

Educational level: *University* | **Beneficiaries:** *Students*

Background

The University of Washington's Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) "estimates that one in 10 students is raising a child."¹ Students taking care of a child may find it difficult to integrate their caregiving responsibilities with the demands of the student schedule.

Description

The University of Washington School of Law maintains a remote learning room that is "intended especially for nursing mothers, but it will accommodate parents who need a place to change diapers, feed babies, or attend to the myriad of chores that face newer parents."² The room has a refrigerator, sink, microwave, soft furniture, two private lactation rooms, and four workstations where students can listen to/watch class sessions that take place in one of the school's major classrooms.² Students wishing to use the room must arrange specified times with the Academic Services Office, which will program the student's ID card upon approval. Access can be granted on a quarterly or emergency basis.²

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*)
- Introduce, make use of, or further the (existing) legal protections for women.

Offering remote learning rooms in the university setting levels the playing field by legitimizing the dual roles of students who are also caregivers and by allocating resources to enable student-parents to manage and fulfill both roles. Although it is not clear what percentage of mothers and what percentage of fathers use the remote learning room, this practice has the potential to challenge discriminatory beliefs that caregiving is the domain of mothers if the room is available to and used by students of both sexes.

However, no formal assessments were available. A newspaper article on student-parents at the university¹ quoted a law student as finding the remote learning room helpful, particularly when regular child care arrangements cannot be met. The article also interviewed the graduate student association president, who believes that "[t]he more relaxed attitude about children in the law school helps to attract professors and students alike"¹; in fact, "the law school has tried to use its family-friendly atmosphere as a recruiting tool."¹

Summary conclusions

This practice has significant potential to transform school arrangements and level the playing field by providing student-parents with infrastructural and institutional support to be

both students and caregivers. More documentation and evaluation is needed to determine how to design, implement, and evaluate the practice to maximize this potential.

Reference(s) and source(s)

1. Long, Katherine. May 9, 2011. "UW students bring kids to classes, seek child-care help". *Seattle Times*.
http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/education/2015009857_parents10m.html
(accessed June 14, 2011).
2. Parents Attending Law School, University of Washington School of Law. Frequently Asked Questions. <http://students.washington.edu/lawpals/faq.shtml> (accessed June 8, 2011).