Proposal: Funding Subsidized Childcare for Student Parents  
at Colorado State University  
May 2010

Summary

Balancing school, work and family is a difficult task for most American college students, and for those who have one or more children, the financial burdens of earning a bachelor’s degree while parenting can be overwhelming. Multiple studies have demonstrated the capacity of higher education to improve not only the life of the recipient, but the lives of his or her children. Americans with bachelor’s degrees earn approximately twice as much over their lifetimes as those whose highest level of education is a high school diploma.

Approximately 11% of students at CSU are parents, and there are 464 Pell Grant–eligible students at CSU who claimed at least one dependent in 2008. In order to address the needs of student parents at CSU, a group of concerned faculty, staff and students formed the Student Parent Working Group (SPWG). In 2009 the SPWG conducted a survey that showed childcare as a major concern of student parents at CSU; the cost of childcare was a particular concern. CSU’s Early Childhood Center is a high-quality facility that currently cannot accommodate its waitlist, nor is the facility affordable for most student parents.

Non-traditional students, a term that encompasses many situations, now comprise about 75% of student bodies at American universities. CSU currently has 3,322 non-traditional aged undergraduates, and our six year graduation rate is 63%. Of those 37% who do not graduate within 6 years, one can assume that within this group there are some student parents who cannot afford to continue to attend CSU because of the burden of childcare costs.

Full-time childcare costs around $1,000 a month in Larimer County, where the self-sufficiency wage is $35,831 for one adult and one preschooler. This means that childcare could amount to a third of a single working parent’s yearly budget. There are programs that serve low-income parents in Larimer County, but most of these programs do not address the needs of student parents. There is a gap in service that must be addressed by the university.

If childcare costs could be significantly reduced through a subsidy, then the expenses of childcare would no longer prohibit student parents from completing bachelor’s degrees at CSU. Providing a student fee-funded childcare subsidy to qualifying low income student parents will enable more students to graduate, and can serve as a recruitment tool for CSU, thus earning the university more income. Other universities have working programs of this nature, such as Oregon State University.

The SPWG has created three proposals to address this issue at CSU. The first provides financial information for how CSU can use student fees to furnish a 100% full-time childcare subsidy to 40 student parents, or 9% of CSU’s Pell-Grant eligible population who claimed at least one dependent. The second plan shows how we can provide a 50% subsidy to the same amount of students, for the price of a specialty coffee per student per semester. The third plan shows how CSU’s student body can provide funding for a Student Parent Coordinator Graduate Teaching Assistant, which is a part-time, permanent position that must be created immediately regardless of whether a childcare subsidy along the lines of the first two proposals is established. It is imperative that we implement one of these three plans.
Section 1: Overview of CSU’s Current Student Parent Situation and the Purpose of the Student Parent Working Group

“Childcare is expensive and inconvenient. My children are in school seven hours a day and it’s frustrating that I can’t fit all of my classes into that window....” –CSU student parent (Student Parent Assessment 2009)

Striking a balance between school, work and family is an arduous and ongoing task for most American college students. For many students, family support and financial aid allow school to take center stage. Yet for some students, this balance is elusive because they are raising one or more children while earning a bachelor’s degree and, often, earning an income. For those who occupy the dual full-time roles of student and parent, fulfilling the financial obligations of parenthood while earning a bachelor’s degree is constant struggle. Single parents face a double burden when it comes to childcare, for they must earn enough to pay the costs of childcare without a spouse’s support or income to assist them.

Experts in the field of human development have resoundingly agreed upon the need for additional student parent support at U.S. universities. According to Brent McBride, a professor of human development at the University of Illinois, the college drop-out rate for full-time, traditional aged student parents is three times as high as that of their traditional aged, non-parent peers (Ciciora 2010). Locating reliable, high-quality childcare is one issue for student parents, but “the ability to…pay for quality childcare is the make-or-break point for most student parents, particularly those with limited family support” (Warfield 2008:4).

Studies have shown that individuals who hold bachelor’s degrees have increased earning potentials, thereby affording them expanded opportunities to improve their children’s chances of future success. Americans who have four year degrees earn on average almost twice as much over their lifetimes as those whose highest degree is a high school diploma. In a revealing report, the U.S. Census Bureau found that over an adult’s working life, college graduates can expect to earn, on average, $2.1 million, and high school graduates only $1.2 million. Another study by the U.S. Census Bureau found that a parent’s educational attainment is a significant predictor of the parent’s educational expectations for his or her children, which can greatly impact a child’s educational attainment. This applies to future generations of Coloradans, but is only part of the reason why it is necessary for CSU to assist student
parents. A childcare subsidy for low income student parents would help ensure student parents are able to earn their bachelor’s degrees at CSU.

Student Parent Working Group at CSU and Student Parent Needs Assessment:

Approximately 11% of students at CSU are parents (Office of the Registrar 2009). This indicates that a sizeable minority of over one out of ten students have a dependent child who may need professional care. In 2008 there were 464 Pell Grant-eligible students at CSU who claimed at least one dependent (Office of the Registrar), meaning that 464 student parents at CSU also qualify as low income.

In the fall of 2008, Mike Palmquist, director of The Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT) at CSU, organized the Student Parent Working Group (SPWG) to investigate and subsequently address student parent needs. This group of concerned faculty, staff and students is coordinated by Jan Rastall of the Office of Adult Learner and Veteran Services and Lisa Langstraat of the English Department. The group conducted a university-wide survey of student parents at CSU in order to assess the unique challenges that this under-represented group faces.

“I don’t use Colorado State’s daycare because it is impossible to get into. I was on the waiting list for over a year until I finally decided it wasn’t worth it. This is a really terrible system because the only way to get the grant for child care is to use that day care yet there is no priority for students who need this grant. Other schools have much better systems...” (CSU student parent, Student Parent Assessment 2009)

The spring 2009 SPWG student parent assessment covered a range of topics, including Childcare, Campus Climate, Access to Resources, Academic Support, Personal and Family Support, and Assistance Opportunities. The survey found that childcare is a major issue for student parents at CSU: 54% of respondents used childcare, and of those respondents, 66% did not find the on-campus childcare system to be accessible (Student Parent Assessment 2009). This indicates a clear need for childcare services that are not being rendered by CSU’s high-quality and relatively high-cost Early Childhood Center, which has a current capacity of 56 children and a waitlist for families they cannot accommodate.

While the Early Childhood Center is looking to expand in the near future, the SPWG has found there to be an imminent need for monetary assistance to low-income student parents who need childcare. In addition, of the 40% of respondents who did not use professional child care, 29% cited affordability
as a reason why they did not (Student Parent Assessment 2009). The prohibitive cost of childcare presents a significant barrier to those who are seeking higher education while raising a family.

See appendix item one for a summary of the survey results, and appendix item six for Mike Palmquist’s invitation to join the group that would become the SPWG.

**Section 2: Student Parents and Academic Success**

Colorado State University has a first year retention rate of 82% and a six-year graduation rate of 63% (Office of the President 2006). Of the 37% of students who attended CSU but did not graduate within six years, one can presume that some are student parents who were forced to drop out because of the financial restraints of parenting, especially the heavy burden of childcare costs. Subsidizing childcare for qualifying student parents at CSU would facilitate higher graduation rates. CSU’s childcare subsidy program could also serve as a recruitment tool to reach a wider pool of potential students. In these ways, subsidizing childcare could promote retention and result in a net financial gain for CSU.

The profile of students earning bachelor’s degrees in the U.S. is changing, and non-traditional students now comprise 75% of all higher education student bodies (Greater Expectations National Panel 2002). The non-traditional student category includes student parents, students who work full-time, part-time students, veterans, and undergraduate students over age 23; many other situations are encompassed in the classification. As of 2009, CSU’s student body contains 3,322 non-traditional aged undergraduates (Office of the Registrar). The ACCESS Project (out of the Occupational Therapy department) has been promoting universal design in learning at CSU. Universal Design means creating programs, practices and infrastructure that can accommodate a range of needs and interests, and are less likely to have to be altered in the future because of unanticipated needs. CSU’s childcare subsidy would be a sustainable, self-funded program that would help our university to better accommodate an expanding demographic of adult learners.
Section 3: Cost of Childcare in Larimer County, CO

- It costs an average of $256.45 a week (full-time) to enroll a 0-12 month old at a childcare center.
- For one to two-year-olds the average cost is $234.08/week.
- For two to five-year-olds the average cost is $201.86/week.
- This does not include emergency care, drop-in care or other babysitting.

In Larimer County, where the self-sufficiency wage is $35,831 for one adult and one preschooler (Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute 2008), full-time childcare would amount to about a third of a single parent’s yearly income, a daunting cost. If childcare expenses could be significantly reduced through a subsidy, then the cost of childcare would no longer be a prohibitive factor for student parents in the Larimer County community.

See appendix item three for a chart that details the average cost of childcare in Larimer County.

Available and Necessary Resources for Student Parents in Larimer County:

There are programs that assist with childcare expenses for qualifying parents in Colorado, yet there is still a service gap that acts as a gulf between student parents and their bachelor’s degrees.

- The Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP): Not available to student parents because the recipient must be working full-time or job-searching to receive assistance. The state of Colorado has recently cut funding to CCAP, forcing the program to cease new enrollment and to stop providing assistance to some families already enrolled.
- The Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) Program: Authorized by the Higher Education Act and administered by the U.S. Department of Education, this program supports the participation of low-income parents in postsecondary education through the provision of campus-based childcare services. CSU has received this grant in the past, but does not currently. The department of Human Development and Family Studies has administered this grant in the past.
• WomenGive: Administered by the United Way of Larimer County, WomenGive provides financial assistance to single parents who are attending institutions of higher education in Larimer County. The organization has helped 21 single parents graduate thus far.

The commendable efforts of these philanthropists are not enough to alleviate the difficult financial situations of all, or even most, of the student parents at CSU who are in need. Just as WomenGive leverages their donations to make a larger impact than any one donor ever could, CSU’s student body has the power to turn a small fee from each student into significant assistance for each student parent who qualifies. CSU’s student body is part of the backbone of the Fort Collins community, and a sustainably funded childcare subsidy for fellow students would help CSU to better serve the community.

Section 4: Childcare Models at Other Universities

CSU currently offers no childcare assistance programs. Several case studies from other universities in the U.S. illustrate how childcare subsidies have been successfully implemented. For example, Oregon State University, which is demographically similar to CSU, uses student fees to fund their program. This funding method works effectively at other institutions of higher education in the U.S.

Oregon State University (OSU):

• Demographically similar to CSU, OSU is a land grant institution with about 22,000 students, and 10-12% of their students are parents.
• OSU provides student fee-funded childcare subsidies.
• They are usually able to allocate about $16-17,000 per term (three terms) to the program.
• OSU can pay up to 50% of childcare-related expenses per term. This past term they had a record-breaking 70 applicants.

While other universities provide useful albeit different models for childcare subsidies, Colorado State University has its own unique campus climate and culture. As a nationally-leading land grant institution, we are in a prime position to lead a transformation in the way universities actively assist students, which in turn increases graduation rates, and cultivates a sense of civic responsibility in the
student community. This paradigm shift would represent a way for CSU to further act on its values while simultaneously improving student retention and recruitment. This is why it is important for CSU to shine in the area of student parent assistance.

See appendix item four for a chart that summarizes several other universities’ childcare subsidy programs.

**Future Directions: Proposed Solutions**

**Section 5: Three Proposals**

After extensive research and brainstorming by the SPWG and the Office of Adult Learner and Veteran Services, three different plans were created to address CSU’s student childcare barrier. The first of these three plans includes calculations for the amount needed to subsidize 100% of 40 student parents’ full-time childcare costs using student fees. The second of the three plans includes calculations for the amount needed to subsidize 50% of full-time childcare costs for 40 student parents using student fees. The third plan includes calculations for funding a new Student Parent Coordinator position, and is the bare minimum that must be done to address the needs of this difficult-to-reach population of students. Under this plan, the Human Development and Family Studies department would attempt to re-qualify for the federal CCAMPIS grant, as CSU does not currently receive benefits but has in the past.

If implemented, each of the three plans would improve the lives of low income student parents at CSU and ease their degree-seeking process, but the National Standard Best Practice and Standard Practice plans would provide actual financial support. The proposed Student Parent Coordinator position would monitor the academic and personal progress of student parents who are subsidy recipients. See section 6 for a discussion of the duties this position would fulfill.

In order to provide assistance to 40 student parents, or 9% of the 464 Pell Grant-eligible students at CSU who claimed at least 1 dependent in 2008, the student fee increase has been calculated as follows (see table on next page):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childcare Subsidy Plans</th>
<th>National Standard Best Practice (100% childcare subsidy)</th>
<th>Alternative Plan #1: Standard Practice (50% Childcare Subsidy)</th>
<th>Alternative Plan #2: No subsidy, only funding for Student Parent Coordinator GTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average cost of full time weekly care in Larimer Co.</td>
<td>Infant: $256 Toddler: $234 Pre-Kindergarten: $202</td>
<td>Infant: $256 / 2 Toddler: $234 / 2 Pre-K: $202 / 2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated number of subsidized children</td>
<td>Infant: 10 Toddler: 15 Pre-Kindergarten: 15</td>
<td>Infant: 10 Toddler: 15 Pre-Kindergarten: 15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Subsidized</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Subsidy Amount per Semester</td>
<td>Infant: $2560 x 16 = $40,960 Toddler: $3510 x 16 = $56,160 Pre-Kindergarten: $1515 x 16 = $48,480</td>
<td>Infant: $1280 x 16 = $20,480 Toddler: $1755 x 16 = $28,080 Pre-Kindergarten: $1515 x 16 = $24,240</td>
<td>$16,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Total= $145,600/semester, $291,200/academic year</td>
<td>Grand Total= $72,800/semester, $145,600/academic year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Amount Paid by Each Fee-Paying Student (approximately 22,200 students)</td>
<td>$6.56/semester $13.12/academic year</td>
<td>$3.28/semester $6.56/academic year</td>
<td>$0.76/semester $1.52/academic year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunctive Changes for Each Proposal</td>
<td>Fully outfitted breastfeeding/pumping areas, lower student rates for reserved spots at the EEC, negotiated lower group rates for student parents at local childcare facilities, parenting classes, free/low cost childcare at library</td>
<td>Fully outfitted breastfeeding/pumping areas, lower student rates for reserved spots at the EEC, negotiated lower group rates for student parents at local childcare facilities</td>
<td>GTA permanent part-time position administered out of Office of Adult Learner and Veteran Services. Human Development and Family Studies department will attempt to re-qualify for CCAMPIS grant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 6: Student Parent Coordinator Graduate Teaching Assistant

In addition to a student fee-funded childcare subsidy, the SPGW proposes the establishment of a permanent, part-time Student Parent Coordinator Graduate Teaching Assistant (SPCGTA). While Student Financial Services will oversee the financial administration of the childcare subsidy scholarship, the SPCGTA will serve as a valuable resource for student parents at CSU and will provide academic and social support to this vulnerable population. The SPCGTA will research funding opportunities, provide student parents with access to invaluable information, and help student parents integrate and transition into the fabric of student life at CSU. The SPCGTA position will be administered by the ALVS office.

Student parent subsidy recipients will meet on a regular basis with the SPCGTA, who will help ensure they are making academic progress toward their bachelor’s degrees. In order to continue receiving the subsidy, recipients will need to meet both GPA standards as well as other requirements, such as attending a set number of workshops or enrichment classes. The SPCGTA will coordinate activities for student parents to facilitate communication, camaraderie and support amongst themselves. The monitoring and support provided by the SPCGTA will help ensure greater student parent retention, and is part of CSU’s responsibility toward its diverse student body.

In addition, the Student Parent Coordinator GTA position will provide an opportunity for graduate students in disciplines such as social work or human development and family studies to gain hands-on experience working with an in-need population. This learning experience is aligned with CSU’s value of excellence in teaching and research.

See appendix item two for a description of the current temporary research assistant position that will transform into the SPCGTA position.

Section 7: Conclusion

The proposed subsidy would seek to reduce the cost of childcare for low-income student parents at CSU who are pursuing bachelor’s degrees. A student fee-funded subsidy program would be sustainable over time and inexpensive for each student paying the fee, yet it would be able to help many student parents reach graduation. The proposals above seek to not only improve the lives of Coloradans
by removing financial barriers to higher education, but to raise CSU’s retention rates and even serve as one of our recruitment strategies.

Providing a childcare subsidy to qualifying student parents implies that CSU’s student body and administration cares about the meeting the needs of diverse populations, which fulfills one of CSU’s missions, to demonstrate diversity and inclusiveness. Colorado State University adheres to the land grant universities’ multi-faceted mission, which includes Equality of Opportunity and Service. By subsidizing childcare, CSU would be allowing greater educational access to a group in need as well as promoting diversity, thus equalizing access to opportunity for a group of people who will in turn help educate our next CSU generation.

Providing a subsidy of 50% of full-time childcare costs for 40 student parents would amount to the roughly the price of a large specialty coffee per semester for each fee-paying student (see section 5), yet the assistance rendered by this fee would amount to something far more significant in the lives of student parents and their children. If the burden of childcare costs is spread over many, each has to pay only a very small amount. The necessary SPCGTA will provide support and assistance to this oft-overlooked and in-need population as well as monitor subsidy recipients’ progress.

Increasing the affordability of full-time childcare for student parents at CSU would facilitate their matriculation. This easing of expenses can make the difference between a student parent graduating from CSU or having to withdraw permanently. There are many other programs and services that could be woven into the fabric of student parent support, but implementing one of these programs is a great start. CSU has the opportunity to address this timely issue in a way that treats special student needs with respect, a value that CSU fosters, so we must act now to close an ever-growing gap in higher education services.
Works Cited

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