



Advising Student-Parents in Higher Education: A Mixed Methods Case Study



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Background

- Student-parents face unique challenges in their pursuit of higher education.
- A positive relationship with a faculty advisor contributes to persistence and success of student-parents, yet many report their faculty advisors have a lack of awareness about the education barriers they face.
- Student-parents and faculty advisors were surveyed to identify knowledge gaps about resources and needs of student-parents.
- Student-parents also participated in focus groups to share their experiences.

Methods

- We conducted three focus groups with graduate students (N=12).
- A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to identify key concepts and themes related to participants' experiences as student-parents.
- A 23-item survey assessing the degree of knowledge of services and policies that benefit student-parents was completed by faculty advisors (n=55) and student-parents (n=37).

Identified Themes

"This is not a sprint, this is your journey, this is your path. And so, we'd rather you be able to balance both [parenting and learning] than burnout."

-- Faculty Advisor to Student Parent

Helpful Qualities

- Frequent meetings
- Flexible and compassionate
- Focus on long-term planning
- Knowledge of resources
- Holistic view of students

Unhelpful Qualities

- Lack of communication
- Limited contact
- Absence of or unethical policies surrounding parenthood

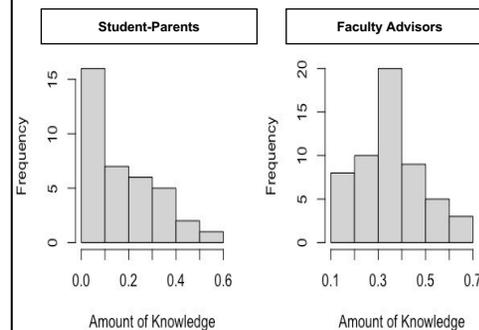
Cautions

- Perceptions of professionalism
- Fear of being viewed negatively by advisors
- Fear of inconveniencing advisors

Advisor Identities

- Understanding based on gender and parental status were mixed indicating that this may be a poor predictor of student-parent treatment

Quantitative Results



Respondents Who Answered Items Correctly

	Most Knowledge	Least Knowledge
Faculty advisors	"Faculty members are required to undergo training related to advising students who are parents." (87%) "There is a childcare center on campus." (71%)	"There is a university blog or discussion board for students who are parents." (0%) "The university website has a page that is dedicated to listing resources for students who have children." (2%)
Student-Parents	"Students can receive food assistance through the university." (41%) "The university health insurance plan offers insurance for students' children/dependents." (38%)	"The university website has a page that is dedicated to listing resources for students who have children." (0%) "The university keeps a list of local childcare centers with current openings that students can access." (3%)

Findings

- Student-parents lacked knowledge about resources and doubted faculty advisors can help locate them.
- Faculty advisors tended to have more knowledge than student-parents about university's services and policies.
- Universities should prioritize providing faculty with information on what is/not available on campus, and accessible through government and local agencies.

Recommendations

- List of campus/community resources for students with children
- Regular advisor-advisee meetings
- Collaboratively planned timelines
- Responsive to emails
- Prioritization for paid opportunities (e.g., assistantships, practica, internships) and training options with minimal commute time
- More nontraditional learning options
- Empathic attitude toward balancing parental and educational obligations
- Clear expectations, policies, and responsibilities for both parties
- Create a safe and nonjudgmental space

References upon request