

Elevating Student-Parents in College

National Trends

- ★ 4.8 million college students are parents of dependent children (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018)
- ★ Student parents, especially single parents, have low rates of college completion in comparison with non-parents (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2017)
- ★ Fewer than 2% of teen parents earn a college credential by age 30 (National Conference of State Legislators, 2013)
- ★ Common barriers in post-secondary education include financial struggles/basic needs, absence of affordable childcare, role conflict, mental health challenges, unwelcoming campus environments, lack of awareness of Title IX rights, lack of social capital, and pedagogical barriers

Work of the Working Group

In 2017, a group of Mason faculty, staff, and student parents came together to assess the climate for student parents at Mason and create necessary changes to promote student parent success. In the short time the group has been meeting, they have been able to:

- ★ Stand up a website of community and Mason resources for student parents
- ★ Conduct focus groups with student parents
- ★ Receive the Endicott College Student Parent Grant
- ★ Inform meaningful changes to syllabus language regarding Title IX
- ★ Sponsor the Generations of Hope gala
- ★ Help support the new University Parent Student Organization
- ★ Family-friendly tag on Mason360

Pedagogical Barriers

- ★ Not fully honoring pregnant and parenting students' Title IX rights
- ★ Requiring activities outside of typical class time and location like group projects and mandatory events
- ★ Attendance policies that lack allowances for family emergencies
- ★ Classroom phone policies that disable contact with childcare providers and schools
- ★ Lack of faculty empathy for the realities of parenthood and juggling multiple roles
- ★ Intrusive questioning and biased assumptions directed at pregnant and parenting students
- ★ Harassment or discrimination from peers toward pregnant or parenting students tolerated in the classroom

Promising Pedagogy

- ★ Familiarize yourself with pregnant and parenting student rights under Title IX and actively uphold those rights.
- ★ Provide students opportunities to let you know they are expecting or parenting in a format that makes them feel safe and not spotlighted like a beginning of class student questionnaire.
- ★ Do not make assumptions about a student's academic goals or capabilities based on their expecting or parenting status. Instead follow their lead and be supportive.
- ★ Before assigning requirements that take place outside of the normal class time and location, consider barriers parenting students may face like lack of childcare, work conflicts, transportation issues, and financial burden.
- ★ When assigning group projects contemplate allowing students to match themselves based on availability, preference to work remotely versus in-person, and other similar characteristics. Additionally, consider building time into class for group work to ease barriers associated with out-of-class assignments.
- ★ Allow flexibility for expecting students, permitting them to turn assignments in early if that is beneficial for them given their due date.
- ★ Offer virtual office hours with times during "lunch hour", evenings, or weekends when working students can access support

Syllabi Suggestions

- ★ Include pregnant and parenting students' Title IX rights along with contact information for your institution's Title IX Coordinator.
- ★ Explicitly state that expecting and parenting students may contact you directly to discuss missed or late work due to family emergencies and/or include a policy that provides a certain amount of excused absences for all students to counteract emergency situations.
- ★ Consider allowing students to bring their children to class if they are exclusively breastfeeding or childcare falls through with the understanding that if the classroom is disrupted the student will excuse themselves and their child until composure is regained and they are able to return.
- ★ Revise policies to allow for phone presence in the classroom provided phones are muted and are not distracting students.
- ★ Incorporate pregnant and parenting students into your nondiscrimination and accommodation policies.
- ★ Include campus and/or local resources beneficial to expecting and parenting students such as your colleges' child development center, mental and physical health services, lactation spaces, diaper banks, and program or student group for parenting students if one exists.

**Further information related to pedagogy can be found at www.singlemomsincommunitycollege.org*

Title IX

Title IX bans discrimination against students based on “pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions.” Title IX also restricts educational institutions from “applying any rule related to a student’s parental, family, or marital status that treats them differently depending on sex” (United States Department of Education, 2013).

Promoting Student Success

- ★ Holistic development through college and career pathways
- ★ Foster social and cultural capital
- ★ Bundle campus and community supports
- ★ Recognize and accommodate for competing priorities and different needs
- ★ Audience-specific college programming for student-parents and their children
- ★ Foster understanding and self-advocacy for Title IX parenting and expecting student rights
- ★ Establish and maintain internal and external services and resources for families

Mason Resources and Contacts

- ★ Student Parent website: <https://masonfamily.gmu.edu/student-parents/>
- ★ Student Parent Working Group: contact Emilie Dubert at edubert@gmu.edu
- ★ Title IX: <https://diversity.gmu.edu/sexual-misconduct>

External Resources and Research

- ★ Aspen Institute: The ASCEND Network
- ★ Temple University: Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
- ★ Achieving the Dream: Working Student Success Network
- ★ Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
- ★ Endicott College Family-Friendly Campus Toolkit
- ★ Institute for Women’s Policy Research
- ★ National Student-Parent Symposium