



UB Graduate Student Association  
310 Student Union  
Buffalo, NY 14260

## **GSA Preliminary Report on the Status of Students with Parenting Responsibilities at UB**

UB's mission statement promises that we as an academic community strive to "[i]mprove academic support infrastructures to provide state-of-the-art educational and research environments that advance faculty and students in their ongoing pursuit of excellence." Students with parenting responsibilities, however, face numerous obstacles in accessing UB's full "transformative educational experiences."<sup>1</sup> GSA, SA, and COAL have all issued resolutions acknowledging the need for an overarching policy regarding graduate students with parenting responsibilities (in the following, parenting graduate students). Such obstacles are of course shared by others in our UB community, including faculty, staff, undergraduates, and visitors, and many representatives from these groups have endorsed GSA's efforts. At UB, we are truly proud of our "diverse, inclusive scholarly community," and would like to see all graduate students, regardless of their familial status, included in it. Following the positive changes enacted in certain schools and departments at UB, the Graduate Student Association calls on the University administration to expand existing successful measures across the institution and enact other university-wide provisions. Given the current political climate, we are excited to see the university, lead by the inspiring example of President Tripathi, confirm its commitment to students who face discrimination on a daily basis. Indeed, UB's Discrimination and Harassment Policy specifically "prohibits discrimination and harassment and requires that accommodations be provided to individuals when such accommodations are reasonable and necessary as a result of an individual's disability, religion, pregnancy, maternity, or breastfeeding status."<sup>2</sup> In line with our commitment to equal access for all, we have prepared the following exploratory report that outlines the current situation at UB, provides comparisons with other local institutions and similar R-1 public universities, and offers best practice recommendations. We know that it is not only possible, but paramount for UB as a leader in higher education to reduce familial-based discrimination and Title IX violations in its treatment of parenting graduate students and increase the retention and satisfaction of its best and brightest.

### **1. Current Status of Parenting Graduate Students at UB**

The University at Buffalo, SUNY does not currently, to our knowledge, collect information about parenting graduate students. Our observations, therefore, are based on parenting graduate student testimonials solicited by GSA—which you will find attached to this report—and conversations with a number of key offices and institutions across campus.<sup>3</sup> We have structured our observations into three

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.buffalo.edu/president/vision/mission-vision.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.buffalo.edu/administrative-services/policy1/ub-policy-lib/discrimination-harassment.html>

<sup>3</sup> We have spoken to the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (Sharon Nolan-Weiss), the Vice Provost of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (Terri Miller), the UB Child Care Center (Sherene Milizia), the Gender Institute (Kari Winter), The Wellness Center (Sherri Darrow), Career Services (Arlene Kaukus; WNY Women's Foundation), the Campus Ministries Association (Board), the Graduate Students Employees Union (Juhi Roy), and concerned/involved faculty,

main categories: child care, TA/funding, and infrastructure. Other issues, such as the continuing sexism that many parenting graduate students face in their departments, are not addressed in depth here, but many of the attached testimonials highlight further issues and concerns.

### **1.1 Child Care at UB:**

Child care expenses on campus (UB Child Care Center and Early Childhood Research Center) are prohibitively expensive. For example, a graduate student who would utilize the UBCCC three times a week—assuming they would only access child care for those days during which they teach, even though plenty of work remains to be done on other days as well—would pay \$195 for an infant per week while earning about \$290 a week.<sup>4</sup> Clearly child care at UB is unaffordable for graduate students. Both the UBCCC and the ECRC do not offer sliding scales or substantial subsidies for graduate students.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, both child care centers have limited hours that do not align with required evening classes/labs and teaching assistant/research assistant (TA/RA) schedules. There are waiting lists for both centers, and graduate students are oftentimes given the impression that they will not have a chance to acquire a spot in time. Finally, no campus child care opportunities are provided for children older than 13 years. Some parenting graduate students report a lack of adequate access to after-school programs that would cover child care during classes and TA/RA assignments.

According to Sherene Milizia, board member of the UBCCC, graduate students only make up about 16% of their clientele. Every single parenting graduate student we spoke to would prefer to use the on-campus child care facilities, but all of them cited the prohibitive costs as the major reason why they do not. Given that a significant percentage of UB's graduate student population is international and out of state, most parenting graduate students cannot rely on local family support to compensate for the lack of affordable child care. Their lives are complicated enormously by having to find suitable child care elsewhere, increasing their hours of commute and reducing their time to work effectively on their educational goals. Many find themselves forced to drop out because they simply cannot make ends meet and find enough time to devote to their studies and teaching.

### **1.2 TA/RA Funding for Parenting Students at UB:**

Parenting graduate students who hold TA/RA lines in many departments, especially in the humanities, currently have very little flexibility in their assignments. Because of this lack of flexibility, for example, students who have due dates in the middle of a semester are forced to resign, which results in loss of health insurance and income. This circumstance has drastic consequences for somebody who is about to give birth. Furthermore, since UB does not consider TA/RAs to be employees, they do not

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especially those in the UB Ad Hoc Faculty Committee for Family Leave, and more specifically, Liesl Folks, who has successfully implemented many of the measures we would like to see instituted campus-wide.

<sup>4</sup> The \$290/week are based on an average TA stipend in the humanities. For UBCCC child care rates see: <http://www.buffalo.edu/ubccc/enrollment/tuitionfees.html>; <http://ecrc.buffalo.edu/parents/schedule.php> The ECRC is similarly expensive, with an average cost of \$1,214/semester for a M/W/F half-day schedule, or \$3,860/semester for a 5-day week at full days. For graduate students who have a TA line that cost alone constitutes over 55% of their income. For graduate students who adjunct at UB, at two classes per semester, their entire income would be used up by child care costs alone.

<sup>5</sup> UBCCC does offer a 10% discount for 'student families,' but its board could not ascertain whether this discount would also apply to graduate students. Graduate students who are TAs receive a matching fund of \$600/year through the GSEU, which covers about three weeks of child care on a M/W/F schedule.

qualify for FMLA/TANF/WIC for child birth or adoption.<sup>6</sup> Parenthood pushes graduate students into extreme poverty, increases their indebtedness (for those who can access loans), and most often leads to an abrupt end to graduate careers for those who are in departments that do not provide flexibility in TA/RA assignments. Single parents are especially impacted and only those with additional sources of funding can manage to continue their studies. For international students parenthood is even more complicated, since they have little to no recourse to loans and are not allowed to work additional hours or access employment off campus.

### **1.3 On-campus Infrastructure and Programs to Support Parents at UB:**

Currently, there are only four designated lactation rooms on North Campus, one on South Campus, and none at the Downtown Campus, and graduate students have reported inappropriate spatial accommodations, including professors' offices where surroundings were not conducive to milk flow and oftentimes characterized by interruptions and discomfort.<sup>7</sup> According to Sharon Nolan-Weiss, the university's current strategy is to let lactation rooms "grow organically," whenever renovations are underway, but this approach puts those who are currently breast-feeding/pumping at a high disadvantage. Furthermore, there are no maps to locate changing tables across our campuses, forcing those with small children in their care to oftentimes use unsanitary and unfit surroundings to change diapers, or to miss classes and other appointments in search of a changing table. The amount of changing tables in men's restrooms, to our knowledge, is negligible, representing outdated gender roles that do not align with the reality of men in care of young children at UB.

Given the precarity into which parenting graduate students find themselves catapulted, many suffer from extreme health issues, including much higher levels of depression and anxiety than among the general student population, and yet UB does not offer health services targeted at the specific challenges that parenting graduate students face. The Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion offers one workshop on the rights of pregnant and parenting students, but otherwise there is a dearth of informational support. EDI's current staff and funding levels do not allow for an extension of services for parenting graduate students, and there is nowhere else that parenting graduate students can turn. There is no designated website or staff person who pregnant or parenting students can approach with questions or problems, and while staff across campus are eager to assist parenting students, the lack of communication across campus makes it extremely difficult for pregnant or parenting students to locate all of the appropriate offices.

## **2. Support for Parenting Graduate Students at Buffalo State University and at Other R-1 Public Universities**

While GSA does not have the resources to commission a full-fledged report on parenting graduate student support at all comparable institutions, we have gathered a few comparisons that offer highlights of what other universities are already doing in the hope that UB will recognize the importance of being among the leaders of equality and access in higher education so as to attract and retain the best-qualified graduate students nation-wide and internationally.

<sup>6</sup> FMLA: Family and Medical Leave Act; TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC: Women, Infants, and Children (Food and Nutrition Service)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.buffalo.edu/equity/obtaining-assistance/obtaining-accommodations/pregnancy-and-breastfeeding-accommodations/LactationRooms.html>

Currently, child care costs at Buffalo State University are about 50% lower than at UB, while their child care center is similarly accredited.<sup>8</sup> Several local community colleges (e.g. Niagara County Community College) have started a 'Mom's Program' that offers career guidance, social worker support, a sense of community, and emergency funding.<sup>9</sup> Many public R-1 universities, such as the University of California, Davis, the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Pennsylvania State University, and the University of Texas at Austin, provide child care tuition assistance, better lactation infrastructure, more detailed resources, workshops, health services, financial support, including better TA/RA wages and/or short term emergency loans, housing assistance, and support groups.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Best Practice Recommendations for UB:**

In order to see UB continue to lead in the state of New York and nation-wide as a supporter of women, parents, and those with care responsibilities, we would like to suggest the following steps and best practices.

First, we recommend an institutionalized effort to address the issue of parenting graduate students, and preferably, all those with care responsibilities. We, the Graduate Student Association, together with many supporters across campus, including COAL, the leaders of all seven student governments representing UB's approximately 30,000 students, the UB Ad Hoc Faculty Committee for Family Leave, the Graduate School, the Graduate Students Employees Union, the Gender Institute, the Campus Ministries Association, the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, the UB Society of Feminists, and Wellness Services, encourage the administration to commission a report on students with care responsibilities and implement a task force. We support the Deans in tackling as many of these issues within their own schools, but urge them to continue to advocate for a university-wide policy that would ensure similar support and opportunities for all graduate students. Given UB's leading role in improving policies concerning sexual consent and the prevention of sexual violence that has inspired change across our state, we are excited to see UB renew its promise to "[i]mprove academic support infrastructures to provide state-of-the-art educational and research environments that advance faculty and students in their ongoing pursuit of excellence."<sup>11</sup>

Second, we encourage change in all three areas that are highlighted above: child care, TA assignments/funding, and infrastructure. Some of these changes can be implemented with little to no cost, such as expanded hours or half days at the UBCCC, more flexible TA assignments, and free family attendance at UB events and facilities. Others, such as child care scholarships, more lactation rooms and changing tables, and a better staffed EDI office would be worth the investment, since they would assist UB in attracting and retaining a highly-qualified pool of graduate students and help diminish the gender imbalance in many a program's graduation rates. Finally, the most important changes to TA stipends and availabilities are already being discussed as crucial improvements university-wide, and we would like to highlight the positive impact that such changes would have on

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<sup>8</sup> <http://childcarecenter.buffalostate.edu/tuition-and-fees>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.niagaracc.suny.edu/moms/>

<sup>10</sup> [http://worklife-wellness.ucdavis.edu/family\\_care/children/index.html](http://worklife-wellness.ucdavis.edu/family_care/children/index.html); <http://www.brc.ucla.edu/Programs/Students-with-Dependents>; <http://odos.illinois.edu/student-parents/parenting/>; <https://www.umass.edu/titleix/resources/pregnant-and-parenting-students>; [equity.psu.edu/cfw/docs/pregnantandparenting010913.pdf](http://equity.psu.edu/cfw/docs/pregnantandparenting010913.pdf); <https://familylife.utexas.edu/resources>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.buffalo.edu/president/vision/mission-vision.html>

parenting graduate students specifically.

Having spent several years exploring the familial-status based discrimination that parenting graduate students face at UB, we highly recommend the university address this issue in a timely and institutionalized manner. Given UB's investment in inclusive excellence, parenting graduate students would be able to thrive at UB if the above issues were to be addressed and they could finally devote their time and energy to making UB the best it can be. Across the board, students, faculty, staff, and visitors with care responsibilities face numerous obstacles at UB, but given a little time and investment, we could easily make UB a truly accessible and inclusive environment.

Attached you will find an overview and plan for action outlining the necessary steps to reducing access barriers for parenting students at UB, followed by appendices of parenting student testimonials and the GSA resolution.

## **UB Parenting Graduate Students Plan for Action**

The Graduate Student Association calls on the UB administration to acknowledge that it currently under-serves graduate students with care responsibilities (especially those who are parents, as well as undergraduate students, faculty, and staff who are engaged in care work, from parenting to elder and partner care). Title IX legislation promises no undue hardship due to one's gender, pregnancy, and familial status, and yet parenting students are unduly excluded and inhibited from participating in the full UB graduate student experience, oftentimes resulting in negative retention and graduation rates. In order to foster inclusive excellence at UB, attract the best qualified graduate students nation-wide and internationally, as well as diversify the graduate student population, we call on the administration to commission a report on parenting graduate students in order to assess the need for best practices across campus. Below we have summarized our initial findings with respect to problem areas and desired changes that parenting graduate students have identified.

### **Priority List of Problem Areas for Parenting Graduate Students:**

#### 1) Child Care

- UBCCC and ECRC are unaffordable (\$60/day) and have no sliding scale
- its hours do not align with classes (especially evening classes) and are inflexible
- no child care provided for children 13 and older
- long wait list and no preference given to students

#### 2) Health Care

- TAs forced to take a leave of absence lose all health care and do not qualify for FMLA/Medicaid/WIC/TANF since they are not considered 'employees'
- there are no Wellness/Health Center programs/services specifically for pregnant & parenting students

#### 3) Lack of Lactation Rooms/Changing Tables

#### 4) Department Flexibility and Support (teaching assignments, absences, etc.)

#### 5) International Students: even less access to financial support

### **Negative Effects:**

#### 1) Recruitment & Retention: students choose more supportive schools or drop out

#### 2) Professionalization: no money or time for conferences and networking or to produce the type of quality writing (from dissertation to articles) that the profession demands

#### 3) Mental and Physical Health: more health issues (from mastitis to depression) that result in increased health-care costs

#### 4) Title IX Violation: de facto discrimination of women since they remain the major child care providers

### **Best Practices Demands:**

#### 1) Institute universal parental/care leave policy

#### 2) Expand childcare assistance and hours

#### 3) Improve space accommodations (rooms, maps, housing, accessibility)

#### 4) Provide funding increase (TA pay, summer funding, scholarships) & emergency loan program

#### 5) Offer free or reduced family attendance at UB events, facilities, and services such as dental clinics

### **Projected Next Steps:**

#### 1) Provost commissions report

#### 2) Collection of statistics

#### 3) Creation of university-wide Task Force/Committee to recommend policy changes

## **Testimonial A: A Case for Child Care Scholarship and Support**

### **What does it take to be a parent student at the UB?**

I am a Ph.D. student at the UB and a mother of 2 daughters: 10 years old (attending middle school) and 17 years old (attending high school). The Ph.D. program that I am pursuing at the UB is a great experience for me and my family, and one of the best intellectual adventures of my life. There is, though, one worry, that is constantly on my mind: how to support my children while I study.

As a Ph.D. student and a teaching assistant, I obtain a biweekly wage of around \$500, with about a \$160 subtracted monthly fee for family health insurance. This salary can be hardly seen as enough for a single person to pay for the rent and other living expenses, but is extremely unrealistic for students with children. It is designed for single students. It means that depending whether a student has children or not, they are in a completely different financial situation. Parenting is the major factor differentiating the educational experience. What are the consequences of this situation for me as a Ph.D. student?

1. Although I am a good student and my articles and presentation proposals get accepted to various conferences and discussion panels, I cannot take advantage of these opportunities, because all my money goes for food for children. I cannot buy any academic books or pay fees for conference that would be valuable for my academic career. Every time when a new course starts and a professor gives a list of obligatory readings, I feel embarrassed because I know I will not be able to buy any of them (not all of them are available in the UB library);
2. The most difficult period for Ph.D. students with children is summer, when we do not obtain any financial support for over 2 months. But I cannot tell my children that we will not eat over the summer because I am not getting paid. What makes the situation even more problematic is the fact that before the summer my bimonthly wage is lowered to about \$300 because the summer health insurance fee needs to be deducted in advance;
3. Another very difficult time is the beginning of my children's school year. It means a lot of additional school expenses: obligatory school supplies, books etc. This September I had to spend over \$500 only for school supplies. But I haven't yet received any single paycheck for my teaching yet;
4. A big source of tension are expenses connected with health care. For example, the insurance plan for grad students provides very limited coverage of dental care. I always worry how I am going to pay for the dentist. Sometimes I do not open an envelope with a bill for a week – I am too scared.

There are also benefits to being a parent student. Being a parent broadens the intellectual perspective, which adds to classroom diversity and a quality of discussions. Moreover, parenting teaches how to be well-organized, responsible, work quickly and efficiently – skills extremely valuable for the academic work. Having additional support from the UB would make it possible to maximize the benefits of being a parent student, but diminish a strain stemming from the need to reconcile these two roles.

## **Why should UB provide additional support for students who are parents?**

- to ensure equal opportunities for students with and without children and level off “the playing field.”

Additional support for parent students would mean the possibility to buy books or access academic conferences that are essential for students’ academic development. Students with children cannot be expected to live on the same salary as students without them.

- to avoid indirect discrimination of female students.

Care and parenting opportunities disproportionately fall on women. For example, when a child is sick, it is usually a woman who has to stay at home. This interferes with her teaching and coursework obligations.

- supporting parent students is beneficial both for students and the university; it creates a better and more diversified pool of students.

Parenting is an important intellectual and social experience, adding greatly to personal and academic merit. If we want an academic merit to be the most important admission criterion, we should allow more studying possibilities for students with parenting obligations. Now the access to UB education is limited for students with children.

- building UB’s image as a socially responsible, fair and innovative institution, tuned to the need of the community.
- the perspective of children of parent students.

If parents decide to pursue academic position, children may find themselves in a precarious position. Why should children suffer when parents decide to undertake a Ph.D. program at the UB?

## **What can UB do to support parent students?**

1. additional childcare scholarship;
2. any kind of family support in the summer;
3. affordable daycare facility;
4. possibility to use UB’s recreation facilities with children. Now I do not take advantage of these facilities (e.g. a swimming pool), because I simply cannot tell my children to stay home while I go swimming. They would like to go with me. But it means, that I would have to pay extra for them, which I cannot afford. opportunities for family – if I go to a swimming pool, I cannot tell my kids to stay home.

## **Testimonial B: Testimonial Regarding Childcare Costs**

I am a sixth-year PhD candidate in [department]. As a parenting TA, I struggle to afford childcare for my 1-year-old daughter, [name]. Like many graduate students, I do not live close to parents or in-laws who would be able to care for my baby while I do the work of writing my dissertation and teaching. As

a TA, I have full responsibility for one section of composition each semester. This teaching work amounts to about 20 hours per week (preparing lessons, teaching, grading, meeting with students, answering emails), in accordance with my TA contract. On top of that, I need to find time to work on my research and writing so that I can finish my project. In order to make this work possible, I need someone else to take care of the baby so that I have time to get my work done.

Unfortunately, childcare is absurdly expensive. For an infant (up to 18 months old), the on-campus daycare center costs \$278/week for 5 days, \$195/week for 3 days, or \$140/week for 2 days. UB students are eligible for a 10% discount on these rates, which means that a full-time graduate student would have to pay \$250/week for 5 days, \$175/week for 3 days, or \$126/week for 2 days. Since the UB Child Care Center has a waiting list and I was unable to place my daughter there, I have enrolled her in a comparable program at a nearby accredited early childcare center. Tuition at this center is \$310/week for 5 days, \$186/week for 3 days, or \$124/week for two days.

To put this in perspective, I make about \$7,000 per semester as a TA. This stipend is my only income. My husband works full time, but he makes less than \$30,000/year before taxes. His income covers our rent, food, and utilities, as well as his very high student loan payments. My income is needed to cover our transportation costs (car payments, car insurance, maintenance, fuel), cell phones, medical care, and other incidental expenses, plus daycare. Assuming that I need childcare during the summer as well (graduate students are generally expected to continue to work on their research during the summers in my program) and I do not receive any summer support from my department (summer teaching opportunities are hard to come by), my \$14,000/year (actually less, since taxes and health insurance premiums are deducted from my pay) needs to cover my portion of the expenses, including daycare, for the full year. This translates to a little less than \$270/week before taxes and health insurance premiums, which is hard enough to live on without children. Full-week daycare at an accredited childcare center (like UBCCC or the center Zoe currently attends) would exceed my total income as a TA. 3 days per week would cost about 65% of my income as a TA. 2 days per week costs just under half of my income as a TA.

While it is possible to find daycare centers that are less expensive, most still cost \$40-50/day, and the less expensive options are not accredited programs and when I toured their facilities, I was concerned about the level of care that many of these centers provide.

Last spring, I did not enroll [my daughter] in daycare because of the extreme cost. As a result, I had to do most of my teaching work in the evenings after the baby was asleep. My husband was able to watch [our daughter] after work two days a week so that I could teach an evening class, but because he works full time and frequently is required to stay for mandatory overtime, he was only able to do this twice a week. This meant that I worked long hours into the night (recall that my contract stipulates that my teaching work should amount to about 20 hours per week), averaging about 4 hours of sleep per night. My health suffered, and I did not get any work done on my dissertation at all.

This fall, I had to take out student loans to help cover the cost of daycare. [My daughter] is enrolled two days a week, which frees up 16 hours/week for me to work without interruption. This does not even cover the 20 hours per week of teaching work that I have to do, but we cannot afford to take out an even bigger loan (I already have about \$60K in student loans from my BA and MA, and my husband has \$40K from his BA and MLIS, which he is paying even though he has been unable to find a job in his field of librarianship in Buffalo). I am getting a bit more sleep these days, but I still am only barely breaking even in terms of having enough time to complete my teaching duties. I am still making zero

progress on my dissertation, and I have no idea how I will ever finish it.

My situation is about to become even more precarious: I am currently in the last semester of my TAship. When that funding is gone, I will work as an adjunct instructor in my department. In order to qualify for health insurance, I will need to teach TWO courses per semester (so my current teaching workload will double), and my income will drop from \$7,000/semester (\$14,000/year) to \$5,000/semester (\$10,000/year) before taxes and health insurance premiums. If daycare (even just two days a week, not nearly enough time to complete my work) is unaffordable NOW, it is going to be downright laughable (though I can assure you that I won't be laughing) in January. I am currently faced with a hard choice between taking out even more loans to complete a degree with slim job prospects or dropping out of school and attempting to find full-time work in some other capacity. My dissertation, a chapter of which won a prestigious fellowship in my department in spring 2014, and which has been enthusiastically received at several national conferences in my field, continues to go unfinished.

Please also bear in mind that I am experiencing this hardship as a married woman whose husband has a full-time job. I'm not worried about where the rent is going to come from, or having to choose between buying food and paying the heating bill. But imagine for a moment that a single mother wants to pursue higher education. Even with the WIC and SNAP and Medicaid that she would undoubtedly qualify for, how do you imagine that she could even survive and provide for her family, let alone succeed in a challenging graduate program?

Make no mistake: the astronomically high cost of daycare is one of several factors that keep parents (and predominantly women) from completing advanced degrees or even pursuing them to begin with. Since women typically enter graduate school in their childbearing years and statistically bear the lions share of childrearing labor, this overwhelmingly affects us over our male counterparts and contributes to the gender pay gap in most fields of work, and it is absolutely a factor in the male-dominance in academia. As such, I believe that there is a compelling case to regard the lack of affordable and accessible childcare at this university as a Title IX issue. This absolutely must be rectified as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and prompt attention to this issue.

#### **Addendum dated 11/04/16:**

At this point, I've had to accept that I won't be able to finish my dissertation under the current conditions. My TA funding is up in December, and the only continuing funding source in my department is adjuncting. I can't afford to do twice the work for a huge pay cut (if I can't afford childcare now, the idea of affording it while adjuncting is laughable). I'm looking for a full time job and plan to take a leave of absence until I decide whether continuing and trying to finish the dissertation is a plausible option in the future.

The high cost of child care and the university's failure to support its parenting students with an affordable option have made my status as a mom a very real barrier to finishing my degree. In my opinion, this is a Title IX issue that I plan on taking up with the EDI office because it creates an unfair disadvantage for parents, especially mothers, pursuing higher education. This contributes to inequality in higher education outcomes in a very real way, and must be addressed.

### **Addendum dated 04/08/17:**

My TA funding ended in December 2016, and the only funding available in my department past that point was to work as an adjunct instructor in the writing program. Adjuncts in that program make only \$2,500 per course. At that time it became apparent to me that continuing full time in my program was impossible under the existing conditions. I could not afford sufficient childcare on my TA stipend, and thus the idea of taking a substantial pay cut to teach double my previous course load was clearly ludicrous. My family needs me to make a living wage. For this reason, I was forced to seek full-time employment outside of academia. I am currently employed as the office manager for a local nonprofit organization. I make a living wage now, and thus can afford daycare, but between my full-time workload and my family obligations, my progress on my dissertation has continued to stagnate. I am taking a leave of absence from my PhD program, beginning at the end of the Spring 2017 semester. I am not sure if/when I will be able to return. At this point, it is uncertain whether I will be able to finish my degree. What began as an incredibly promising graduate school career (including honors such as winning the prestigious Opler-Doubrava Fifth-Year Dissertation Fellowship in my department and a university-wide Graduate Student Excellence in Teaching Award) is now effectively over. My situation is symptomatic of a larger problem in the university: the total lack of affordable childcare makes it incredibly difficult (if not impossible, as it was for me) for parenting students—and particularly women, on whom the greatest share of the childcare responsibility tends to fall—to complete their degrees. Doctoral candidates need time to write, and as such, we need both a living wage for our TAs and adjunct teaching work AND affordable childcare in order to succeed. The University at Buffalo currently offers neither of these. The message to (female) graduate students is clear: if we wish to succeed in our academic careers, we must delay or forego having children. In this day and age, women should not have to choose between having a career and having a family. To expect us to do so is discriminatory. I firmly believe that the lack of any support for parenting students is a Title IX issue, as it creates a barrier to women's equal opportunity to pursue our chosen course of study. It may be too late for a policy change to make a substantial impact on my situation, but I urge the University administration to do right by those who follow in my footsteps. Things do not have to be—indeed, they should not be—the way they are now.

### **Testimonial C:**

I am currently a PhD student in the [department] at the University of Buffalo (SUNY). As a single Kanien'keha (Mohawk) mother, I, unfortunately, live the realities that I teach in [my] classes. Namely, that one of the biggest barriers to success in academia, especially graduate school, lies in the lack of support for parents; especially mothers, especially single mothers, and especially ethnic minority single mothers.

During my pregnancy, I risked losing my insurance as I prepared to take a leave of absence for a semester in order to recover from the birthing process, nurse and bond with my son. Like many universities across the United States, UB has no official parental leave policy for undergraduate and graduate students. The message sent becomes one of graduate school or parenting; becoming pregnant and birthing become punishable by loss of basic health care.

As full time students, we are not eligible for Medicaid, WIC, food stamps or other basic state support despite the fact that those of us working as teaching “assistants” (teaching undergraduate classes

independently) are listed as state employees with a union. As one of the hubs for the development of Women's Studies turned Gender Studies in the United States, this is an abomination at the University of Buffalo – to send the message that we must choose between medically recommended time with new babies, nursing, and basic physical recovery or we risk losing our insurance policies.

Once my son was born and I began attending seminars again, I encountered yet another hindrance to my physical and academic well-being – access to safe and reasonable places to pump. Since there was no designated place to pump my breast milk for son, I had to regularly leave campus, drive to Babies R Us on Niagara Falls Blvd and pump.

The alternative offered to me was someone's office at Student Wellness Services which meant this person had to stop all of their work multiple times a day for thirty minute sessions at a time while I attempted to pump. Furthermore, this office was only available from 9:00am- 5:00pm which meant that during evening seminars, pardon my language, I was shit out of luck.

The other alternative offered to me was the graduate student lounge or colleagues' and professors' offices (which they graciously offered to me as I did not have an office at the time).

In both the latter scenarios, my milk would not let down. The commotion in the Wellness Center, the person whose office it was having to occasionally interrupt to grab something (“My eyes are closed coming in quick!” they would yell while breasts were exposed), made it impossible to relax enough for let down.

In the graduate student lounge on the tenth floor of Clemens, other graduate students would bang on the door. One particular senior male faculty member felt it appropriate to attempt to have conversations through the door and make jokes resulting in, again, a lack of let down.

The inaccessibility of appropriate places to pump breast milk resulted in severe mastitis that aggravated a recurring case of MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) situated primarily in my breast. If you are unfamiliar with mastitis, it is a nauseating, excruciating pain that makes it feel as though one's breasts are simultaneously on fire and about to explode. This mastitis and MRSA infection resulted in hospitalization, heavy antibiotics that create an unwell feeling which resulted in a prolonged absence from school.

The doctors that I visited to remedy this situation all agreed, access to regular pumping/nursing would have prevented such a severe illness. The lack of a safe place to pump resulted in experiences that caused severe physical illness, objectified my body, opened my body to exposure (interruptions, people opening doors, etc) and embarrassing, emotional, if not traumatic experiences.

Once I was well again, I brought my son to campus with me for all seminars and academic events. He came with me for two reasons. Firstly, for my physical well-being. Because UB and no appropriate place to pump, which resulted in severe and debilitating illness, he was necessary to ensure milk was expressed (into his mouth when he nursed). Secondly, because I have no funds for childcare. If you can imagine for one moment, envision who will be more successful in the graduate seminar setting – the student focusing on the class or the student nursing, changing diapers and entertaining an infant. While I love my son dearly and love having him near, I am aware that it is not simply my academic professionalism and progress that is impacted, but that his joyous nature is a distraction to other students as well.

Prior to my return to UB, I looked into childcare located on UB's North Campus anticipating it would be set up like Buffalo State College's childcare- sliding scale for students, spots reserved specifically for children of students. However, I was informed there was a two year waiting list. And even if the waiting period wasn't impractically long, on a salary well below the poverty line, there is no way I could afford UB's prices (currently priced for infants at: \$278 for five days a week; \$195 for three days a week- set staunchly on Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays; or \$140 for two days a week – again staunchly set on Tuesdays and Thursdays).

Childcare alone at minimum, even not UB, would cost me approximately \$320 a month for two days a week at a place that costs \$40/day (I haven't found a place this cheap but let's pretend shall we). If we multiply this by the number of months in an academic year that's \$2,880. Combine this with rent (\$800/month x 9 months in an academic year = \$7,200), that's \$10,080. I receive \$13,000 per academic year minus fees so approximately \$12,000 per academic year. If we do the math, this leaves \$1,920 spread across nine months.

With this impossible financial reality, I rely on what little time my mother can offer for childcare, sleepless nights to get my work done, and bringing my beautiful boy with me to seminars, to conferences, to academic events and to classes I teach.

While this may sound like a long winded personal story of persevering through frustrating, patriarchal structural issues rampant throughout the United States but especially in universities across the country, it is a request, a call to action to help parents of all genders contribute to the body of knowledge incubating at the University of Buffalo and across academia.

The first, a university parental leave policy for undergraduate and graduate students. I invite you all to look at policies from places such as Yale (whose policy only came to be through student protests demanding action to end the demonization and punishment of parents pursuing academic careers), Cornell, Brown, MIT, University of Arizona and many others. These policies range in their scope of time offered away, which parents may take leave, as well as certain restrictions as to whether students are MA or PhD bound.

The second, appropriate places to nurse. It is unacceptable to limit students' ability to pursue studies because there are not yet reasonable, quiet, private accommodations, free from harassment and interruptions, to pump. At a university the size of UB, there must be somewhere on each campus to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of each person choosing to feed their children milk from their bodies.

The third, childcare assistance. This can be in the form of a sliding scale at UB's childcare facilities with spots reserved specifically for students or in the form of childcare specific grants. Again, I love my son and love being near him, but there is little less conducive to academia than infants and toddlers. Graduate students generally live below the poverty line, even with external grants and scholarships and are ineligible for state support. Any assistance with closing the gap between the needs of graduate students and our lived financial realities would not only benefit individual students and families, but the UB community as a whole helping to set a standard of action across the SUNY system.

Thank you for taking the time to address these crucial issues that can only help to push universities across the country towards a more equitable future for all people pursuing academic careers.

## **Testimonial D: Parenting Student Voice**

I was pregnant for my first year as a phd student in [department]. I encountered a few issues, not from our department, but from UB in general. Now, I'm on a kind of floating, indefinite break because I can't afford the amount of childcare I would need to be successful in my program. ...

Brief list of my issues:

- had to fight to get dr recommended temp disability parking pass. Was told by office of accessibility that pregnancy was a "blessing, not a disability." I said I was not disabled, I was pregnant and having accessibility issues. This is probably the biggest one. I got the pass eventually, but not without fighting. There is plenty more to this part.
- had difficulty finding food options on campus once diagnosed with gestational diabetes -the walking/parking in general with no option given other than deal with my little "blessing"
- after, the childcare on campus is too expensive for many grad students / undergrads and I was placed on the waitlist and a spot never opened anyway.
- the lactation rooms on campus are accessible only by a code which is given only to enrolled students, faculty and staff. I partially understand this tactic, but it leaves visiting mothers with very few options when they need the room quickly. I'm fine breastfeeding in the open, but if I had to pump I would prefer privacy. I plan on visiting a lot to remain involved in the department.

## **Testimonial E: Parenting Graduate Student**

I actually had my child in between semesters almost 3 years ago so I have been parenting for a portion of my graduate program. The biggest challenge I find with parenting (while being a student and working FT) is making time for school work. Even with a partner helping I still have to wait until after bedtime to get work done. However, there isn't much that UB can do about that other than stop requiring so many group projects, which make my life even harder because of everyone's different schedules and the fact that most of my colleagues don't have kids to work around. However, group projects are helpful for many reasons. However, when I was nursing, I did have some trouble identifying a place to express breast milk while on campus. I was pumping during breaks in a nasty bathroom near my classrooms until I just could not take that anymore and starting looking for help. I did eventually get some guidance from (I think) the Office of Diversity (maybe?) but it took a couple of weeks and it took them a while to find a location. It wasn't like they had a map or readily-available guide for just this purpose, which was really surprising simply given the fact that it is required for employers to provide a space for women to express milk and UB is such a large employer. Again, I did get help; it just was not easy. The professors had no idea where to guide me and the director of the UB SSW program did not know either. It might be helpful to not just encourage creation of some sort of map but to also advertise where students can go for this type of help. Again, I think it was the office of diversity or disabilities or something but it was not obvious.

## **Testimonial F: Parenting Graduate Students**

I am 4th year PhD student in [department]. I'm a mother of two kids, a girl and a boy, aged 5 and 8

respectively. While being a student at UB, I've observed that parenting graduate students are provided no help and assistance. Even if there is a daycare, its so expensive that we can hardly afford it. I wish there was an after school program available on campus, where my kids could get dropped and could stay a few hours after school, where they could get help doing their homework. I especially had a lot of problems during Summer vacations, when kids were off from school, and I had to stay home taking care of them and was not able to do any research work done. It is amazing if GSA realizes our problems and could offer some solutions. May thanks in advance.

### **Testimonial G: Input from Graduate Students with Children**

Below are some of my suggestions on how UB can help graduate students who are parents:

- Nursing rooms should be provided in major libraries in UB (I know one is provided in Capen, but there is none in Lockwood and HSL)
- Special discount in the UB Child Care Center or Day Care for graduate students (I think they provided discount for low-income undergraduate students, but not for graduate students)
- Special discount for children during the Summer and/or Winter. Summer and Winter breaks are that awkward time when most graduate students do not receive funding and have to care for kids who are not at school. Yet most graduate students need the Summer to do some work, so a program at the UB day care center or a discount for those programs will be very useful.
- Affordable dental clinic for children or other family members



1617-01  
UB Graduate Student Association  
310 Student Union  
Buffalo, NY 14260

**RESOLUTION 1617-01**

**TO: Members of the Senate**

**FROM: Tanja Aho, GSA President, Transnational Studies**

**DATE: 7 December 2016**

**SUBJECT: UB GSA Resolution to Support Students with Care Responsibilities**

**UB Graduate Student Association Senate Resolution to Support Students with Care Responsibilities**

**WHEREAS** the University at Buffalo (UB) Graduate Student Association (GSA) Senate may enact resolutions concerning issues of importance to the graduate student body as regards issues of academic policy, student rights, and student welfare;

**WHEREAS** UB currently has a total enrollment of 29,806 students, 7,291 of which are graduate students;

**WHEREAS** parenting graduate students and those with care responsibilities have voiced numerous problems with lack of support and equal access to academic opportunities because of familial status;

**WHEREAS** UB's Discrimination and Harassment Policy specifically "prohibits discrimination and harassment and requires that accommodations be provided to individuals when such accommodations are reasonable and necessary as a result of an individual's disability, religion, pregnancy, maternity, or breastfeeding status";<sup>12</sup>

**WHEREAS** child care expenses on campus (Child Care Center and Early Childhood Research Center) are prohibitively expensive, do not have a sliding scale, and are not subsidized for graduate students;<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>

<http://www.buffalo.edu/administrative-services/policy1/ub-policy-lib/discrimination-harassment.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.buffalo.edu/ubccc/enrollment/tuitionfees.html>; <http://ecrc.buffalo.edu/parents/schedule.php>

**WHEREAS** access to on-campus childcare is further prohibited by long waiting lists and spots occupied by community members not affiliated with UB;

**WHEREAS** access to on-campus childcare is further prohibited by hours that do not align with required evening classes/labs and teaching assistant/research assistant (TA/RA) schedules;

**WHEREAS** no child care opportunities are provided for children older than 13 years, but some parenting graduate students report a lack of adequate access to after-school programs that would cover child care during classes and TA/RA assignments;

**WHEREAS** graduate student TAs regularly take leaves of absence that result in loss of health insurance and income;

**WHEREAS** UB does not consider TAs employees, teaching assistants therefore cannot qualify for TANF/WIC/disability leave for child birth or adoption;<sup>14</sup>

**WHEREAS** there are only four lactation rooms on North Campus, one on South Campus, and none on the Downtown Campus, and graduate students have reported inappropriate spatial accommodations;<sup>15</sup>

**WHEREAS** there are no maps for locating changing tables for any campus, nor changing tables in any men's restroom;

**WHEREAS** some UB schools have implemented flexibility measures to assist pregnant and parenting graduate students retain their positions and funding while taking on caring responsibilities, but there is as of yet no university-wide policy that would encourage all schools to do so;

**WHEREAS** this administrative lack of concern for familial-status based discrimination has led highly-qualified graduate students to leave UB and puts enormous and unfair pressure on those who stay;

**WHEREAS** the lack of support leads to increased health risks and costs for all students with care responsibilities;

**WHEREAS** international students are especially negatively impacted by visa restrictions on work flexibility;

**WHEREAS** some SUNY campuses, such as Buffalo State and Purchase have actively increased their support for students with care responsibilities or already provide much better accommodations;

**WHEREAS** other public research universities—such as Pennsylvania State University, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of California, Davis, and the University of

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<sup>14</sup> TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC: Women, Infants, and Children (Food and Nutrition Service)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.buffalo.edu/equity/obtaining-assistance/obtaining-accommodations/pregnancy-and-breastfeeding-accommodations/LactationRooms.html>

California, Los Angeles—have actively increased their support for students with care responsibilities;

**AND WHEREAS** UB does not collect any information on familial status/care responsibilities and its effects on graduate students.

***NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:***

- The graduate student body of UB calls for the administration to commission a report on students with care responsibilities;
- GSA urges UB to implement a task force that will address the lack of services and support for students with care responsibilities, especially parenting graduate students;
- GSA encourages UB, given its strategic goal to “[i]mprove academic support infrastructures to provide state-of-the-art educational and research environments that advance faculty and students in their ongoing pursuit of excellence” and in accordance with its mission statement, to provide access for students with care responsibilities to UB’s “diverse, inclusive scholarly community” and its “transformative educational experiences”;<sup>16</sup>
- GSA supports a university-wide care leave policy, financial childcare assistance, increased space accommodations, funding increases to TA/RA lines (including summer funding possibilities), and free or reduced family attendance at UB events and facilities.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.buffalo.edu/president/vision/mission-vision.html>