The Critical Importance of Childcare on all UW Campuses:
A Research-Based Rationale from the UW System Women's Studies Consortium

Summary

The UW System Women's Studies Consortium, a network of Women's Studies programs and departments on all UW System campuses, strongly urges all UW campus administrators to establish, support, and expand the availability of quality on-site childcare at their institutions. Countless studies, which we highlight below, document the positive effects of on-site childcare on recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students, productivity, job satisfaction, quality of life, and gender equity. The need for ample on-site childcare on our UW campuses is especially acute and even more necessary in this time of financial retrenchment.

Rationale

An increasing number of businesses across the US have recognized that work-life issues, including childcare, directly impact employee recruitment, productivity, retention, and job satisfaction. The availability of childcare in the academic workplace likewise has proven highly effective in attracting and retaining students, faculty, and staff, increasing diversity among these groups, enhancing quality of life and job satisfaction, and redressing gender inequities. On UW campuses, access to on-site childcare is a significantly pressing need. As a public university system, UW campuses have a responsibility to provide access to higher education to deserving students, and at many of our campuses, the number of non-traditional students, among them working parents, has been rising.

Recognizing the importance of attracting non-traditional students to UW institutions, the 2008-2009 UW-System Adult Student Guide (My Degree is Possible!) features a non-traditional working parent on the second page. The campus-by-campus chart of adult student services, intended to demonstrate the range of support offered to adult students, includes on-campus childcare under the category “Family Perspectives.” Although figures on non-traditional parent-students in the UW-System are not available, the Guide shares the prevailing nationwide view that a sizeable number of prospective non-traditional students are parents.

Women currently comprise half of the US workforce (BLS 07/09; ctd. Shriver). Nearly two-thirds of working mothers (62.8%) in 2008 were primary wage earners (single mothers or mothers earning as much or more than their partners) or co-earners contributing at least 25% of a family’s income. For over ten years, the majority of students in the UW System have been women (54.1% in 2008-09, UWS Accountability Report). By type of institution, there were majority female student populations of 55.4% in the Comprehensive Universities, 53.4% in the Colleges, and 52.6% in the Doctoral Universities in 2008-09. More women than men in that year were non-instructional academic staff (57.1%) and classified staff (55.9%). This pattern has occurred at least since 2004 (UWS 2007-2008).

The majority of UW instructional academic staff is also female, mirroring a national trend in which women are 10 to 15 times more likely than men to occupy “contingent,” non-tenure track teaching positions (Finley, 2010). Given that nearly two-thirds of all teaching positions in colleges and universities in the US are non-tenure track, a large and growing number of women occupy unstable, less lucrative positions (Finley). Because these positions have
lower pay and lower status (regarding the number, regularity, and time of classes taught, e.g.), reliable on-campus childcare is crucial to ensure that institutions retain quality instructors on whom they depend heavily. Although men continue to comprise the majority of tenure-track faculty, 43% of UW System faculty were women in 2007 (2007-2008 UWS Accountability Report).

These numbers mean that a significant percentage of UW faculty and staff must find ways to balance family and work responsibilities, and that many of our students have the additional task of balancing family and work with their education. This challenge can be especially difficult for single parents, and single parents with children comprise more than a third of US families (Shriver, 2009). Clearly, childcare is not just a women's issue, and quality, low-cost, campus-based childcare also benefits male students, faculty, and staff. Nevertheless, substantial research continues to show that working women who are parents more frequently confront the dual obligations and pressures to be both good workers and good caregivers.

A significant body of research has demonstrated the connection between available childcare in the workplace and four positive outcomes addressed below: recruitment and retention of faculty and staff; recruitment and retention of students; productivity, job satisfaction, and quality of life; and gender equity. The UW System Women’s Studies Consortium strongly urges all UW campus administrators to establish, support, and expand the availability of quality on-site childcare at their institutions.

**Recruitment and Retention of Faculty and Staff**

A large number of colleges, universities, and professional organizations consider campus-based childcare to be an effective recruitment and retention tool for faculty and teaching staff. The AAUP’s Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities (2001) recommends “an institutional commitment to the provision of quality child care for the children of faculty and other academic professionals.” In its view, “the availability of child care is a crucial issue in recruiting and retaining faculty.” The American Council on Education specifically mentions “quality, affordable childcare” in its recommendations to “Improve Career Satisfaction, Retention, and Advancement” of faculty (2005). The Sloan Foundation’s extensive Work and Family Research Network funds research nationwide into work-life issues, including a Faculty Family-Friendly Edge initiative for the University of California system. The initiative lists quality childcare for infants and preschoolers of tenure-line faculty, particularly new hires, and childcare programs for school age faculty children during breaks and summer among its recommendations to enhance faculty retention (Wilson, 2003).

This finding is born out in practice. As part of its initiative to improve the campus climate for women and to attract women and minority faculty, Duke University allocated nearly $3 million to childcare (Lipka, 2004). Cornell University credits its place on Working Mothers Best 100 Companies for 2007 to its extensive childcare program (Fulop, 2007). Working Mothers includes childcare as one of its seven assessment criteria for the ranking which both rewards companies and influences potential job candidates. Two-thirds of faculty respondents to a survey on expanding childcare at the University of Georgia indicated that potential candidates had asked about childcare during job interviews (UGA, 2006).

Moreover, the UGA survey found that on-site childcare was a wide-spread concern, not limited to parents of pre-school aged children. Employees with no children, grown children, or planning children in the future also viewed childcare availability as a recruitment tool, evidence of UGA’s commitment to its employees, and a matter affecting the productivity of
fellow faculty, staff, and students (UGA, 2006). There was no evidence that non-parents resented the costs of campus-based childcare. A Virginia Tech survey regarding the establishment of VT-associated childcare likewise found that 70% of respondents who either did not have or plan to have children recognized the need for and supported on-site childcare (VT Advance, 2004).

In fact, the perceived negative impact on recruitment caused by the lack of a childcare facility was one of the survey’s major findings (VT Advance). This finding is significant for UW campuses, because the VT study, funded by NSF, was designed to identify practices that would “increase the participation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers.” In 2003, professors surveyed in the University of California system identified campus-based childcare as “the most important ‘family-friendly resource’ the university could provide” (Wilson, 2005). The survey went to all faculty in the UC system and had a response rate over 50%, indicating the importance of childcare to faculty (Mason and Goulden, 2004). The UC system dedicated “up to $1.25-million in matching grants to encourage campuses to build new centers” (Wilson, 2005).

An investment in on-site childcare produces benefits even in difficult financial times. The University of Georgia survey concluded: “Salaries are important, but they are by far the most expensive way to address employee satisfaction. Work-family issues, including childcare, are effective measures that cost less. UGA may not be able to control state funding allocated for salaries, but it does have the opportunity to excel as a family-friendly employer. A true commitment in this area will do much to attract and retain our nation’s best faculty and staff.”

Recruitment and Retention of Students

Specific data addressing impact of childcare availability on student recruitment and retention is voluminous, beginning with a watershed study in 1988 for the State University of New York Office of Community Colleges (Fadale and Winter, 1988.) The study included a survey of 24 SUNY community campus childcare centers. Its findings "showed conclusive evidence of a strong relationship between campus-based childcare services and the academic success of student-parents" (Fadale and Winter, ctd. Triplett, 2000). In particular, “more than 80% of the student parents surveyed credited the availability of campus-based child care as an important factor to their initial and continued enrollment as well as their persistence in program completion” (Fadale and Winter, ctd. Triplett). The study concluded that, where campus childcare exists, students are more likely to stay in school and to graduate; in addition, they earn higher grades and graduate in fewer years (Kappner, 2002). A 2007 study of the relationship between the academic success of single mothers and campus-based childcare also found “significant correlations” between childcare and “grade improvement, persistence, and credits earned” (Carey-Fletcher, 2007)

A study of student parents at Southern Illinois University produced similar results. There, 83% of respondents reported that the availability of "a comprehensive campus-based child care program" had a positive impact on their academic achievement (increases in GPA) and continued enrollment (Triplett, 2000). Two findings from the study are especially important for the UW System. First, “a significant number of African American student-parents reported that they could not have either started or continued their college programs without a comprehensive campus-based childcare program.” The "perceived impact" of on-site childcare was almost three times higher for respondents of color than for white student-parents (Triplett).
Second, after finishing their programs, many students either stayed at SIU or enrolled there for graduate studies, and the primary factor in their decisions was the availability of childcare on campus. Campus-based childcare thus can have a significant impact in increasing the diversity of our student population and workforce (Inclusive Excellence) and increasing the number and diversity of college graduates in the state (Wisconsin Growth Agenda).

Productivity, Job Satisfaction, and Quality of Life

On-site child care can relieve a major concern for campus parents and enhance their quality of life and commitment to the university. This benefit is significant: there are countless examples from business and organizational management fields that demonstrate the positive relationship between childcare and employee productivity and job satisfaction. A U.S. Department of the Treasury release on childcare and working parents concludes that, “With on-site care, parents have less need to take time off because of child care emergencies, increasing attendance and productivity” (1997). Intel’s creation of childcare services, including on-site care, resulted in reduced rates of absenteeism, turnover and “workplace disruptions.” Employees also reported 95% satisfaction with the childcare programs (Sorensen, 2005). A recent Australian study similarly found an association between on-site childcare, greater productivity, and reduced absenteeism (Brandon, 2008).

The Penn State manual, Employer Options for Employee Childcare: Effective Strategies for Recruitment and Retention, lists several advantages for employers to on-site childcare: it “attracts and retains employees; cuts absenteeism and tardiness caused by unreliable childcare arrangements; improves the quality of employees’ work and productivity by alleviating anxiety about their children…; improves morale by demonstrating that the employer cares about employees” (Van Horn and Beierlein, 2001). Additional studies link the perception of employer support for the employee’s family life to a range of positive outcomes, including greater job satisfaction, stronger loyalty to the organization and commitment to its success, and a higher probability of employee retention (Bond et al, 1998, ctd. Van Horn and Beierlein). Universities, like businesses, can realize similar gains by providing quality campus-based childcare for its faculty and staff.

In both environments, there is a need for quality on-site childcare. In the Virginia Tech survey, 40% of respondents indicated that their childcare provider’s schedule made it difficult for them to perform their job effectively (2004). This result mirrors numerous studies from the business sector. 57% of mothers and 33% of fathers with children less than six years of age, in a survey of 5000 employees at five companies, indicated that they spent “unproductive” time at their jobs due to childcare concerns (Women’s Bureau, ctd. Van Horn and Beierlein). In the same study, roughly three-fourths of male and female respondents with children under 18 years of age said that they spent time dealing with family issues during the work day (Women’s Bureau, ctd. Van Horn and Beierlein). “Breakdowns in care giving arrangements directly translate into time missed at work. The average working parent in the US misses nine days of work per year. As children enter elementary school, the number rises to thirteen” (Carillo, 2004, ctd. Shellenback, 2004).

In contrast, employer-provided childcare resulted in a 63% increase in productivity, including a 40% reduction in employee stress over family responsibilities and 35% increase in concentration on the job (survey of nearly 1500 employees at American Business Collaboration companies). In addition, employees felt that the ABC-supported childcare improved their productivity (ABT, 2000, ctd. Shellenback).
With children in campus childcare, faculty parents can spend more time on campus working and interacting with students, with less time spent commuting to childcare off-site (UGA, 2006). All campus parents benefit from the ability to be reached in an emergency, a reduction in transportation time and cost, and the opportunity to visit with a child during the day (AAUP). There is also the relief of knowing a child is receiving quality care in a dependable facility (AAUP; Dept. Treasury, ctd. Van Horn and Beierlein). Childcare needs are especially acute for parents during final exams, when schedules change, and over school breaks and summer vacations (CCSU, 2008). Moreover, campus parents, particularly students, can feel a greater sense of belonging to the university community if childcare is available on-site. Childcare obligations often interfere with a parent’s ability to participate in or attend campus events; they also can affect a student parent’s choice of classes. A survey of faculty, staff and students at Central Connecticut State found that 48% of respondents missed an on-campus event or class due to lack of childcare (CCSU). Available, quality childcare will enable UW campuses to reach one important goal of the Inclusive Excellence Initiative, which is “an improved campus climate and strong sense of community belonging.”

**Gender Equity**

A number of recent studies show that the amount of time men spend on domestic and child-rearing activities has been increasing. (Drago and Williams, 2000; Galinsky et al, 2008; Shriver). Over the last 40 years, the hours men spend have more than doubled, from seven hours a week in 1965 to 16.3 hours a week in 2005 (Bianchi, ctd. Shriver). Yet, despite this increase, working women with children still spend disproportionately more time—nearly twice the hours per week—than men do in these roles: 31.8 hours a week in 2005. Thus, while childcare is not solely a women’s issue, the domestic and child-raising responsibilities continue to be substantially heavier for women. The availability of on-campus childcare for student, staff, and faculty mothers plays an especially crucial role in their ability to successfully manage their family, work, and educational responsibilities.

Increasingly, “universities are using child-care centers as their major initiative to address gender-equity issues” (Wilson, 2005), a realization that led the UC system to allocate funds to build new childcare centers on its campuses. The UW System Board of Regents policy relating to the “Elimination of Discrimination Based on Gender,” likewise identifies campus-based childcare as a key strategy to address gender inequity: “As an alternative to community child care, where it does not meet the needs of the institution/unit, each University should set a goal of seeing that top quality, low-cost child care and extended child care services, *preferably campus based*, are available to the children of students, faculty, and staff” (14-3.II.F)

Moreover, there is compelling evidence that having children adversely impacts a female professor’s ability to achieve tenure. There is “a large and consistent gap in achieving tenure” between women and men who become parents early (less than five years after the Ph.D.): tenure-track fathers are 38% more likely to achieve tenure than tenure-track mothers (Mason and Goulden, 2002, ctd. 2004). Academic field (social sciences, sciences, humanities) and type of four-year institution have only a small impact on the degree of difference; overall, “the ‘baby gap’ is robust and consistent” (Mason and Goulden, 2002). Early fathers actually attain tenure at slightly higher rates than non-parents of both sexes (Mason and Goulden, 2002).
An academic career definitively impacts family formation, and the “life trajectories” of male and female tenured faculty are not the same (Mason and Goulden, 2004). Women’s reproductive years and pre-tenure years are often parallel (the average age for receiving a Ph.D. is 33), and more female faculty delay childbirth or have fewer children than their male counterparts (Mason and Goulden, 2004). In the UC survey of faculty (4400 respondents), more than twice as many women as men reported having fewer children than they would have liked (38% to 18%). Female assistant professors had newborns at a significantly lower rate than their male counterparts, and the rates only narrowed markedly during the sixth and seventh years, just after tenure (Mason and Goulden, 2004). Among tenured faculty in the study, 74% of men were fathers (70% married) compared to 55% of women who were mothers (44% married). The study concludes that both professional and family outcomes (as measured by marriage and children) must be considered in any accurate assessment of gender equity (Mason and Goulden, 2004).

Like working women in general, faculty mothers spend significantly more hours in caregiving and housework than faculty fathers. In the UC study, faculty mothers between 30 and 50 years of age devoted less time per week to their professional work (51.2% to 55.6%), and they spent significantly more hours per week on caregiving and housework (50.1 hrs/wk to 32.2 hrs/wk) (Mason and Goulden, 2004). Faculty mothers spent over 100 hours per week on career and domestic work, whereas faculty fathers in the same age range spent slightly more than 85 hours per week. Given the greater burden faculty women carry, the provision of quality campus-based childcare will be a greater benefit for faculty mothers, particularly for pre-tenure faculty mothers.
Conclusion

As a consortium, we are deeply concerned about proposed reductions in the funding of on-site childcare on several UW campuses, as well as about the fact that some campuses either do not have childcare facilities at all, or have facilities that are only available for children over a certain age. We believe that despite budget cuts, or in fact because of them, there has never been a greater need for quality childcare on university campuses. If we cannot offer faculty salaries commensurate with their training, if we are reducing pay without reducing workload in the form of the system-wide furlough, and if we are increasing student fees regularly, offsetting these changes with child- and family-friendly campuses would allow the recruitment and retention of the kind of students and faculty of whom we can continue to be proud.
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