

Sarah Anderegg

From: Jonathan Eldridge
Sent: Monday, March 6, 2023 12:55 PM
To: Jonathan Eldridge
Subject: Spring 2023 Faculty Information & Updates, Volume IX
Attachments: Responses to Student Mental Health Needs.pdf; Supporting_the_Well_being_of_Student_Who.pdf

Dear College of Marin Faculty:

I want to remind you about the upcoming 'Turning Ideas into Action' sessions, particularly the next one, 'Soliciting Feedback,' on March 15th. Details appear below. Also below is an update on work at the new LRC project site.

And I have attached two articles this week. The first discusses the myriad issues—and opportunities—associated with a greater awareness of students' mental health needs and how they may intersect with instruction and classroom management. The second, sent to me by Peggy Dodge, looks at the importance of supporting students who are parents. I hope each of them spur conversation and look forward to hearing your thoughts.

LRC Project Update

The following activities will take place at the LRC site over the next week, **March 6 – March 12**.

- a. Grading
- b. Soil Testing

You can expect to see large construction vehicles on site. Please note regarding the soil testing: **Persons that are in direct contact with the soil being tested are required to wear personal protective equipment such as goggles, a half-face respirator with a particulate filter and a Tyvek suit. This level of PPE is merely a precaution and not an indication of significant contamination. Air quality monitors will be onsite.**

Equity is Not a Phase: Turning Ideas into Action

Turn the ideas shared by Dr. Pedro Noguera during Convocation into action. Learn new strategies from your colleagues, share what empowers your students, and set actionable goals. Facilitated by the Umoja Equity Institute. FLEX eligible, register in ProLearning. All sessions hosted on Zoom. Contact cmihal@marin.edu with questions.

Session 2: Soliciting Feedback

Wed March 15 12:40-1:30 p.m.

Session 3: Setting Clear Expectations

Wed April 5 12:40-1:30 p.m.

Session 4: Supporting Mental Health

Wed May 10 12:40-1:30 p.m.

Zoom Meeting ID: 836 0602 2676

<https://marin-edu.zoom.us/j/83606022676>

Thank you for all you do. As always, if I can be of assistance in any way, do reach out.

Jonathan



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Students Say Mental-Health Breaks From Class Help Them Succeed. Here's How Colleges Are Responding.

By [Julian Roberts-Grmela](#)

FEBRUARY 2, 2023

Eric Enriquez is a determined student. But some days, his mental-health challenges make it difficult for him to participate in class.

"There are some days for me, personally, where I've struggled with mental health and it's hard to get out of bed," said the junior psychological-sciences major at the University of California at Irvine. "My anxiety is so bad."

When he's feeling overwhelmed, he appreciates instructors who are flexible with attendance and assignments, or who provide remote-learning options.

Enriquez is one of many students who believe that colleges should scale up such accommodations for academic-related distress.

Across higher ed, there's a growing recognition of the connection between students' well-being and their success in the classroom. "Mental health affects how students perform academically, and the stress of academics, and certainly disappointments academically, affect students' mental health," said Sarah Lipson, an assistant professor at the Boston University School of Public Health.

Some colleges and faculty members are creating or considering new policies to support students when they need a day to tend to their mental health. But providing the kinds of academic accommodations that many students are calling for — such as reforms to [extension](#) and [attendance](#) guidelines — requires instructors to shoulder new responsibilities and change old habits and standards that some of them value.

Campus officials and professors are debating [how to balance academic rigor with increased flexibility for students](#), as well as who should be responsible for determining when students should get a break.

The issue is urgent: [Seventy-two percent of student-affairs officials reported that mental-health concerns on campus worsened over the last year](#), according to a recent survey by Naspa: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. A new Center for Collegiate Mental Health report found that [levels of trauma and social anxiety have increased among students over the last decade, and that academic distress has increased compared to pre-pandemic](#).

Lipson said she's happy to see that colleges and professors are thinking about ways to make academics more accommodating to those experiencing mental-health challenges, but landing on the right solution is complicated. She recommended that colleges form their plans with student feedback.

"There's going to be different solutions for different institutions," Lipson said.

'I Was Worrying the Entire Day'

Last summer, Northeastern University started a new program, in response to student advocacy, that gives students two excused absences per semester for any reason. But some students say the program doesn't go far enough.

The idea for the program, called [Wellness Days](#), came from the campus chapter of Active Minds, a mental-health awareness group. "The importance of a wellness day is if you're having a mental-health crisis, you should probably be taking the time to come back from that," said Jack Ognibene, a junior and psychology major who's vice president of the group. "It's a similar thing to if you are sick."

Ed Gavaghan, a spokesperson for Northeastern, wrote in an email that student feedback in a recent university survey was "overwhelmingly positive."

While Ognibene is pleased that Northeastern officials have embraced the program, he said that Active Minds had to make compromises on its design. The group conducted its own student survey about wellness days, and one common issue students brought up was a lack of accompanying accommodations, according to Ognibene.

"There isn't much of a difference between taking a wellness day and skipping class," Ognibene said. "All your assignments are still due on the same day, so you don't really have the time to rest. You also have to play catch-up because you're missing class, and professors aren't really providing students with the notes from class that day."

Rachel Umansky-Castro, a sophomore criminal-justice and journalism major and an editor at the student newspaper, *The Huntington News*, wrote [an op-ed about her experience with the Wellness Days program](#), which made her anxiety worse.

"Thinking about all the assignments I would miss started getting me really nervous," Umansky-Castro said in an interview. "I was worrying the entire day."

Ognibene and Umansky-Castro said some instructors at Northeastern provide accommodations for students taking a wellness day, but others don't.

Umansky-Castro said she'd prefer if Northeastern dedicated days for the whole student body to take wellness days together — [similar to the Care Day program that Northeastern had in place](#) before the opt-in system.

But Ognibene said Active Minds pushed hard for students to be able to choose their days off.

"You can't really choose a day to have a mental-health crisis," Ognibene said.

He said Active Minds would ask university officials to consider requiring professors to offer deadline extensions and to send copies of class notes when students take a wellness day, so all students have access to the same accommodations, regardless of their instructor.

Weighing Accommodations

At Rice University, students have advocated for a rule that would require faculty members to spell out a mental-health-accommodation policy in their course syllabi. The change would provide clarity and ensure that students in the same class received the same flexibility, said Alison Qiu, a computer-science major and student-government leader at Rice.

Faculty, however, worry that the measure would force them to make decisions they don't feel qualified to make.

Last fall, Qiu helped author a student-government [resolution](#) recommending a mandatory-accommodation policy, as well as two other additions to the syllabi: a mental-health statement and a list of campus resources. Those two measures were endorsed by [Rice's Faculty Senate](#), but the accommodation policy was omitted.

An [editorial in *The Rice Thresher*](#), Rice's student newspaper, criticized the Faculty Senate's decision and argued that explicit policies would "reduce the stigma around students asking for accommodations."

Qiu said she believes including policies in the syllabus would hold instructors accountable. Lipson agrees.

"There's also a lot of evidence that if a policy isn't made explicit to students — like how to request an extension or what the protocols are for accommodations — there's systematically certain students who do not feel comfortable asking those questions," Lipson said.

Alexandra Kieffer, an associate professor of musicology and speaker of Rice's Faculty Senate, said faculty care about their students' mental health. But they're concerned, Kieffer said, that requiring mental-health-accommodation policies in syllabi would put instructors in a position where they'd need to make their own assessments about students' mental health.

“That would have required the instructor of a course to essentially make a determination in a particular case as to whether or not the student met some kind of criteria for the mental-health accommodation, as opposed to some kind of other blanket attendance policy or extension policy,” Kieffer said in an interview.

Kieffer wrote in a follow-up email that if students experience mental-health challenges, the Faculty Senate encourages them to seek resources at Rice’s counseling center and to request formal academic accommodations through the disability-resource center.

Qiu said she’ll continue to advocate for accommodation policies. “My goal is to continue to communicate with the Faculty Senate about either passing the third requirement or modifying it in a way that makes the most sense for both faculty and students,” Qiu said.

Lipson said that although most instructors aren’t trained mental-health professionals, they have a responsibility to understand campus protocols and resources and how they can best support students.

The University of California at Irvine hired someone last year to help faculty do just that.

‘Flexibility With Guardrails’

Called a pedagogical wellness specialist, the UC-Irvine position involves training instructors to incorporate wellness into their classroom policies and procedures. Theresa Duong, who was hired for the role, said her responsibilities include creating workshops, consulting with professors, and doing research.

“My job involves supporting faculty wellness through pedagogy, but also supporting students’ wellness through the practice of pedagogy,” Duong said. “So that means training the faculty to think about wellness in their courses and to integrate well-being strategies into their course design.”

Duong said she encourages instructors to apply a mind-set she calls “flexibility with guardrails.” Duong created a [digital guide](#) that includes advice on rethinking high-stakes exams, assessing workloads, clarifying deadlines, and providing assignment choices, among other things.

During her workshops, Duong has instructors brainstorm how their class could be a barrier or facilitator to their students’ wellness and then create an action plan.

Angela Jenks, an associate professor of teaching in anthropology at UC-Irvine and the vice associate dean of faculty development and diversity in the School of Social Sciences, works with Duong to help professors revamp their courses. In her own classes, Jenks said she has created “menus” that allow students to choose assignments, with a [reduced emphasis](#) on traditional-grading practices.

“By traditional grading, I think about an approach to grading that really focuses on sorting and ranking students,” Jenks said. “This type of approach tends to both produce enormous amounts of stress and anxiety for students.”

Instead of high-stakes assignments that receive letter grades, Jenks focuses on feedback, self-reflection, and opportunities to resubmit. “In my everyday job,” Jenks said, “nobody grades me.”

ACADEMIA | Letters

Supporting the Well-being of Student Who are Parents

Michelle Briegel, Mount Royal University

Sonya Jakubec, Mount Royal University

Andrea Shippey-Heilman, Mount Royal University

Paxton Bruce, Mount Royal University

Literature

In recent years, some community colleges have evolved into degree-granting institutions across Canada. At the same time, delayed parenting, changing family structures, and other social phenomena are features of the lives of students that influence their post-secondary success (van Rhijn, Smit Quosai, & Lero, 2011). Alongside these transitions, the supports and services offered to adult learners in community college settings; including family residences (Brown & Nichols, 2013), child care (Adam, 2014), and on-campus support groups (Moreau & Kerner, 2012) for parents have gradually diminished. It is within this context of institutional and social changes, as well as the shifting trends in academic programming and support, that we sought to understand the needs and circumstances of students who are also parents within an undergraduate college, turned university, setting in Canada.

Research suggests that the population of students who are parents is increasing among post-secondary institutions and is estimated that over one-quarter of post-secondary students are parents (Adam, 2014; Demeules & Hamer, 2013; Flores, 2013; Nichols, Biederman, & Gringle, 2017), with the majority being women, low-income, or single parents (Demeules & Hamer, 2013), yet this population generally goes underserved with their unique needs unmet.

There are numerous factors contributing to low degree completion rates and a sense of marginalization among students who are parents, including: barriers to accessible and affordable on-campus childcare (Adam, 2014; Brown & Nichols, 2013; Demeules & Hamer, 2013;

Schumacher, 2013), lack of institutional policies and support from staff and faculty (Estes, 2011; Moreau, 2016; Lucchini-Raies, Marquez-Doren, Herrera-Lopez, Valdes, & Rodriguez, 2018), as well as time equity and the balance between student-life and home-life (Baron, 2012; Baxter & Britton, 2011; Brooks, 2012b; Moreau & Kerner, 2012).

Students who are parents face pressures beyond the many responsibilities and requirements of most traditional students, which, coupled with the issues outlined above can lead to feelings of isolation and marginalization (Smit Quosai, 2010). While there are definite consequences associated with being a student who is a parent, there are strategies universities can employ to better address barriers and support this population.

Existing literature, mainly older literature from the United States, emphasizes the primary issue of affordable and accessible childcare (Flores, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010; Schumacher, 2013; Smit Quosai, 2010). Institutional policies that address access to resources and facilities (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2012; Scharp & Dorrance Hall, 2019), as well as mental health, were also important factors for success, highlighting the need for university policy and reform. Support from staff and faculty (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Estes, 2011; Flores, 2013; Moreau, 2012; Moreau, 2016; Schumacher, 2013), along with factors such as class scheduling, negotiating time and space for study, and negotiating gender norms also featured as themes in the current literature about students who are also parents.

What our Research Found

Our survey of students who are parents at one undergraduate university campus in western Canada found that >30% of the participants were unaware of the resources available to them. Participants were recruited by posters on campus as we had no way of knowing which students were parents. Our survey specifically asked participants to list the campus services that they felt were most required, and it appeared there was a need for greater awareness and communication of the available resources.

In addition to increased knowledge of supports, some participants utilized some of the supports on-campus (mainly through their formal student association/union). An overwhelming majority were aware of on-site childcare but did not use it because of the high cost, a higher age minimum than what is deemed necessary (no children under 18 months), or because there is no option for drop-in care. A review of the literature shows that affordable, appropriate childcare is a service that is missing across many campuses' (Flores, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010; Schumacher, 2013; Smit Quosai, 2010).

The participants in our study also identified supports that they would find helpful as they pursue their academic goals. All respondents repeated indicated a high level of need for sup-

port as a result of their combined student and parenting roles. In addition to desiring increased communication of services and supports, the students' needs included: private rooms for breastfeeding and pumping mothers, social 'family' rooms where parents could take their children to play while working on their studies, and increased understanding from faculty and scheduling-staff, which are all needs that have been recognized as important in the literature (Estes, 2011; Moreau & Kerner, 2012; Scharp & Dorrance Hall, 2019). A staggering 70% of respondents indicated that they did not feel a sense of community at the university, indicating the magnitude of the complexity, and desire for additional community and affiliation. It is a reasonable assumption that if participants had better support, and more appropriate access to the supports offered, their sense of community would increase, allowing the university's parenting-students population to be fully immersed in their university experience, while also feeling supported and understood.

Recognizing the disconnect between student parents and post-secondary policy and practice, it is hoped that this information can build the case for increased attention, policy and programming for students who are also parents. Their experiences matter a great deal to the shape of post-secondary, and outcomes for current and future generations. Adequately reflecting the needs of student-parents in policy may decrease the exclusion experienced by students who are parents and can help students to 'belong' to a fairer and more inclusive environment (Lucchini-Raies et al., 2018). It is our hope that the results of this review will assist decision making at colleges and universities to respond to and welcome students who are parents on campuses, and to further evaluate and enrich multiple levels of intervention to support this population.

Conclusion: Implications and Recommendations

The population of student-parents is increasing among post-secondary institutions, and yet they often appear to exist in the margins. This research sought to explore the complexities of being a student who is also a parent, with the primary barriers being centered around awareness of, and reasonable access to various services and supports, which are currently under-utilized by parenting students. Colleges and universities might first respond to this need by improving communication of, and ease of access to, existing resources (for example, a specific students who are parents tab on a university webpage, or posting signs about which bathrooms have changing tables). Colleges and universities could also begin to create spaces on campus where parents can breastfeed and pump breast milk in comfortable and private rooms, and so that parents can have productive study time while their children play in family-friendly spaces.

It is recommended that faculty, staff, and administration of colleges and universities con-

tinue to discuss how best to support students who are parents who wish to continue their education, and to decrease the gaps which exist within post-secondary institutions. Based on the data collected, and with evidence from the literature, colleges and universities could advance significant improvements for this population in terms of promoting an awareness of resources, additional resources, and an increased sense of community.

Further investigation and study into the experience of students, and the value of multiple levels of intervention is warranted. This study was a small snapshot into one local Canadian post-secondary institution and the subject matter would benefit from extended and expanded study of the needs and experiences of students who are also parents. Post-secondary institutions indeed rely on student enrollment while being influenced by changing economic dynamics, and it will be wise to examine how to best welcome and support as many diverse students as possible.