

Background

Child care can help students and faculty with children to attend classes and work while ensuring their children are receiving care. However, not all students and faculty can afford it. A respondent to a 2002-2003 faculty survey at the University of California noted that “the cost of preschool is extremely high, and there is no subsidy for faculty. The people who are most affected by this are likely to be at the assistant level, earning the least amount of money. Over half of my [pre-tax] salary has gone to preschool in the past two years.”¹

Description

Some universities in the US offer financial assistance for child care services, using funds from local government grants, federal government grants, and the institutions themselves. Many offer assistance to students, depending on their part-time or full-time status and financial need. For example, the University of California at Davis partners with the city government to provide partial subsidies to students and offers a small number of grants and loans to students through the Financial Aid Office.² Likewise, the University of Michigan administers grants for students, faculty, and staff to access the university’s child care centers and subsidies for students to use a child care center, family child care home, or group child care home.³ The subsidy is \$4,030/academic year/child, up to \$6,040 for two children, and up to \$8,060 for three or more children. Students with financial need may also apply for loans to meet their child care needs. The state government of Michigan and some local jurisdictions, such as the city of Lansing, also offer child care scholarships to residents, usually based on financial need and working/studying status.⁴

Michigan State University offers undergraduate and graduate students several financial assistance mechanisms, including grants of up to \$1,000 per child per semester for children 12 years old or younger or for children up to 19 years old who have special needs,^{5,6} reduced fees,⁷ discounts,⁶ and free Care.com memberships to facilitate the search for a qualified child care provider.⁸ The university also uses federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) funding to provide grants of up to \$3,000 per child in the family, or the equivalent of 666 hours of child care, to undergraduate students who meet certain financial need criteria to use a child care provider who is contracted with the Spartan Kids program.⁹ The program can be used for evening and weekend care if students provide their class and/or work schedule.

Harvard University does not currently have child care financial assistance available for students¹⁰ but does offer some funds to faculty and staff. Ladder ACCESS Program financial awards are available to income-eligible tenure-track faculty who have children under 6 in child care.¹¹ Benefits-eligible employees who earn less than \$70,000 annually are also eligible for “Just in Time Care,” which reimburses employees or directly pays caregivers up to \$350 per employee per year for back-up care.¹² US universities also have the option of offering a tax benefit to employees by allowing them to allocate up to \$5,000 per year in pre-tax dollars for child care to a dependent care flexible spending account.^{2,4,11}

Results

Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Transform family, school, and/or work arrangements so that women are not economically or socially penalized/disadvantaged for caregiving (*critical criterion*)
- Change or attempt to change an imbalance of power or otherwise level the playing field (*critical criterion*)
- Challenge and change common discriminatory gender beliefs or norms (*critical criterion*).

Financial assistance for child care has the potential to level the playing field by allocating resources that facilitate and legitimize the caregiving responsibilities that some students and faculty have. Child care can be prohibitively expensive, so providing financial assistance that enables students and/or faculty to access it removes a key barrier to keeping students and faculty, especially women, in classes and at work. However, no formal evaluations of this practice at the universities included in this review were available. Respondents to a 2009 survey of postdoctoral fellows at the University of Michigan indicated that though they were generally satisfied with the child care options available, they felt that child care should be more affordable.¹³ It is unclear from the documentation whether the respondents were not aware of the university's subsidy program, or if the subsidy program was implemented after the survey was administered.

Implementation lessons learned

Institutions should consider the funding options available, both internal and external. Michigan State University, for example, provides approximately \$1,000 per year to the various child care grants and fee reductions and receives a federal CCAMPIS grant of \$210,000 per year for four years (2009-2013) for the Spartan Kids program.^{6,14}

Summary conclusions

This practice allocates resources to enable students and faculty with children to take advantage of another practice with gender transformative potential, child care. By making child care more accessible to more beneficiaries, child care financial assistance is an important strategy for leveling the playing field. Reviewers recommended that institutions offer this practice to students, faculty, and staff in conjunction with child care and emergency child care as a package. Recognizing that institutions will need to assess their ability to implement this intervention, reviewers felt that financial assistance was an important component to offering child care in the preservice education setting.

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