A. Abstract

Adult students face unique circumstances that call for unique resources and support in order to ensure that they are able to persist and achieve their academic goals. Many adult students assume multiple roles in addition to that of being a student that require multiple demands on their time, energy, and availability. Often times, the need to balance various multiple roles such as student, parent, employee, can make it difficult for students to persist in college in part due to lower engagement in high impact practices, disconnection from peers and colleagues, lack of access to beneficial resources, and feeling excluded from the college. In recognition of the multiple roles assumes by our adult students and in an effort to better meet their unique needs, the office of Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs has identified various aspects of the adult student’s life in order to develop targeted programs and resources. According to a report by the American Council on Education, nearly one quarter of postsecondary students in the United States have children (Soares, 2013). While we do not have the ability to count the number of students with children at DePaul, we know through our work with adult students that many of them balance their role as students with their role as parents as well. This led to the development of a “students with children initiative” which kicked off with a daylong-conference that came together through collaboration with over ten DePaul departments that worked on workshops, child-care, a keynote lunch, and a resource guide. Student learning outcomes were identified for this program that were specifically related to each student’s exposure to resources, advocacy for self and child, and networking between other students with children.

To assess student learning as a result of the conference, a pre and post-test survey was administered that asked questions about their awareness of resources, connection to peers with children, and comfort with advocating for students with children. All items measured had a large increase in knowledge of the resources. This highest increase occurred in knowledge of DePaul resources that support the student as a parent increasing over 100%. Students comfort with practicing self-advocacy increased almost 90%, and at the end of the conference 83% felt they had the opportunity to network with other students with children as a result of the conference.

Overall, the office believes the data supports that students successfully achieved the learning intended through Conference for Students with Children and will continue to offer the program in this format.

B. Introduction and context for this year’s report

1. What is the question being asked? What learning outcomes are being assessed?

   Learning outcomes to be measured from the Conference for Students with Children:
   - Students will be able to advocate for themselves and/or other adult students who are caregivers to (a) child/children.
   - Students will navigate the specific university resources for adult students and students with children.
   - Students will be able to identify and network with a community of students with children.
   - Students will connect with community support services.

2. What is the relevance of the question as it relates to the work of the department and/or division?

   The learning outcomes associated with the Conference are within these Divisional/Departmental Learning Outcome Domains:
- **Persistence and Academic Achievement** - Students that participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Programs will utilize appropriate resources when needs arise.
- **Knowledge Acquisition, Application, and Integration** – Students that participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs programs will gain useful knowledge that applies to their lives.

Achievement of the learning outcomes would also promote the mission of Adult, Veteran and Commuter Affairs. The department mission is so assist adult students in their transition into higher education and provide resources to help them achieve their academic goals. This Conference provided information that addressed some of the unique barriers students with children may face when pursuing their degree. By attending the Conference sessions, the student attendees now have knowledge and strategies to combat difficulties they may encounter throughout their DePaul experience especially relating to their multiple roles as both a student and a student with (a) child/children.

### 3. How does answering this question help your department?

Answering these questions and achieving the learning outcomes we have set for the Conference speaks to mission of the Office. We provided the students who attended with resources and information that will assist them in achieving their academic goals. We can also analyze this method of delivery of information about resources for other specialized populations.

### 4. How is the question linked to the Student Affairs Strategic Plan (2010-2013) and Vision Twenty18 goals? (Please be as specific as possible.)

The development of this Conference coincides with the first of the Vision Twenty18 Goals, enhance academic quality and support educational innovation. More specifically, it speaks to the objective that focuses on the entire university community on student learning and success. We focused on critical transitional resources that would assist any student with a child in higher education. We also hope this strengthened the connection between students across different academic studies. We developed this Conference to reduce barriers student with children may face and enhance the DePaul community in general.

### 5. Provide any relevant research and/or literature that informs or contextualizes this project. Please summarize and cite this information. Do we know anything theoretically or empirically about this question?

Usually, adult students assume multiple roles, whether it is student and spouse, student and caregiver, full-time employee and student, or countless other variations. This complexity of one’s identity can cause stress and conflict because the multiple responsibilities may not coincide well (Dyk, Patricia A.H., 1987). Since various roles create competition for time, energy, and resources, the author suggests re-defining the “normal” responsibilities; by doing this with a reliable source, tasks associated with each role can be better managed and balanced (Dyk, Patricia A.H., 1987). One thing this author identified as an ineffective way to cope, which is very common among people who assume multiple roles, is to attempt to complete everything with no regard to self-care (Dyk, Patricia A.H., 1987). This is not only physically unhealthy, but will most likely result in a lower potential for academic success. The Conference we developed helped students with children cope with stress, make an effort to care for themselves, and become acquainted with other students with children.

Most four year universities do not have programs geared specifically toward students who have children. However, we believe that this population’s needs are so unique that they would greatly benefit from such resources. In fact, “Facing the Baby Blues? Serving Student Parents on Campus”, a book published by affiliates of Northeastern State University, says there is a gross need for university programs that cater to students who are parents specifically (Gasser, H.S. & Gasser, R.F., 2008). One important initiative is to have a campus support system to serve as a place where students can get their questions answered and network with other students similar to them (Gasser, H.S. & Gasser, R.F., 2008). Another proclaimed advantage is to conduct further research and collect more data about what barriers caregivers in individual
universities encounter (Gasser, H.S. & Gasser, R.F., 2008). Our Conference speaks to both of these essential aspects and addressed some of the stressors students with children may face.

C. Methodology
1. On what group(s) of individuals did the question focus (were particular groups intentionally excluded)?
   All student attendees and their guests were given both the pre-test and the post-tests. An attempt was made to exclude guests in pre-tests, but one guest did complete the post-test.

2. What steps were taken to ensure consent of participants? How did you inform participants of their role in this assessment project? Was participation optional?
   The assessment was optional, but connected to random prize drawings to encourage participation. The pre-test was both emailed and given out upon arrival if the student volunteered that they did not complete it prior to attending. The post-test was paper and done on site upon conclusion. Email text and instructions upon arrival for the pre-test indicated its voluntary nature. The post-test was also introduced as optional.

3. Was any identifying information about individual participants collected through this assessment? If so, what precautions were taken to keep this information secure (i.e. kept in a locked file).
   None of the responses were tied to identifying information.

4. Describe the methods used to answer the question, as well as a description and size of the group initially invited to participate in the project.
   All attendees of the Conference for Students with Children were invited to participate. Because we did not link a pre-test responder to a specific post-test responder, we cannot say for certain that the same students who completed the pre-tests were exactly the same as the post-test participants. The conference had no-shows who would have been given the opportunity over email to complete the pre-test, and one guest did complete a post-test. That information is included and results in 13 pre-tests and 13 post-test responses.

5. Please include a copy of the assessment instruments (surveys, focus group questions, interview questions, etc.) and consent forms or written requests to complete instruments.
   See attached appendix.

D. Findings/Results and Discussion
1. Describe the results
   13 individuals participated in both the pre and posttests. 20 students and guests attended the conference.
   The following demographic information was collected:
   - 1 first-year student, 1 sophomore student, 1 junior student, 7 graduate students, and 1 guest.
   - 4 males and 9 females completed evaluations
   - Students came from the following schools:
     - College of Business: 4
     - College of Computing and Digital Media: 2
     - College of Education: 1
     - College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences: 1
     - College of Science and Health: 1
     - School of New Learning: 1
     - No response: 3

   The assessment was setup pre-test/posttest fashion gauging the above learning outcomes. The main learning outcomes were assessed in a Likert scale with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree, 3 being Neutral, and 5 being Strongly Agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of resources within DePaul that supports role as student.</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of resources within DePaul that supports role as parent.</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of community resources that support role as student with child(ren)</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort with practicing self-advocacy on issues that affect student</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To demonstrate the knowledge would go some use, the post-test assessment asked students to rate if they planned to use information gained at the conference and to give an example. Rating information is below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-test only</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I got information from the conference which I plan to utilize in my role as a parent.</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got information from the conference which I plan to utilize in my role as a student.</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some specific examples of information planned to be utilized included:

- “Finding balance in our lives.”
- “Better analyzing and developing my writings.”
- “Family workouts”
- “Connecting with University Center for Writing Based Learning”
- Orgsync
- “Tactics for spirituality.”

Students general comments included praise on overall conference (“I hope it is held again!”), information on favorite sessions, least favorite sessions, and compliments on the ability to network (“meeting other parents in similar situation…”). Negative feedback mostly related to logistical challenges of conference and food.

2. What did you learn from the assessment?

Students increased knowledge of resources available and comfort with practicing self-advocacy during the time between the pre-test and post-test assessment. The highest average rate knowledge in pre-test (Resources within DePaul that supports students rated at 2.6) is still lower than the lowest rated in the post-test averages (DePaul resources for students with children at 3.2).

Here are the percentage changes in mean from pre-test to post-test in the major categories:

- DePaul resources for role as parent increased 103%
- Comfort with practicing self-advocacy as issues arise increased 89.5%
- Community resources knowledge increased 72.5%
- DePaul resources for role as student increased 30.65%

One of the highest mean scores in the post-test related to actually executing information they gained at the conference (rated 4.27 in questions related to gaining information they plan to utilize in each role).

In addition, there was a significant increase in awareness of other students who had children. In the pre-test, 1.91 was the average response. The post-test had 83% of student respond they had the opportunity to network with other students with children.

The highest to lowest rated in the pre-test compared to the post-test also rearranged, indicating a real change in knowledge of resources.

- Pre-test ranking order:
  - DePaul resources for student: 2.6
  - Comfort with self-advocacy: 2.3
  - Knowledge of community resources: 2.0
  - DePaul resources for role as parent: 1.6

- Post-test ranking order:
  - Comfort with self-advocacy: 4.4
- Knowledge of community resources 3.5
- DePaul resources for student 3.4
- DePaul resources for role as parent 3.2

The results are encouraging that the Conference for Students with Children provided significant knowledge of resources to the students and gave them comfort in utilizing them. A challenge of the project is the relatively low numbers surveyed and the inability to know if all included in pre-test are the same students in post-test.

E. Implications

The results indicate the methods of presentation of resources (a guidebook, presentations, keynote, and implications throughout that presentations connected to available resources) were successful in encouraging self-advocacy and awareness of resources, both within DePaul and in the community. Students also networked with other students in their multiple roles of being both a student and also a parent.

Other departments within Student Affairs can look at the model of an intensive day-long conference as a good method of reaching busy, highly specialized populations that need special support structures. Adult, Veteran, and Commuter Student Affairs is already planning a Thesis/Dissertation Conference for new Graduate Students following this model.

Out of the conference a student group, POLO (Parents of Little Ones) is beginning to take shape. The results of this survey will be shared with that group. In addition results will be distributed to presenters and stakeholders in the conference.

An opportunity for future study exists to go deeper into analysis of what resources the student has knowledge and of the students specific skills in practicing advocacy. In addition, data on the overall experience of students with children at DePaul is limited, so interviews or more qualitative data on this population could greatly aid future program development.
Your feedback below will aid us in planning for future events for students with children. Remember those who completed the pre-conference survey and the post-conference evaluation are eligible to enter a prize drawing. Please provide your email address below if interested in entering the contest.

Select one of the following:
What is your status?
- First-year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Grad./Prof.
- Other

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

Please select your college:
- College of Business
- College of Communication
- College of Computing and Digital Media
- College of Education
- College of Law
- College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
- College of Science and Health
- School for New Learning
- School of Music
- The Theatre School
How did you find out about the Conference for Students with Children?
- E-mail
- Flier/Poster
- Newspaper Article
- Social Media
- Word of mouth
- Other: _________________________

What expectations do you have for the conference?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable raising issues that affect me as a student or as a student with a child.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me as a student.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me in my role as a parent.</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of community resources, outside of DePaul, that support me as a student with a child.</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I know other students at DePaul with children.</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation

Your feedback below will aid us in planning for future events for students with children. Remember those who completed the emailed survey (before the conference) and this post-conference evaluation are eligible to enter a prize drawing. Please provide your email address below if interested in entering the contest.

Select one of the following:

What is your status?
- First-year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Grad./Prof.
- Other

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

Please select your college:
- College of Business
- College of Communication
- College of Computing and Digital Media
- College of Education
- College of Law
- College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
- College of Science and Health
- School for New Learning
- School of Music
- The Theatre School

How many children do you have?

What are the ages of the children? Please separate multiple children by commas.

What was your favorite and least favorite session and why?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>3</th>
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<td>I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me in my role as a parent.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got information from the conference which I plan to utilize in my role as a parent.</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*If applicable, please share an example:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I got information from the conference which I plan to utilize in my role as a student.</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
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</table>

*If applicable, please share an example:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I plan to follow-up with an office/department/presenter as a result of today's Conference.</td>
<td>〇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had the opportunity to network with other students with children at today's Conference.</td>
<td>〇</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What would you change and what would you keep about the conference if held again?

Please provide your email address to enter raffle for prizes! Winner will be emailed next week!

__________________@_____________________
Select one of the following:
How did you find out about the conference?
☑ DePaul Student What is your relationship to them? __________________________
☐ Email
☐ Poster/flier
☐ Newspaper article
☐ Social Media
☐ Other ________________________

What is your gender?
☑ Male
☑ Female
How many children do you have?

What are the ages of the children? Please separate multiple children by commas.

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<th>4</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of resources within DePaul available for students with children.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I am aware of community resources, outside of DePaul, that support me as a student with a child.</td>
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<td>If applicable, please share an example:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had the opportunity to network with others like me at today’s conference.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was your favorite session and why?

What session was your least favorite and why?

What would you change about the conference if held again?

Why did you attend the conference?