Parent Policy include:

- The Policy outlines a set of possibilities for extensions, leaves and modifications for graduate student parents who decide to start families. However, the vague wording, directing students to discuss various options for milestone extensions with their advisors and Area Deans, contributes to the difficulty and uncertainty of family-planning decisions by graduate student parents.
- The leave of absence policy for childbirth and newborn care ends up being punitive to students who take it because they could lose their university housing, access to facilities, and medical insurance. International students can also jeopardize their visa status. The policy states that these might be consequences of a leave of absence and provides no remedy, leaving students with little option but to reject a leave, and thus sacrifice time spent with their newborns.
- The Policy provides some extra time to fulfill requirements, but without actually allowing student parents to “stop the clock” on their time-to-degree. As such, it neglects to address the actual impact on the time needed to fulfill academic requirements as a result of childbirth, nursing, newborn care, and the overall post-birth commitments and challenges of graduate student parents.
- There is no mention of policies concerning issues such as lactation or infant feeding on the campus, or emergency childcare for graduate student parents.
- The Policy notably fails to mention childcare and dependent healthcare, two central concerns for graduate student parents.

These gaps in the University of Chicago Graduate Student Parent Policy highlight some of the weaknesses in the University’s student-parent and family-life support.

IV. Child Care and Family Life Provisions at Peer Institutions

The quality of student-parent support is an essential component of a healthy academic community. Part of what makes family-life support more generally important to the University community is the necessity to recruit and retain top-rate faculty, graduate students, and staff. With this in mind, the University of Chicago falls short of its peers in a number of areas related to family life, particularly with regard to child care and maternal/dependent healthcare.

University of California, Berkeley

The University of California at Berkeley offers child care to students, faculty, and staff through the university-wide “Early Childhood Education Program”.

Subsidized fees for students are based on a sliding scale set by the State Department of Education, and are assessed based on family size and gross monthly income. There are also 15 subsidized/discounted child care centers in the area in addition to free 'kids activities' (sports, dance etc.) that account for an additional two hours of free quality family/child related programming.

Maternity and Paternity leave is coordinated by department, though all pregnant women can add a year to their normative time requirements. In addition, any student may add up to six months for emergencies like a child's serious illness. Up to six weeks of fully paid maternity leave is also included. For example an engineering student may receive two "new parent" semesters of no or little involvement (no pay) or part-time status with full-time benefits, with normative time adjusted accordingly, and "part time" pregnancy leave 4-weeks before and 6-weeks after.

Berkeley also offers an institutionally-run student parent center. This center coordinates well-developed advice networks and newsletters. A student parent association, student parent alumni network, peer mentorship, and "bear cubs @ cal" also foster family life in the Berkeley community.

Access to "sick kid daycare" and referrals to medical and other non-university low cost alternatives are available.

Graduate Student Parents are offered below-market price Graduate Family housing, as well as "continued support" from the childbirth accommodation fund, for which student parents can apply. Referral to state and federal social services programs for low-income families (i.e. food stamps) are also available.

Duke University

Duke University students cannot access the on-campus child care center, but the University gave \$1 million in grants to 'Duke Partnership Centers', which gives preference to Duke faculty, students, and staff, and is privately administered through Child Care Services Association.

Graduate student parents also receive a childcare subsidy based on income to send their children to three-, four-, or five-star childcare facilities accredited by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

In terms of maternity and paternity leave, the designated primary caregiver will be relieved of full-time graduate studies and duties for up to seven weeks after the birth or adoption of a child. If need be, up to two of those weeks may be before the projected birth or adoption date. The non-primary care giving parent may be

relieved of one week of full-time graduate studies and duties in order to provide additional support to the primary caregiver. If both parents are Duke PhD students, they may discuss with their respective degree programs and the Graduate School a feasible proposal for dividing up the eight week accommodation period in a different way if they so wish. PhD students benefiting from accommodation will remain registered as full-time students, and thus their eligibility for graduate student benefits remains intact (insurance, housing eligibility, student services, and the like). Eligible students who are also receiving stipend support continue to receive that support. This policy only applies to PhD students.

Princeton University

Princeton University's child care centers are available and open to both University and non-University members. One of these child care centers, "The University League Nursery" is available to university members at a discounted rate, relative to non-University affiliate members. Graduate student parents, however, are eligible for the "Student Child Care Assistance Program" (SCCAP).

SCCAP provides assistance to eligible graduate and undergraduate students with pre-kindergarten children to help them meet the cost of child care. The grants are based on household resources, and can be used to pay for a wide range of possible arrangements, from in-home care to licensed day care centers. The maximum grant for one eligible child is \$5,000; an additional grant of up to \$5000 is available for a second eligible child. Only one grant is available per eligible child. For tax purposes, these grants are treated as additional stipend income for graduate students or non-tuition scholarships for undergraduates, and may be subject to state and federal tax.

SCCAP's is open to graduate student parents who are unmarried or married to a spouse or partner who is: employed at least 50% part-time; or a full-time student matriculated in a degree or certificate program; or disabled as defined by the Internal Revenue Code.

SCCAP may be granted for up to one year to those eligible families in which the spouse or partner of the student, although eligible for employment, is currently unemployed but is actively seeking employment. Parents must have a total annual household income of less than \$130,000.

Princeton also has a number of innovative initiatives, including the Dependent Care Travel Fund for Graduate Students which is a \$10,000 grant from the Elsevier Foundation to help graduate degree candidates and postdoctoral fellows in the sciences and engineering. The Graduate School also funds this program

for the humanities and social sciences. This program allows graduate students pursuing research at Princeton to apply for funds to pay for dependent care on site or at home while they attend academic conferences or similar events. This program meets the needs of students and post docs to present research that is crucial for the development of their careers.

Princeton also offers a “back up” care plan, which allows Graduate Student Parents to have adequate child care in home for 4 dollars an hour, or 2 dollars an hour at a care center.

Maternity leave at Princeton is extended to graduate students who give birth, 12 weeks of maternity leave are provided during which the birth mother continues to receive financial support, and teaching and other academic obligations are suspended. While applications are required, the benefit is automatic.

Also, birth mothers or primary caregivers who are pursuing doctorates will be eligible for an extension of academic deadlines that provides for one additional term of financial support to complete their studies for each child they give birth to or adopt. A full-time enrolled male graduate student who has been the primary caregiver of a newborn or adopted baby during the regular enrollment period of his doctoral program can apply for extended financial support upon suitable declaration of that responsibility

Additionally, the cost of adding dependents to health range from 725.00 for one child to 2,175.00 for three children. The student healthcare plan includes: Childhood Immunizations (ages 11 & under) Gardasil (HPV) Immunization (ages 9-26) covered at 80% After Deductible. This also includes “Well Baby Care”: which includes six “Well Baby” visits up to and including the 2nd year visit.

Princeton also offers a peer network and counselor service called “Carebridge.” Work-life counselors offer assistance addressing personal issues related parenting and help graduate degree candidates find child care arrangements that meet their needs.

Emory University

Emory offers 10 days of discounted child care per year through the “Bright Horizon Network”. The pay rate is \$2/hour/child for in-home care and \$15/day/child for care in a center.

Pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare are handled according to other leave of absence guidelines. These guidelines state that a student in good standing may be granted 2 one-year leaves of absence upon recommendation of the student’s

program and approval of the Dean. Leaves of absence are available to students only within eight years of admission to advanced standing

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Under the Parental Leave Policy, a full-time stipend-supported graduate student is eligible for six weeks of leave from his/her graduate program. In the event that both parents are full-time graduate students at UNC-Chapel Hill, only one may take Parental Leave.

During this period of leave, the graduate student will continue to be enrolled (i.e. tuition will be paid) and will receive his/her full level of stipend support and health benefits.

Additionally, the student will receive a one-academic semester extension for all academic responsibilities. Full-time graduate students who are not stipend-supported may request parental leave without tuition or stipend support. Such leave will include the one-academic semester extension. Departments must be notified eight weeks in advance of expected birth or adoption.

The campus also has a number of lactation rooms.

healthcare for the dependents of Graduate Student Parents is broken into two categories. Graduate Student Parents pay \$2,126.00 for student and child care and \$4,535.00 for student and family care. TAs/RAs/Fellows pay \$2,499/year for children and student. The spouse and children rate is \$5,646/year.

Chapel Hill housing places Graduate Student families in one residence with affordable 2BR (\$950-960/mo, utilities included) apartments with communal areas, including playground and barbecue pit.

Stanford University

Graduate Student Parents at Stanford have access to all 7 on-site facilities. Additionally, Graduate Student Parents have access to The Children's Center of the Stanford Community (CCSC), which is a parent co-op. The Pepper Tree After school program (K-2), gives wait list priority and discounted rates for Graduate Student Parents. The Rainbow School (3-9 yrs) has priority for those living in the housing development where it is located, usually grad students. Madera Grove has Graduate Student Parents as second priority and the Arboretum Children's Center has no priorities and offers extended hours. CCSC has priority for those living in the housing development where it is located.

The specific details of maternity leaves at Stanford are determined by department. The university-wide policy, however, guarantees that all female graduate students—including those in the professional schools—who are pregnant or have recently given birth and who are registered and matriculated are eligible for an "academic accommodation period" of up to two academic quarters before and after the birth, during which the student may postpone course assignments, examinations and other academic requirements. (This is not a leave of absence.) Female graduate students are eligible for full-time enrollment during this period and retain access to Stanford facilities, Cardinal Care student health insurance and Stanford housing. Students are also granted an automatic one-quarter extension of university and departmental requirements and academic milestones—with the possibility of up to three quarters by petition under unusual circumstances. In addition, female graduate students supported by fellowships, teaching assistantships, and/or research assistantships are excused from their regular teaching or research duties for a period of six weeks during which they continue to receive support.

Additional parental support can be found at the WorkLife office, and through various listservs.

Graduate Student Parents at Stanford can add dependents to their existing student healthcare, and grad student employees are afforded subsidized premiums. The cost of an additional spouse or domestic partner and/or dependent ranges from \$202-\$386/month (\$2,424 - \$4,632 a year). Maternity healthcare is also 100% covered through student health insurance.

Graduate Student Parents with two or more children in on-campus housing may also receive up to one year of additional financial assistance.

University of California, Los Angeles

UCLA offers full-time, year-round child care to UCLA students, staff and faculty in three nationally recognized and accredited child care centers.

UCLA Graduate Parents also have access to a unique parent participation nursery school for children ages 2 through 5 (9hrs/month mandatory volunteer time and a cheaper rate, for student, staff, and faculty). UCLA's Early Care and Education provides various types of child care tuition assistance for families with at least one parent enrolled as a full-time UCLA student.

Family Leave at UCLA varies by department. Leaves of absence can be taken for maternity or paternity leave for the birth or adoption of a baby, unless the student is studying for a doctoral examination, for periods of one to three

quarters. This may be extended for a total of six quarters. Students on leave may not keep a salaried appointment to any apprentice teaching or research title.

The ECE Resource and Information Program provides assistance in locating community-based child care. Health insurance is available for dependents of the insured student. Eighty percent of maternity healthcare is covered by the student insurance. UCLA also offers year round kindergarten, summer programming and a lab school for ages 4-12.

Oregon State University

Oregon State offers two childcare centers to graduate student parents, totaling about 200 spots. There is a preschool which offers free or subsidized services to low-income parents; free short-term childcare is offered at the University library. OSU also offers a child care subsidy for which parents can apply semester. This subsidy is in addition to reduced tuition and state grants. Graduate Student Parent also have access to childcare centers subsidized by the City and the United Way.

The Our Little Village Library is a short term drop-off child care center for children of student parents. This center allows any currently enrolled student parent to drop off their children ages 6 months-10 years old for up to 3 hours per day while using library resources. This service is paid for with student fees, so there is no cost to use the center.

Graduate Student Parental leave is covered by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) This covers up to 12 weeks of leave. Student parents may take maternity leave, but the details are decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the student's advisor and department.

With regard to healthcare, OSU pays 85 percent of the yearly premium cost for graduate students. Premiums for 2010-11 (charged on a per-month basis):
Graduate fellow only coverage - \$43.00 Graduate fellow + Spouse/Partner - \$314.47 Graduate fellow + Children (1 or more) - \$233.01 Graduate fellow + Spouse/Partner + Children - \$504.44.

In Maternal Care OSU's student health plan covers 100% of Well baby care including any appropriate lab service. Benefits are limited to thirteen examinations during the first 36 months of life. This limit includes any standard in-hospital exams performed at birth and any exams performed at a physician's office. The plan also covers 90% of services of a physician or a licensed certified nurse midwife for pregnancy and 90% of routine nursery care of a newborn while the mother is hospitalized and eligible for pregnancy-related benefits under this

plan if the newborn is also eligible and enrolled in this plan. There is also a free prenatal care program.

OSU also has 12 lactation rooms around campus. Insurance covers 85% of cost of a breast pump; there is a set policy for mothers who pump, complete with a printable poster you can bring with you to put outside the room you choose to pump in. OSU is proud to have "been designated a Breastfeeding Mother Friendly Employer." OSU also sponsors monthly "lunch and learn" sessions addressing various issues for parents (e.g. "making the most of your maternity leave," "adoption," etc.)

OSU awards a prize to the faculty or staff member that has provided admirable support to an OSU student with children.

The University of Washington

The University of Washington offers two childcare centers that give precedence to graduate student parents. There is also a center designated for mildly sick children. The University underwrites the entire daily fee for academic student employees.

At the University of Washington, Graduate Student Parent childcare centers are cheaper per month than the childcare center that serves faculty and staff. Students can apply for yearly child care assistance from the university. Current assistance includes discounts of up to 60% off for infant care, toddlers, and preschoolers, and 35% off child care for school-age children.

Graduate Student Parental Leave is covered by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for up to 12 weeks. This leave greatly reduces student access to University resources, but they maintain the ability to visit the Hall Health Primary Care Center on a pay-for-service basis. The Graduate Student Parental Leave also does not stop the time-to-degree clock.

WU has an active Student Parent Organization and the UW Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) has recently formed a student-parent task force to investigate providing better support to student parents.

Graduate Student Parent healthcare can cover dependents at the student only rate of \$1840, the Student + child/children rate of \$4160, the Student and spouse rate of \$4584, and the Student + spouse + child/children rate of \$6904. The student healthcare plan also covers maternity health, which covers 2 ultrasounds; 48 hr inpatient care for vaginal delivery and 96 hrs for c-section; routine nursery care and infant well-being checkups. The new born baby also shares his/her

mother's insurance for the first 3 weeks. The plan also covers 80% of midwifery costs.

UW has a number of family friendly resources such as changing stations in men's and women's bathrooms in selected campus buildings and several family housing buildings. Students with dependents have priority over students without dependents in securing these apartments.

The University of Oregon

At the University of Oregon, Graduate Student Parents have access to The Co-op Family Center, which is an independent, non-profit co-operative located in UO Spencer View Family Housing. Student families receive first priority and a tuition discount. The center serves children eight weeks to ten years. Additionally, Graduate Student Parents also have access to the Moss Street Children's Center, a program of the Erb Memorial Student Union, offers university student families first priority and a tuition discount. The center serves children three months through fifth grade.

UO Graduate Student Parents also can apply for the Child Care Subsidy, an incidental fee funded program, which pays a percentage of child care expenses for low-income student parents. The goal of the program is to ease the financial pressure of paying child care expenses while also paying college tuition. Based on their need level, parents receive a subsidy ranging from 20%-50%. There is also a Child Care Scholarship funded by the Women's Center.

Harvard University

Graduate Student Parents at Harvard University have access to University childcare. There are six separate tuition-funded child care centers at the University. The centers, which are fully licensed with high-quality professional staff, provide full-time or part-time care for 380 children of Harvard staff, faculty, and students and families in the surrounding community.

Some of the child care centers are able to make a limited amount of internally generated financial aid available each year. Some of the programs also have spaces supported by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care for income-eligible families.

Harvard just ended their pilot parent stipend program in 2010. The pilot program—planned to last three years but extended this academic year to last for a fourth—was limited to graduate students with an approximate income below \$80,000 whose children are enrolled in one of the six competitive daycare centers associated with Harvard. The program only provided stipends to 17

students this year, and University spokesperson Kevin Galvin said that administrators decided in December that the University's resources should benefit a larger number of individuals in the community. "We recognize that many graduate students are also parents, and there are new programs under consideration that would help address their needs," Galvin wrote in an e-mailed statement. The scholarship—which offered up to \$5,000—has been cut.

When taking a family related leave, Harvard Graduate Student Parents may pause their graduate clock. The Harvard University Student Health Plan (HUSHP) covers dependents for an additional fee, but Maternity related healthcare is covered by the basic HUSHP plan.

Harvard University students who are married and/or have children may be eligible for Harvard-affiliated housing through Harvard Real Estate Services (HRES).

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

The University of Massachusetts, Amherst offers University students and employees first priority to enroll their children in their on campus child care program. Enrollment is offered on a space available basis, in the order of the date of the enrollment application. Child care tuition rates are based on a sliding fee scale determined by family size and household income. A variety of child care tuition subsidies are available through the University, as well as local and state agencies.

The Graduate Student Senate (GSS) administers subsidies to graduate students and graduate student employees with children for childcare. These subsidies are financed through a combination of funding sources: Graduate Student Senate Tax, Child Care Funds as specified in the collective bargaining Agreement between GEO/UAW Local 2322 and the University, and the UAW/UMASS Health and Welfare Trust Fund. The subsidies are generally allocated during the beginning of the Fall and Spring semester for use during the academic year. Subsidy amounts may vary depending on the number of applications, but in the past have ranged from 5% to 40% of cost. Subsidies are determined based on income and family size by a committee of the Graduate Student Senate. Graduate students with children ages 0-12 are eligible to apply. Graduate Student Parents who receive financial aid may see a reduction in this aid based on child care funding provided by this program, but unlike financial aid loans, funding from the GSS Child Care program is not a loan and will not have to be repaid.

Graduate Student Parents at UMass can receive up to 8 Weeks unpaid maternity , 2 Weeks unpaid paternity. (Covered by the Family Medical Leave Act.) Graduate

Student Parents at UMass can receive the standard Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP), + a family plan (The family plan rate for 2010 – 2011 is \$1,958.50 per semester.) Enrolment in the SHIP individual plan is required to be eligible to purchase the family plan. Premiums reflects the total of the two plans. No additional Maternity healthcare is provided.

Family Housing is also available and requires an application.

New York University

New York University Graduate Students Parents have access to a Graduate Student Childcare Subsidy and Referral Program. To be eligible, the Graduate Student Parent must be a full time graduate student with a child under the age of 6. These students may apply for a small subsidy credit. The student must submit an application before the deadline and include a copy of the child's birth certificate. Each student must re-apply each academic year.

NYU Graduate Student Parents are entitled to 30 days of paid leave. If the student has a disability that prevents her from returning to work beyond that time, she would apply for New York State disability. The terms of paternity leave are unclear.

Graduate Student Parents at New York University also have access New York Health Plus, Child Health Plus and Medicaid Health Plus provides a child or teenager with free or affordable health coverage depending on their household income. Medicaid is a program for New Yorkers who can't afford to pay for medical care.

NYU Graduate Student Parents are also given access to the Students With Children (SWC) group. The Students with Children Club is an All-University club with provides a sense of community, information, support and advocacy for student-parents enrolled at NYU.

Additional Graduate Student Parent Benefits include NYU Family Care which works to support NYU's working parents with children aged newborn through school-age. Many of the initiatives are also available to student parents. These include access to Nursing Mother and Lactation Rooms, lunchtime education seminars, NYU Babysitting Registry, NYU Parents Network, and school and child care options. NYU student parents may also contact the director to be connected with a Master's level consultant. Consultants are available around the clock to help NYU student-parents better understand early education and school-age care options, develop a child care plan that works with their family's needs, understand what constitutes quality early childhood education and out-of-school

care, research and identify vacancies in the NYC-metropolitan area for regular full and part-time care for child(ren) from newborn through school-age, identify and select services for children before and after school, during school holidays and vacation weeks and establish a back-up care plan and identify options for emergency and sick child care.

Georgetown University

Georgetown offers child care to Graduate Student Parents. Graduate Student Families with incomes of less than \$100,000 are eligible for a scholarship that is funded through a small grant. The scholarship covers between 10 and 40 % of the tuition cost based upon need.

Notre Dame University

Notre Dame's child care center is open to Graduate Student Parents with tuition discounts (10-40%) available based on need. The child care center (Early Child Care Development Center at Notre Dame, ECDC-ND) also offers whole day and half day options.

V. Issues Regarding the New Child Care Center.

The proposed child care center at the University of Chicago will be a wonderful first step to creating an academic community that fosters family life. Given the limited amounts of information that have become available, it is as yet unclear whether the child care center will only be open to the children of administrators, faculty, and staff, while excluding children of graduate students. The University needs to clearly state whether student parents will be able to access the center. By ignoring the family life issues of Graduate Student Parents, the University of Chicago runs the risk of isolating an underrepresented student group and creates enormous strain on graduate student families.

In addition to the possible limitation of access, charging market rates will not only price out most graduate student families, but also many staff members. Again, the University of Chicago falls behind peer institutions in seeking to resolve issues of access through pricing. Many peer institutions have piloted or funded child care centers with sliding scale or graduate student parent stipends designed specifically to help assist graduate student families. Despite shrinking endowments and economic recession, many universities have found ways to keep these assistance measures intact, often through formal collective representation of graduate student employees.

VI. Recommendations

1. Immediately make the new University of Chicago Childcare Center open to graduate student parents, ensuring as soon as possible that there are adequate spots for all members of the University community without long wait-lists.

2. Ensure that the University of Chicago Childcare Center charges income-based sliding scale rates, or ensure that the University provides a childcare subsidy to student and staff parents who cannot afford its rates.
3. Review and renew the University of Chicago Graduate Student Parent Policy according to some of the best practices at peer institutions, especially in terms of: academic leaves for mothers and fathers that do not end up punishing students by taking away their access to healthcare and University facilities; allowing time to 'stop the clock' on time-to-degree'; clearly outlining the ability of new mothers to breastfeed their infants on campus, or either parent feeding their infants.
4. Review and renew the University's graduate student healthcare plans to ensure affordable dependent healthcare.
5. Study the best practices of peer institutions and create an official forum for University of Chicago graduate student parents to share their concerns and challenges, towards the goal of creating a family-friendly campus in all its different aspects – from ongoing and emergency childcare services, lactation rooms etc.

Appendix A: Statements from Graduate Student Parents

Piper, PHD Student in Sociology:

Having been on campus for a couple of years, I've attended several workshops and "get to know you" type events for grad student parents. It seems pretty common in these situations that in 2-parent families, one is a student and the other is a stay at home parent (SAHP). For such families, the Family Resource Center offers classes and workshops that help the SAHP not go crazy at home alone with a kid or kids.

My family is a bit different. I am essentially the SAHP while my spouse is in a medical residency. We knew this would be the case when our daughter was born and so we knew that when we moved to Chicago we would need full-time care for our daughter. What folks might not know is that securing a spot in daycare requires applying many months in advance. In other words, when we learn that we've been admitted to a school and make our decision by April, we are in a very serious time crunch to find a safe, nurturing environment for our kids before the fall quarter starts. To put this in context, our daughter was born while we still had about a year living in Vermont. We were unable to find a spot in a daycare for her despite searching for the duration of the pregnancy.

We attempted to find a daycare in Chicago while still in Vermont. Our first struggle was to find a childcare provider willing to care for a 14 month old. Many daycares in the area begin at age 2. In addition, several of these provide incentives (like getting put at the top of the wait list) for University faculty, but not for grad students. My wife and I eventually found one that seemed reasonably priced, near the apartment we'd be renting, and suitably answered our questions in phone conversations. We filled out the paperwork, set a date to begin some trial runs for our daughter to see the space, interact with kids and teachers, etc. for a couple of hours with me in the room. I was appalled by what I saw in the 2.5 hours I spent there on our first visit. All the kids were sprawled on a rug watching television.

The main teacher sat in a rocking chair munching on potato chips. The room was in disrepair. Coco puffs littered the floor, floor tiles were broken, a few wrappers were scattered on the floor. Scissors and staplers were in easy reach of curious little hands. After about 30 minutes of T.V the kids gathered on the rug for about 10 minutes of activities. They then had some free play indoors and a snack of juice and Cheez-it crackers. The kids were sent out to an attached play area where the teachers chatted in a corner while kids ran wild. Shortly after getting outside, the kids were rounded back up in order to come inside to catch the tail end of Sesame Street because Elmo was on. I asked the teacher how much TV the kid watched and learned that it was on during drop off, pick up, and Elmo's daily Sesame Street appearance.

With 2 days until orientation, we called on some friends to babysit and eventually found an opening at one of the Baby PhD network providers. This situation has been spectacular, however it is likely cost prohibitive to many grad students.

The point of this lengthy story is to say that not only are graduate students being left out, but the actions of the University have gone beyond oversight. Grad students, maybe more than new faculty, often have young children or will have young children during the time as graduate students. While I wouldn't say that grad students should get preference in a child care program which includes young kids (under 2yrs) but we should have equal access. The University needs to recognize that graduate students have well rounded lives. Further our ability to complete our studies in a timely fashion would, in my opinion, be advanced if we knew that there was a safe and easily accessible place for our children to be while we work.

There is also the issue of cost. Personally, I would scrape together whatever I needed in order to feel confident in my child's care. That said, child care is far too expensive. Rather than appealing for discounted rates, we might collectively think about an arrangement where graduate students could get tuition credit by providing service to the child care center. Those with a proficiency in a given language could do weekly language classes. Ditto for someone with a musical talent. Grad parents could volunteer to do housekeeping of the facility, take turns relieving the paid staff at lunch time so that they can have a break.

Finally, I think that we need to pose this issue to the University as one of ability to recruit graduate students. U of C ought to be leading as an example of graduate education. Including consideration for our non-academic needs seems to fall under this umbrella.

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Female graduate student in the Social Sciences Division:

Being a graduate student and a parent without reliable, affordable daycare is a very difficult balancing act. My husband and I are both students. Fortunately, his classes are online which allows us to trade off childcare responsibilities in order to complete our coursework. We wholeheartedly believe that it is our personal responsibility to ensure our daughter is nurtured and safe. This may seem obvious, but the resources to help parents who are working and going to school are limited. We have lived in Hyde Park for 10 months and are already on our third caregiver. The first woman who gave us a very affordable rate, eventually had to get another job to provide another source of income for her family. In the case of the second woman (who also gave us an affordable rate), we decided to stop after three days because our daughters came home throwing tantrums

(something she did not do previously and no longer does). We found ourselves with no choice but to pay a higher rate to guarantee the quality of care that we believe our daughter should have. However, we only take her three days a month because that is all we can afford in our student budget. This is fine for us because my husband and I work together to help one another. However, in the practical sense this means we often are only able to put in the least amount of effort necessary to receive good grades in our classes and most of the working takes place in the middle of the night while our daughter is sleeping. This is especially worrisome given I am a graduate student and graduate study is not about letter grades but about conducting research. I have very little time if any to cultivate ideas or follow up on scientific questions I come across in my studies. Although I know this will hurt me as a scholar in the end, I have no other options at this time. An affordable quality day care on campus that graduate students can access would be a great investment. This is an essential need of all families (faculty and students alike) and the University of Chicago would set a standard of excellence by taking the initiative.

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Karim Mata, Ph.D. student in Anthropology:

We will go down on paper by stating that its very challenging to be parents and graduate students at the same time! Would free or cheap University child care services have made our experience easier? Absolutely. Parents tend to help each other out by baby-sitting, organizing play dates etc. This has also been 'institutionalized', if you will, by the creation of coops, listhosts, the use of play and educational spaces, etc. The challenge with joining such efforts is that parents are asked to contribute time (and/or money) which is hard for graduate students. Neither of our boys has been in nursery school or kindergarten, for the simple reason that we cannot afford it. Because of this, Kim and I have tag-teamed parenting - she holding a part-time job and spends half a day with the boys, I essentially doing my graduate studies on a part-time basis, also spending half days with the boys.

Because Kim and myself aspire to become educators at the college level, we enjoy working with the age group, we applied for the Resident Head position three years ago. An obvious bonus attached to the position is not so much the meager paycheck but the low cost of living. The rub for graduate students of course, again, is the time commitment.

Child healthcare is another obvious one. Adding the children to a graduate student health plan is a costly business. I have heard of graduate students using State healthcare options. We cut down on the cost of healthcare by adding the kids to my wife's healthcare plan. She is employed part-time by the university and in the college.

We have survived like this for four years, the first having been the most challenging one financially (requiring loans) because we had a much higher cost of living without the Resident Head position.

I hope this helps you somewhat in understanding our experience as parent students.

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Tom Perrin, Ph.D. student in English:

My wife and I have a toddler who was born at the beginning of 2010. Currently our child is with a sitter for 20 hours a week; this is a temporary arrangement because we will be leaving the university for full-time jobs this summer – we are borrowing from our future salaries in order to pay for childcare in the short term. For most of our baby’s life my wife and I have traded off childcare – each of us would babysit for four hours a day and work the other four hours. We are in advanced residence in a PhD program in the humanities. One of us has had a dissertation write-up fellowship; the other has been working multiple part-time jobs on campus. We knew when we decided to have a baby that childcare would cost more than we were able to afford on what we made as graduate students, and we thought carefully about how we would juggle work with looking after our baby and still make progress on our dissertations. That said, if a daycare with subsidized rates for graduate students were available on campus, as it is at some other universities, we would certainly have taken advantage of it and would have been able to progress more quickly as a consequence. I understand that the Baby PhD network may offer some concessions to graduate students. However, on the two occasions we have attempted to contact Baby PhD via email we received no response; I have heard similar stories about the difficulty of getting in touch with Baby PhD from other University parents. It would have been a huge help to us to be able to find affordable daycare in Hyde Park early in our baby’s life. There is definitely a need for more, and more affordable, daycare facilities for the children of graduate students, and excluding them from the planned University daycare facility seems arbitrary and unfair.

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Jason Weaver, Ph.D. Candidate in Christian Literature:

My wife and I pay \$50.00 a day, 3 days a week, to a friend to watch our kid here in Park Ridge. She is not a certified day care provider. (She watches my daughter and her nephew to augment her husband's income from the big south side Ford plant.) We also pay \$900.00 a month in my wife's student loans, most of which were incurred during her studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School (She is a pastor serving a church in Park Ridge). In day care costs and student loans, we pay about \$1,500.00 a month -

more than what I lived on as a single graduate student. If we didn't have a home included as part of my wife's compensation package from the church, I don't know how we would make ends meet.