Managing to Make It:
The College Trajectories of Traditional-age Students with Children

Sara Goldrick-Rab, Julie Minikel-Lacocque, and Peter Kinsley

University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Wisconsin Financial Aid Study

Working Paper #1

January 5, 2011

The authors wish to thank the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, and the William T. Grant Foundation for financial support of this work. We also thank Robert Kelchen for his assistance with early analyses for this paper. Teresa Sommer and Josipa Roksa provided invaluable feedback.

Abstract

Students with children are a growing presence in higher education, but apart from being labeled "nontraditional" their prospects for degree completion are poorly understood. How does parenting while in college make students vulnerable? How does it make them stronger? To address these questions this exploratory study draws on a panel study of young, low-income Wisconsin college students that includes administrative, survey, and interview data. Findings suggest that while parenting students have divergent college pathways compared to their peers, those pathways do not always indicate disadvantage. At the same time, it is also clear that they would benefit from additional supports.

Introduction

Students with children are a growing presence in higher education, but apart from being labeled "nontraditional" their needs and prospects for degree completion are poorly understood. To what extent and under what conditions does parenting while in college create conflicts that affect academic outcomes? Are there ways in which having a child exerts a positive influence on college students, helping them make progress towards degrees? Are college students with and without children as different from each other as the current literature supposes?

These important questions are suggested by empirical research but have been inadequately addressed for several reasons. First, they require close examination of both educational and "non-educational" outcomes—for example, how having a child while also being a student affects one's social life and health (Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen, 2010). Usually the effects of parenting in college are conceived strictly in academic terms (e.g. persistence rates) (Attewell and Lavin, 2007; Roksa, 2010). Second, these types of questions necessitate the use of multiple methods—ones that can both enumerate distinctions and describe trends, but also help elaborate processes. Past studies on parenting students tend toward either the quantitative (e.g. Attewell and Lavin, 2007; Goldrick-Rab and Han, 2011; MacGregor, 2009; Quimby and O'Brien, 2004; Roksa, 2010) *or* the qualitative (e.g. Austin and McDermott, 2003; Gardenhire-Crooks et al., 2006; Gardner et al. 2010; Haleman, 2004). Finally, such inquiries demand consideration of change and trajectories; yet most studies are "point-in-time"—marking only the initial college choice, or a point in the later college years.

This exploratory study takes a detailed look at the transition into and through the first year of college for traditional-age, low-income students with children. We focus on a sample of Wisconsin Pell Grant recipients who began attending the state's public two-year and four-year colleges and universities for the first time in fall 2008, within three years of completing high school. Utilizing data from self-administered surveys, administrative records, and in-depth interviews, we (a) compare parenting students to other comparable students, and (b) compare the experiences and attitudes of parenting students at the start

of college to their experiences and attitudes a year later. In other words, we consider both differences among students as well as individual changes over time.

The findings suggest that a framework of "nontraditionality," typically used by higher education researchers to describe this group (e.g. Kim, Sax, Lee, and Hagedorn, 2010), is unsatisfying as a way of understanding the challenges and opportunities facing traditional-age students with children (Westbrook and Sedlacek, 1991). Some of our evidence may be surprising, indicating that the kinds of tradeoffs students make (for example, in terms of their time) do not readily support expectations of academic disadvantage. We also observe changes in students' trajectories that reinforce the conclusion that this is a population in need of greater support if they are to succeed in earning college degrees.

College Students with Children: A Growing Presence

The expansion of college-going among American high school graduates over the last forty years was accompanied by substantial shifts in the composition of the undergraduate population (Bound et al, 2009). In particular, many reports document the growing presence of "nontraditional students"—those whose characteristics seem to set them apart from other students, putting them "at risk" of non-completion (Choy, 2002; Horn, 1996). The numbers of traditional-age (e.g. 18-21) college students with children are increasing as the result of (at least) three trends. First, after more than a decade of decline, pregnancy rates among U.S. teenagers are rising, with the greatest increase concentrated among 18 and 19-year-olds (Luscombe, 2010). At the same time, educational aspirations are at an all-time high among teenagers from all backgrounds (Ingels and Dalton, 2008), and becoming a parent at a young age less frequently precludes high school completion and college entry (Hofferth, Reid, and Mott, 2001; Upchurch et al., 1993). As a result, the share of undergraduates with children is non-trivial, even among younger students. According to one national study, 11 percent of traditional-age college entrants start college with children (Bozick and DeLuca, 2005). National statistics indicate that among undergraduates

enrolled in college in 2008, 23 percent had at least one child. Almost five percent had a child under the age of one, and 12 percent had at least on child under the age of five.[1]

In one sense, the growing presence of parents in higher education is promising, given that parental education appears to translate into substantial economic and social benefits for both individuals and their children (Magnuson et al. forthcoming; Magnuson, 2003). On the other hand, for many students (including those without children) college access fails to translate into success: Less than one in ten students with children completes a bachelor's degree within six years of college entry.[2] This is why policymakers and philanthropists seeking to grow the nation's supply of college-educated labor seek to identify strategies that successfully promote college persistence and completion among young parents (Gardenhire-Crooks et al. 2006; Gardner et al., 2010; Goldrick-Rab and Sorenson, 2010; Miller et al. 2009; Miller, 2010; Sommer et al., 2010).

Parenting and Persistence

Parenting while also enrolled in college is frequently postulated to reduce the chances of completing a degree. The path that begins with parenthood and then includes college enrollment is typically described as "less favorable" and a "less educationally beneficial life course pattern" (Roksa, 2010, p.3). The literature is rife with empirical studies that operate from a premise that parents are at a disadvantage (e.g. Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Thornton et al. 1995; Hogan 1978; Marini 1984; Sibulkin and Butler 2005; Roksa 2010; Rindfuss et al. 1988; Gardenhire-Crooks et al. 2006).

It is true that *on average* parenting students share the characteristics of "disadvantaged" students. Having children is more common among low-income students, women, African-Americans, and first-generation students (whose parents do not have a bachelor's degree). It is less common among students who begin college right out of high school (Roksa, 2010; Goldrick-Rab and Han, 2011). Moreover, it is also the case that completion rates of parenting students are very low. According to one study, "one-third (3.7 percent) of low-income single women with children and slightly more than one

[1] Statistics are authors' calculations from NPSAS 2008 data using DAS.
[2] Authors' calculations based on the Beginning Postsecondary Study.

quarter (28.8 percent) of low-income married women with children take more than 10 years to complete a bachelor's degree, compared to 15.6 percent of all women, 16.5 percent of all low-income women, and 12.7 percent of all men" (Center for Women's Policy Studies, 2004). These statistics certainly suggest support for the conclusion that parenting students are a disadvantaged lot.

Yet closer consideration brings to light some key distinctions. While many so-called "nontraditional" attributes describe *how* parenting students attend college (e.g. the timing of their initial enrollment, intensity of enrollment, work behaviors while in school), others simply denote their life course transitions. As Roksa points out, the newfound popularity of college-going coupled with the persistent desire of many Americans to marry and/or have children means that contemporary postsecondary success "will at least in part reflect the complex processes of adopting and managing multiple social roles" (2010, p.3). It is thus unclear whether parenting students are uniformly disadvantaged, and whether the extent of their disadvantage depends on their ability to navigate myriad identifies as well as their institution's ability to adapt to serving these new kinds of students.

Whatever the cause of a "parenting penalty," it does appear to arise from an indirect rather than direct pathway. That is, having children when one starts college does not appear to directly diminish odds of bachelor's degree completion but rather affect (or reflect) other decisions that in turn reduce completion rates. For example, an event history analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth of 1997 revealed that students who entered college as parents were less likely to complete a bachelor's degree primarily because they had "a reduced commitment to higher education (as measured by the number of months enrolled)" (Roksa, 2010, p. 25). This is more often the case for women, who seemed to pay a larger price for being mothers in college, as compared to what men pay for being fathers in college (Roksa, 2010). Similarly, research using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Study found that parents were most likely to attend college part-time, which in turn lengthened time-to-degree and reduced odds of degree completion (Horn, 1996). Other studies indicate that having a child before entering college may reduce chances for completion by prolonging the period between high school graduation and college entry, increasing the likelihood that a student will require academic

remediation or feel otherwise unprepared for college coursework (Goldrick-Rab and Han, 2011; Bozick & Deluca, 2005; Sommer et al., 2010). For example, data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study indicate that among students who delay college, 14 percent have had a child prior to entry (Goldrick-Rab and Han, 2011). In addition, parenting students are much more likely to begin at a public two-year college—according to the national Beginning Postsecondary Study, 46 percent of unmarried or separated parenting students and 61 percent of married parenting students first enter a community college.[3]

Standing between these defining characteristics of students and their educational outcomes is a complex array of decisions and actions that lead to divergent college pathways. Past research offers several explanations for why parents might make different decisions compared to other students. We next review these, but first offer a caveat: in most cases the cited studies consider "parenting students" as a group, without much attention to variation within that disparate group. Researchers have paid little attention to the roles that age and income (and related factors such as health) play in differentiating parents from other students—for example older students are more likely to work while in school, may find it harder to get along with the average college student, and may be more likely to feel challenged by the physical and mental requirements of juggling multiple roles (Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2001; Gardenhire-Crooks et al. 2006). While some quantitative studies try to deal with these issues through regression analysis, attempting to net out observable differences, that approach may overcompensate by setting aside some of the key distinctions that comprise the college experience. For example, it is common to simultaneously control for age, income, and race (background characteristics) while also controlling for marital status and hours of employment—factors which may reflect the experience of being a parent while in college. Setting these experiences aside reduces a researcher's ability to identify the mechanisms through which parenting in college generates negative (or positive) outcomes.

By far the most frequent explanation for low degree completion rates among parents is the challenge of time management. Parents need, and want, to spend time with

[3] Authors' calculations using DAS, BPS 2004.

their children, reducing the time available to attend class and study (Bradburn, Moen, & Dempster-McClain, 1995; Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2001; Adair, 2001; MacGregor, 2009; Gardenhire-Crooks et al. 2006). In focus groups conducted with low-income working parents over age 21 who were either current, former, or potential community college students, Matus-Grossman and Gooden (2001) found that participants believed that balancing the demands of life and finding and affording childcare were among the central barriers to their completing college. Interestingly, however, some parents found childcare to be a "barrier" not because of the high cost and inflexible schedule of many childcare centers, but because they simply wanted to spend more time with their children. In other words, some chose to postpone or forego meeting their own educational goals in order to be more involved in their children's lives. Similarly, in the Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2006) study, mothers attending college usually did not follow a "typical" student schedule and often prioritized seeing their children.

In addition, parenting students have fewer financial resources, increasing their need to work and reducing (again) their time for academics (Gardenhire-Crooks et al. 2006; Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2001). In fact, Matus-Grossman and Gooden (2001) found that the low-income working parents were less concerned with incurring additional expenses related to attending college (namely, tuition and books) and more concerned with the lost wages associated with reducing their work hours in order to attend community college.

Further, some research indicates that parents struggle to "fit in" to college, and that lack of social integration affects their chances of persisting to a degree (Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen, 2010). But one possibility is that the social supports of parents differ by age—younger parents may be able to rely on parents and immediate family as well as partners or friends, compared to older parents who may not have the same level of family support. At least one study suggests that community college students find making friends to be only marginally important to their college success (Gardenhire-Crooks et al. 2006).

While assessing the validity of each of these potential explanations is beyond the scope of this paper, we do explore the extent to which they resonate with our data on

younger parenting students. We begin with the assumption that there is no single explanation and no one lever will generate great changes in parents' completion rates.

Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

This study utilizes a conceptual framework initially articulated by Goldrick-Rab and Sorenson (2010). According to that model, four characteristics of individuals (their social interactions, time use, economic resources, and mental and physical health) are affected by college attendance in ways that influence their children and family well-being. Some of these hypothesized relationships are positive, promoting healthy outcomes, while others are negative. In this analysis we pay particular attention to aspects of parenthood which might promote resiliency in college. These include aspects of self-efficacy and time management, which could give parenting students an advantage over other students. This approach is consistent with work by Sommer and her colleagues (2010), whose qualitative inquiries have uncovered struggles faced by parenting college students as well as the ways in which being a parent can serve as a powerful motivator for college success, specifically when parents receive adequate support (in their case, they focus on the role of high-quality early childcare centers).

Our primary research questions include the following:

(1) In which ways does being a young, low -income parent while in college conflict with achieving academic success?

(2) How might parenting while in college increase one's chances for success?

(3) What are the ways in which young, low-income parenting students are similar to their non-parenting peers, and how do they differ?

(4) How do the experiences and attitudes of parenting students at the start of college compare to their experiences and attitudes a year later?

Data and Methods

Our analysis draws on a data from the Wisconsin Financial Aid Study (WiscAid), a panel study that includes a stratified random sample of the 6,000 Wisconsin public high school graduates who first enrolled in a public two-year or four-year Wisconsin college in fall 2008 and received the federal Pell Grant, with at least one dollar of remaining unmet need. In this study, Pell eligibility serves as the proxy for "low-income"—on average these students come from families earning less than $30,000 per year.[4]

Sample

The full sample includes 3,000 students (for sample characteristics see Table 1). In this paper we focus on a subsample who began college before age 23 and completed a survey during their first semester (N=1,922). That survey, a 26-page pencil-and-paper instrument containing 83 items, was sent to students in early October 2008. Administered by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, and including a $5 pre- and $25-post incentive, it achieved a 78 percent overall response rate. Table 1 compares the full sample to the analytic subsample on the basis of gender, parental education and income, and expected family contribution (all as measured on the students' 2008 FAFSA). Statistical tests indicate that we cannot with at least 90 percent confidence reject the hypothesis that the two samples are the same in these measures. In other words, our findings from the analytic subsample would seem to generalize to the full sample.

Within our analytic sample, six percent of students had a child prior to entering college (including 12% of students attending 2-year colleges and 1.5% of students attending 4-year colleges). We determined this with information from their 2008 financial aid application and their 2008 survey.[5] Throughout the paper we use the term "parent" to

[4] Given that the federal aid calculation classifies all parents as independent, increasing the likelihood that they will qualify for a Pell, one might be concerned that these parents are only temporarily low-income and that they come from more well-off families than their low-income peers without children. However, our examination of parental income from both the FAFSA and the student surveys indicates that parents are not from more financially advantaged backgrounds, and in fact they may come from less-advantaged backgrounds.

[5] In one case these sources of information conflicted—a student reported having a child on his survey, and did not report one on his FAFSA. As we had also interviewed this student (see below for details on the

refer to any individual who claims to have a child—biological or not—whether or not the person was financially responsible for that child or currently actively involved in raising that child.

For the analysis in this paper we used administrative, survey, and interview data to identify the parenting students who were part of our interviewing subsample (interviews are described below). We identified four students who were parenting at the time they enrolled in college, and one student who fathered a child while in high school and put the baby up for adoption before college. In this paper we focus on the four students who are currently caring for their dependent children. As Table 2 shows, three of these students are male,[6] three are single and one is married, two are Hispanic, one is Black, and one is Southeast Asian. The four parenting students are split evenly between two-year and four-year institutions.

Data Sources and Measures

The data come from several sources. We measure students' family background and resources using data from their 2008 financial aid application. We observe enrollment behavior over four semesters drawing on records from the National Student Clearinghouse. In addition, we utilize information from both the initial (fall 2008) survey, as well as a very similar survey conducted one year later (fall 2009). Approximately 75 percent of the sample who completed the fall 2008 survey also completed the fall 2009 survey.

Using the survey we include measures of the following aspects of the college experience:

- Educational expectations and aspirations—these were assessed on the survey instruments and were measured both in terms of highest degree aspired to and the perceived likelihood of success.

---

interviews) we were able to confirm that he did not have a child; instead, he resided with someone else's child (e.g. a younger relative).

[6] Reasons for this gender imbalance may relate to differences in time availability or other factors—this is something we are looking into.

- Motivation, self-efficacy, and adulthood—as assessed on survey instruments using measures drawn from prominent studies of the adolescent transition to adulthood, such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions.
- Time allocation—utilizing a time log contained in the surveys.
- Relationships and forms of support—these are self-reported measures of the financial and emotional assistance provided by family and friends.
- Mental and physical health—again, self-reported measures adapted from well-tested instruments.

While this paper focuses primarily on that quantitative data, in a few cases we turn to qualitative data to explore how it resonates (or does not) with information from administrative and survey sources. To accomplish this we draw on semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted as part of the larger study (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Students were selected for participation in interviews through a consenting process contained in the fall 2008 survey—those who agreed to be contacted for an interview were then stratified based on the college they attended, whether or not they were receiving a specific financial aid grant (the focus of the larger study), their race, and their gender. That stratification resulted in the creation of a cell structure classifying the students at six targeted colleges (four 4-year and two 2-year colleges), and a random sample was then drawn from within cells. We invited 75 students to participate in the interviews (all had previously consented to that invitation) and 50 agreed.

Interviews were conducted in-person every six months for two academic years (fall 2008, spring 2009, fall 2009, and spring 2010). The retention rate of the interview sample over that time exceeded 95 percent. For each interview, staff developed protocols containing pertinent topics that we aimed to discuss. However, we purposefully engaged the participants in semi-structured interviews rather than structured; in other words, we used open-ended questions whenever possible, and when appropriate we followed the participants' lead in terms of the direction of the conversation. We paid particular attention to the affective nature of the interview, rather than strictly to the content. This

approach allowed for themes to emerge organically from the conversation rather than limiting the interviews solely to our prescribed topics of inquiry. It is significant to note that while we did use our protocols in this manner, the larger study of which the present project is a part is a study of financial aid, not parenting while in college. Thus, parenting was not the focus of our interviews.

The interviews lasted from 35-120 minutes (with most lastly about 90 minutes). Interviews were conducted in public spaces and each participant received $20 compensation (in the form of cash) and was treated to a beverage and snack or meal each time an interview took place. All but one interview took place in person, and all occurred whether or not the respondent was still in college. While most were held within Wisconsin, some necessarily took place in other states, and one occurred online.

Analysis

Our quantitative analysis examines several aspects of students' college experience, comparing these by parental status within each sector (e.g. 2-year and 4-year). We make these comparisons while recognizing the very small number of parents in the 4-year sector in this study—however given the large differences in student characteristics by initial sector we felt was it important for face validity to differentiate the analysis in this way.

Where cases were missing data we use multiple imputation in STATA to create ten datasets and average the results. All measures in the analysis were included in the imputation (and imputed) except for the indicator of whether a student had children. We calculated descriptive statistics on each measure and compared the results for parents and non-parents with a two-tailed t-test. We report the t-statistic for each to indicate where differences can be said to be statistically significant. Results do not differ for imputed and non-imputed analyses, and imputed analyses are shown in the tables.

The analysis of interview data was based on a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2005; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). That is, instead of intentionally coding for pre-set themes, we read the data with the goal of allowing themes to emerge. After identifying the parents in our interviewing subsample, we read the transcribed interview data for each participant

(three or four interviews have been completed with each student to date) and coded for salient themes. As themes emerged from the interview data, we engaged in a cyclical process of examining the quantitative data and indentifying ways in which data from the two methodologies could inform one another. This cyclical process, which is fundamental to mixed methods analysis, is akin to grounded theory's process of theoretical sampling whereby the data is coded for themes and concepts, prospective theories are formed by proposing relationships between those concepts; emergent theories are tested against further data examination and analysis; and the cycle is started anew.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the analysis is that it draws on data from a study primarily focused on understanding financial aid rather than the challenges facing parenting students more broadly.[7] This prohibits us from making any claims of generalizability to the population of Wisconsin parenting undergraduates, or even to low-income traditional-age parenting Wisconsin undergraduates. Moreover, while the surveys and interviews solicited a great deal of information relevant to understanding the experiences of parenting students, neither focused explicitly on that topic. In one sense, this proved beneficial, since respondents were not prompted to focus on their role as parents—allowing us to uncover differences between and among parents without the influence of social desirability bias related to expectations of parents. On the other hand, the reader may wish for additional information which was not obtained, given the focus of the study on financial aid. In sum, however, we believe that the integration of rich qualitative and quantitative data on a contemporary group of parenting undergraduates is appropriate and illuminating for exploratory purposes.

[7] The broader study leverages data on a private program that awarded scholarship to students at random in order to estimate the effects of financial aid on college outcomes.

Parenting During the Transition to College

The transition to college is a challenging time for many low-income students, and caring for a child while learning to adjust to being a college student may be more difficult. In investigating how parenting affected the college transition, we begin by considering how the parenting students we interviewed talked about college during those initial months.

We asked all students general questions about their goals and aspirations, and how coming to college felt to them. We never asked specifically about being a parent, and the three fathers we interviewed did not initiate conversations about their children. While these fathers (who were all involved with their child but either had live-in help or were not the primary caregivers) discussed their children, their role as parents did not dominate our conversations with them. In contrast, Alicia, the young mother we spoke with immediately introduced her daughter as a key topic of conversation in the first interview, and her efforts to provide for her daughter were a central theme in each subsequent discussion.[8] Indeed, she answered the very first question we asked her in the first interview by telling us that she has a young daughter, and about how busy she is as result. Our first interview with Alicia began this way:

> I: Okay so basically just tell me about yourself. Anything, like where you're from?
>
> A: I'm from [hometown]. Um, I started college right out of high school. I had a child my junior year of high school. She'll be two next year. So basically that's it. I work and school and my daughter is all I really do, so that's all I really have time for. And the sleep I can get (*laughs*), on top of studying, so.

While there are many possible explanations for this discrepancy between conversations we had with these fathers and the ones we had with Alicia (including variation in the ways in which questions were asked as well as variations in rapport between interviewee and interviewer), we had repeated, in-depth conversations with these parents over time and this pattern remained consistent throughout. Thus, we believe this discrepancy is significant to note and warrants further study.

[8] Alicia is a pseudonym.

Demographic Differences

How do young, low-income students with children differ from their peers in terms of demographic characteristics? As Table 3 indicates, in this sample students who started at 2- year colleges were somewhat older than those who started at 4-year colleges, and parents were slightly older than non-parents (on average, non-parents were between 18 and 18.5, while parents were closer to 19). Since they all received Pell grants (and the federal formula for aid takes into account the presence of dependent children in its need calculation) parents and non-parents did not differ in their expected contributions to college costs. But in both sectors, compared to other young, low-income non-parents, parenting students were more often women who were married and/or living with a partner. They were disproportionately from racial/ethnic minority groups, but no more or less likely to come from college-educated families.

We next turn to the survey data to explore how parenting students differed from other college students as they began college. Our findings are illustrated in Table 4.

Hopes and Expectations

Academic ambitions are notoriously high among entering college students, and students in this sample are no exception. As they transitioned to college, more than 98 percent of students entering 4-year colleges and more than 80 percent of those entering 2-year colleges aspired to earn at least a bachelor's degree. Parenting students at both 2-year and 4-year colleges were more likely (than non-parents) to strive for a master's degree but students who attended 4-year colleges and did not have children and who wanted to go beyond a BA were more likely (than parenting students) to reach for a doctorate or professional degree. Those differences in aspirations were not reflected in how students estimated their likelihood for success—for example, while parenting students were more likely to *hope* to achieve more than a BA, they did not estimate a stronger likelihood of actually earning a BA. Overall, this means that the gap between educational aspirations and expectations appeared larger for parenting students, rather than non-parents.

The greater incongruity between aspirations and expectations among parents should be considered in relation to their notably higher levels of motivation and self-efficacy. Not only were students with children more likely to initiate their postsecondary education with specific career goals and plans in mind, but they also felt better prepared for college compared to those around them. They were more likely to perceive themselves as smart, able to handle the task of getting good grades, and perceived a sense of control over their directions their lives were taking.

A Sense of Motivation

Corresponding with evidence presented earlier, college students with children were more likely than their counterparts to report a willingness to sacrifice in the short-run to have a better future, and have a sense that college would be important to that success. Even as she struggled through her first year of college, working full-time while attending a four-year college full-time, Alicia expressed strong emotions when asked about why she tried so hard. She told us:

> "… I don't wanna see myself where my mom is. I don't wanna have to ever depend on a guy to take care of me and my daughter…I just gotta do it for me and her, so it's all about us now. It's like all about us. Everything I do is for us.…[*crying*] It's just like I can't do it. I just-I can't, I can't be like my mom. I can't be like my mom. I gotta, I gotta know that me and my daughter are always safe, always taking care of, so... Whatever I gotta do, I gotta do it cause I gotta take care of me and my daughter. That's the way I feel."

This strong sense of adulthood, of being in charge of someone else's life, was unsurprisingly more common among our parenting students. Regardless of college sector, they averaged scores of 4.5 on a scale of 1-5, compared to 3.5 for non-parents. Correspondingly, parents had overall higher levels of general self-efficacy.

Managing to Make It

In spite of the commonsense hypothesis that students with children are forced to give short shrift to class attendance and studying, parents seem to find other ways to adapt

to those time constraints. While devoting eight to ten hours per day to their children (time not expended by students without children), parents in this study spent as much time in class (4 hours per day) and an additional hour per day studying, compared to non-parents. To compensate they devoted much less time to other activities, including sleeping (parents at 4-year colleges slept 5.9 hours each night compared to 7.7 hours among non-parents), spending time with friends, exercising, and participating in student organizations. It is possible that their sacrifices had indirect effects on academic performance via effects on their health. In particular, self-reported mental and physical health was notably lower among parents in this sample when compared to non-parents.

Our interviews deepened the survey findings by revealing variation in parents' *perceptions* of time constraints. The men we spoke with indicated that they had "flexibility" in their schedule, and "time to hang out" if they wanted. As one 20-year-old dad with a 5-month-old baby put it, he also found ways to "put school first." Another man reported placing a similar priority on school. His son sometimes made that difficult: "It's pretty hard … for me to study. Because you know little kids they always want to bug you… and they can't sit still so you can't read a book or you can't do your homework without getting distracted." Their strategies for dealing with this challenge, as we later describe in more detail, included depending on support from family and friends.

In contrast, Alicia told us that between working full-time, being enrolled as a full-time student, and raising her daughter alone, she did not have time for any other activities. In fact, she lamented that she did not have enough time with her daughter due to her work and school schedule. "That's like one of my downfalls now that I'm so focused with school and work and then, I mean I do see her, but by the time we make it home it's like 'okay eat dinner, bath, and bed.'"

As noted earlier, in this sample parenting and non-parenting students were expected to make similar monetary contributions to their college costs (e.g. as revealed by their expected family contribution) and yet parents reported much larger monthly expenditures. For example, parents at 4-year colleges reported spending $863 per month, compared to $308 among non-parenting (independent) students. But parents did not

report work many more hours or earning much more than non-parents, and differences in the percentage receiving loans and/or gifts from family were not statistically significant. Also, parents appear more financially knowledgeable than non-parents and—at least for those at 2-year colleges—less likely to be averse to debt.

Our interviews provide some indication that parents may be forgoing work in order to spend more time with their kids, and that this creates an internal struggle. For example, one dad told us that staying home was a challenge for him. He said, "I'm a little concerned 'cause I want to work…to provide for the family 'cause it feels like I'm being a bum. But my wife tells me, you know, that if I would work, it would be hard work. We'd be paying more for childcare. You know what I'm saying? So me staying at home is helping us in some way, so that's what she kind of wants me to do, just take care of my daughter instead of working. I am going to try to find a job anyway, see how that works." Particularly as the economy worsens, it may become particularly important to understand the interpersonal and emotional difficulties created by gender norms and blocked opportunities.

Forms of Support

The demographic differences we described above would seem to suggest that parenting and non-parenting students have differing levels of support, particularly in the form of social and cultural capital. Indeed, some of the data indicate this is the case from the start of college—for example, compared to non-parenting students, those with children reported getting less material help from their family or friends, and felt less confident that financial problems will not comprise their college performance. This is notable since even the average levels of material support from family and friends were low (between 2 and 3 on a scale of 1 to 12). Given this, it is unsurprising that students with children also felt more obligated to provide financial assistance to their own families.

At the same time, we observe substantial heterogeneity in both the type of institution a student attended and whether they received "support." Compared to their peers without children, parenting students at 4-year colleges were more likely to reside with their own parents—this was not true for students at 2-year colleges. In contrast, while overall levels of family encouragement were strong, compared to their peers

students with children attending 2-year colleges reported receiving less encouragement from their family to stay in college. Again, this was not true of students at 4-year colleges. It is also the case that while 4-year college students with children got more support in the form of a place to live, they remained less confident of their prospects of avoiding a financial mishap that comprised completion. Overall, parents were much more likely than non-parents to indicate that they were upset or worried they did not have enough money to pay for things they needed.

Our interviews also point to a strong role of family members in making college possible for parenting students. The fathers we spoke with all received substantial help with childcare from family members that reside with them. One told us that living with his parents gave him "flexibility." When he needed to get schoolwork done or see his friends, his parents told him, "Go ahead, we can watch her, we're not going nowhere. She can stay here." In the mornings before school, another father reported taking his daughter downstairs to his parents (who live below him) without having to dress her— as a result, he said, "it's easier for me to prepare—you know, to wake up and get myself ready for school." We do not know whether and under what conditions parenting students are likely to receive the most positive reinforcement from their own parents.

Engaging in College Life

As they started college, parenting students tended to live further from campus (compared to non-parenting students) but did not differ in how they assessed campus-based support. At the same time, they generally felt much less enthusiasm about the social benefits college is reputed to offer. For example, compared to their peers, parenting college students were much less likely to report that college was fun or a place to make new friends. They were more apt to report that college did not make them as happy as they had anticipated, and overall they were less likely to feel like they "fit in" with other students at the college. But these issues were less salient for students at 2-year colleges, where in comparison to their non-parenting peers parenting students appeared to take college entry as a time to break from past friends (fewer of whom also attended college) and begin to feel more comfortable with friends from college compared to friends from home. Moreover,

consistent with the Gardenhire-Crooks (2006) study, parenting students seem to place academics before friends.

The First Year of College

The freshman year marks many transitions for both parents and other students (see Table 5 for an illustration). For example, during their first year at a 2-year college, students with children were more apt to have experienced a downward leveling of their ambitions for master's degrees. While 37 percent of them initially aspired to a master's degree (compared to 25% of their peers), only 16 percent persisted in that ambition a year later (compared to nearly 28% of their peers). This change may be attributable to the greater disparity between educational expectations and aspirations observed among parenting students as they began college (described earlier). The change is also echoed in a declining sense of both their chances of finishing college and their assessment that they are as smart as other students they attend college with. In turn, a year of college translated into a reduced sense of adulthood for parents—while non-parents increased their sense of adulthood (the result was that by year two, parents and non-parents had more similar ratings of adulthood).

Parents seem to have different approaches to handling their time in college, depending on where they began school. Over their first year of college, parents attending 4-year colleges reported increasing the time spent with their children, and sleeping, while reducing time spent in class and studying (as Table 6 shows, they were more likely to leave college entirely, though patterns of time use are *not* substantively different when restricted to enrolled students). On the other hand, parents at 2-year colleges cut back on their time with children and their time studying, while increasing their time with friends.

By the end of their first semester of college, the pathways of parenting and non-parenting students began to diverge. The form of this divergence depended on where students began college. Students with children who began at universities were nearly 17 percent points more likely to have left by the end of the first semester, compared to non-parents attending universities. But students with children who began at 2-year colleges were slightly *less* likely than their peers to leave. Over the next year, these differences by

both parental status and sector remained. Parents at 2-year colleges appeared more resilient (or face fewer obstacles) than the average college student, while the opposite was true for 4-year college students with children. These differences mean that the typical advantages of beginning at a 4-year college did not appear to accrue for parenting students—their overall persistence rates were on par with 2-year college students without children (see Table 6).

Discussion

Students with children have much lower rates of degree completion, but to what extent is that driven by their experiences as parents? How much of their experience is common to low-income adolescents, transitioning to adulthood? While this analysis cannot definitively answer either question, it indicates that both should be the topic of additional research.

Some of our findings raise questions about the extent to which parents should be treated as unable to focus on their studies, for a lack of time and attention to do so. Instead, we find our young, low-income parents to be a highly focused set of students who are cutting corners in other areas of their lives, in order to make academics a priority. That said, it is not clear that a college campus is a place where they have much extra time to spend—where, for example, they might enjoy participating in additional supportive opportunities. These parents face significant time constraints, and some of them do not find that they fit in with other students at their college—thus they are less likely to want to participate in more activities with them.

The adjustments that parenting students make over the course of their first year of college likely reflect both their individual preferences and structural constraints. It is clear that some institutions and sectors may create opportunities for parenting students that others do not. It is also the case that the intersections of family, work, and school are affecting students in different ways, and that further research is needed to unpack these. Given the clear evidence that parenting students are a vulnerable, if not disadvantaged, group that stands to benefit substantially from college degrees, this should be a top priority.

References

Attewell, P., & Lavin, D. E. (2007). *Passing the torch: Does higher education for the disadvantaged pay off across the generations?* New York, NY: The Russell Sage Foundation.

Austin, S. A., & McDermott, K. A. (2003). College persistence among single mothers after welfare reform: An exploratory study. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice*, 5(2), 93-113.

Berkner, L., Horn, L., and Clune, M. (2000). *Descriptive Summary of 1995–96 Beginning Postsecondary Students: Three Years Later* (NCES 2000–154). U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Bozick, Robert, and Stefanie DeLuca. (2005). "Better Late Than Never? Delayed Enrollment in the High School to College Transition." *Social Forces* 84:531-554

Bradburn, E. M., Moen, P., Dempster-McClain, D. (1995). Women's return to school following the transition to motherhood. *Social Forces*, 73, 1517-1551.

Center for Women Policy Studies, "Profile of Low Income Women Students in Postsecondary Educational Institutions (2004)." (Washinton: Center for Women Policy Studies, 2010) (http://www.centerwomenpolicy.org/pdfs/PSEFactSheet.pdf [February 10, 2010]).

Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing social justice studies. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 507-535). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Choy, S. 2002. *Nontraditional Undergraduates.* Condition of Education. NCES.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. 2005. The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 695-727). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Gardenhire-Crooks, A., H. Collado, and B. Ray. 2006. *A Whole 'Nother World: Students Navigating Community College.* MDRC NY.

Gardner, M., Brooks-Gunn, J., Chase-Lansdale, P.L., Sommer, T.E., Rauner, D.M., & Freel, K. (2010). "Harnessing parental investments in young children's learning: Laying the foundation for an innovative educational intervention strategy for low-income mothers." Working paper. Northwestern University.

Goldrick-Rab, S. & Han, S. (2011). "The Class Gap in "The Gap Year": Academic Coursetaking, Family Formation and Socioeconomic Differences in Delaying the Transition to College." *Review of Higher Education.*

Goldrick-Rab, S., & Sorensen, K. (2010). Unmarried parents in college. *The Future of Children,* 20(2), 179-203.

Haleman, D. (2004). Great expectations: Single mothers in higher education. *International journal of qualitative studies in education,* 17(6), 769-784.

Hogan, Dennis P. 1978. "The Variable Order of Events in the Life Course." *American Sociological Review* 43:573-586.

Horn, L. (1996). Nontraditional Undergraduates, Trends in Enrollment From 1986 to 1992 and Persistence and Attainment Among 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students (NCES 97–578). U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Horn, L.J., and Premo, M.D. (1995). Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1992–93, With an Essay on Undergraduates at Risk (NCES 96–237). U.S. Department of Education, NCES. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Hofferth, Sandra L., Lori Reid, and Frank L. Mott. 2001. "The Effects of Early Childbearing on Schooling over Time." *Family Planning Perspectives* 33:259-267.

Ingels, S.J., and Dalton, B.W. (2008). *Trends Among High School Seniors, 1972–2004* (NCES 2008-320). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Kim, Karen A.; Sax, Linda J.; Lee, Jenny J.; Hagedorn, Linda Serra. "Redefining Nontraditional Students: Exploring the Self-Perceptions of Community College Students." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, v34 n5 p402-422 2010

Luscombe, B. (2010). "New data: Teenage pregnancy, abortion on the rise." *TIME.* January 26.

MacGregor, C. A. (2009*). Education Delayed: Family Structure and Postnatal Educational Attainment*. Fragile Families Working Paper WP09-07-FF. Princeton, NJ: Center for Research on Child Well-being, Princeton University.

Magnuson, K., Sexton, H., Davis-Kean, P. and Huston, A. (forthcoming). The effects of increases in maternal education on young children's language skills. *Merrill Palmer Quarterly*.

Magnuson, K. (2003). The effect of increases in welfare mothers' education on their young children's academic and behavioral outcomes: Evidence from the national evaluation of welfare-to-work strategies child outcomes study. University of Wisconsin, Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Paper, 1274-03.

Marini, Margaret Mooney. 1984. "Age Sequencing Norms in the Transition to Adulthood." Social Forces 63:229-244.

Matus-Grossman, L., & Gooden, S. T. (2001). Opening doors to earning credentials: Impressions of community college access and retention from low-wage workers. New York, NY: Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation.

Miller, K. (2010). "Student parents face significant challenges to postsecondary success." Fact Sheet. #C376. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Miller, K., Gault, B., Thorman, A., & Milstein, A. (2009). Improving child care access to promote post-secondary success among low-income single parents. Working Paper. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Quimby, J.L. & O'Brien, K.M (2004). Predictors of student and career decision-making self-efficacy among nontraditional college women. *Career Development Quarterly*, 52(4), pp. 323-339.

Richburg-Hayes, L. et al. (2009) *Paying for Persistence. MDRC: NY.*

Rindfuss, Ronald R., S. Philip Morgan, and Gray Swicegood. (1988). *First Births in America: Changes in the Timing of Parenthood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Roksa, J. (2010). "Work, Marriage, and Parenthood: Life Course Transitions and Inequality in Higher Education." Working paper, University of Virginia.

Shaw, K. M., Goldrick-Rab, S., Mazzeo, C., & Jacobs, J. A. (2006). Putting Poor People to Work: How the Work-first Idea Eroded College Access for the Poor. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Sibulkin, Amy E., and J. S. Butler. (2005). "Differences in Graduation Rates between Young Black and White College Students: Effect of Entry into Parenthood and Historically Black Universities." *Research in Higher Education* 46:327-348.

Sommer, T.E., Chase-Lansdale, P.L., Brooks-Gunn, J., Gardner, M., , Rauner, D.M., & Freel, K. (2010). "Early Childhood Education Centers and Mothers' Postsecondary Attainment: A New Conceptual Framework for a Dual-Generation Education Intervention." Presented at the meetings of the Population Association of America.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Thornton, Arland, William G. Axinn, and Jay D. Teachman. 1995. "The Influence of School Enrollment and Accumulation on Cohabitation and Marriage in Early Adulthood." American Sociological Review 60:762-774.

Upchurch, D. M., McCarthy, J., & Ferguson, L. R. (1993). Childbearing and Schooling: Disentangling Temporal and Causal Mechanisms. *American Sociological Review*, 58(5), 738.

Westbrook, Franklin D.; Sedlacek, William E. "Forty Years of Using Labels to Communicate about Nontraditional Students: Does It Help or Hurt?" *Journal of Counseling and Development,* v70 n1 p20-28 Sep-Oct 1991

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics: Full and Analytic Subsamples by Sector

	4-year students			2-year students		
Characteristic	Full Sample	Analytic Subsample	t-statistic	Full Sample	Analytic Subsample	t-statistic
Female (%)	57.4	59.9	-1.27	54.4	57.8	-1.51
Mother holds college degree (%)	36.9	36.4	0.21	32.5	32.0	0.22
Father holds college degree (%)	29.6	30.4	-0.38	22.5	21.7	0.38
Parental adjusted gross income ($)	28668.86	28892.55	-0.31	22494.18	23323.65	-0.95
Expected family contribution ($)	1590.232	1626.867	-0.42	1092.60	1118.58	-0.36
Sample Size	1500	1134		1500	788	
Source: Fall 2008 FAFSA						
Notes:						
(1) Analytic Subsample includes members of the Full Sample aged 17-23 who participated in a Fall 2008 survey						
(2) Complete cases, no imputation performed for missing data						
(3) All measures are as of Fall 2008						

Table 2. Characteristics of Interview Participants

ID	Gender	Race	Sector	Age (F08)	Marital Status	Residence
1	F	Black	4 year	18	Single	Off-campus apartment or home
2	M	Hispanic	4 year	19	Married	Off-campus apartment or home
3	M	SE Asian	2 year	20	Single	In apartment above parent's home
4	M	Hispanic	2 year	18	Single	In parents' home

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics by Parental Status and Sector						
(% shown unless indicated)						
	4-year students			2-year students		
Characteristic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic
Female	70.1	59.3	0.86	77.7	56.2	4.71
Average age (years)	18.7	18.2	1.66	19.2	18.5	4.73
Married	31.2	0.4	2.21	16.8	1.6	4.12
Living with Partner	4.5	1.6	1.01	29.6	12.9	3.73
Targeted minority	70.6	27.8	4.1	38.1	22.3	5.32
Family speaks language other than English at home	24.6	9.8	1.02	6.4	8.5	-0.85
Father has college degree	24.9	28.8	-0.31	25.9	24.8	0.22
Mother has college degree	27.8	34.9	-0.51	33.4	32.6	0.16
Expected family contribution (independents only)	2048	1616	0.46	1294	1351	-0.2
Sample Size	18	1116		98	690	
Source: Fall 2008 FAFSA						
Notes:						
(1) Sample includes members of the Full Sample aged 17-23 who participated in a Fall 2008 survey						
(2) Complete cases, no imputation performed for missing data						
(3) All measures are as of Fall 2008						

Table 4. Student Characteristics at the Transition to College by Parental Status and Sector						
(all items are on Likert scale of 1-5 unless indicated)						
	4-year students			2-year students		
Characteristic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic
Educational Expectations and Aspirations						
Highest degree aspired to (%)						
Associates	0	1.8	-3.55	18.1	18.5	-0.07
Bachelor's	24.6	32.1	-0.65	27.9	39.6	-3.28
Master's	56.9	38.7	1.7	37.3	24.9	2.3
Doctorate or Professional	18.5	26.7	-0.77	13.2	13.1	0.03
Likelihood of transfer to a 4-year college	2.2	2.4	-0.53	2.8	3.2	-1.23
Likelihood of transfer to a 2-year college	1.36	1.34	0.14	1.9	1.7	1.37
Likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree	4.5	4.4	0.97	3.4	3.4	0.1
Likelihood of dropping out of college	1.4	1.2	1.49	1.2	1.2	-0.23
Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Adulthood						
I am willing to sacrifice today so that my life will be better tomorrow	4.5	4.1	1.19	4.4	4	4.44
I have to do well in college if I want to be a success in life	4.4	4.3	0.34	4.5	4.2	5.45
I have specific career goals and plans to reach them	4.6	4.1	3.24	4.5	4.1	3.34
I handle making sure I have good grades well	3.6	3.6	0.14	3.8	3.5	3.9
I have a better chance of finishing college compared to most people like me	3.8	3.5	1.07	3.6	3.4	3.98
I am just as smart as the people I go to school with	4	3.8	0.62	4.1	3.8	3.96
General self efficacy (scale: 5-30)	24.6	22.6	2.06	23	21.7	4.42
I am responsible for what happens to me	4.5	4.6	-0.53	4.7	4.6	1.41
I have control over the direction my life is taking	4.6	4.6	0.16	4.7	4.5	3.05
Luck or chance plays an important role in what happens in my life	2.9	3	0.57	2.8	3	-2.57
The extent to which I think of myself as an adult	4.5	3.5	5.18	4.5	3.6	5.6
Time Allocation						
Hours spent with a child (last 24 hours)	8.1	0.1	5.35	9.6	0.2	15.29
Hours spent in class (last 24 hours)	3.8	4	-0.47	4.3	4.3	-0.06
Hours spent studying (last 24 hours)	4.4	3.2	4.11	3.3	2.6	2.19
Hours spent sleeping (last 24 hours)	5.9	7.7	-11.84	7.1	7.7	-2.41
Hours spent with friends (last 24 hours)	1.2	3.3	-2.38	0.8	2.8	-5.93
Hours spent exercising (last 7 days)	3.3	4.4	-1.32	2.6	3.3	-2.2
Hours spent partic. in student org (last 7 days)	0.2	1.4	-7.06	0.4	0.56	-0.83
Hours spent working (last 7 days)	11.4	6.6	1.38	15.7	14.9	0.47

(continued next page)

(continued from prior page)

Budget, Expenditures, Financial Knowledge, Loan Aversion						
Monthly earnings from employment ($)	425	527	-0.73	817	655	1.21
Total monthly expenditures ($)	863	308	2.25	912	465	3.3
Family loans per month ($)	22.4	16.8	0.27	21.4	14.6	0.91
Family gifts per month ($)	32.4	30.7	0.09	19.6	19.4	0.05
Financial aid knowledge score (scale 0-15)	12	11.9	0.25	12.3	11.8	3.52
Loan aversion score (scale 0-3)	1.59	1.49	0.61	1.41	1.51	-2.35
Relationships and Forms of Support						
Material help from family or friends (scale 0-12)	2.9	3.4	-0.89	2.3	3.2	-2.16
Family encourages me to stay in college	4.7	4.7	-0.13	4.5	4.6	-1.99
I feel obligated to support my family financially	3.8	2.8	2.5	4	2.8	19.71
My family expects me to do well in college	4.3	4.6	-1.33	4.5	4.4	1.59
I'm confident that if faced with financial problems, I could get help and not drop out	2.3	3.1	-1.92	2.4	2.9	-3.15
Residing in parents' home (Fall 2008) (%)	44.1	15.8	3.41	29.7	60.3	-5.23
Residing in off-campus apt (Fall 2008) (%)	40.3	5.9	3.13	69.1	32.4	5.99
I'm not getting as much help from my college as I'd expected	2.6	2.3	0.93	2.2	2.2	0.11
College life is fun	2.7	3.7	-4.7	2.6	3.1	-6.15
I like the freedom of being in college	4	4.3	-1.12	3.7	4	-4.04
I'm not as happy in college as I'd expected to be	2.4	2.5	-0.39	2.2	2.6	-2.92
I have fewer friends at college than I'd expected	2.8	2.5	0.86	2.4	2.7	-3.21
I'm still friends with most of my high school friends (% agreeing)	77	82	-0.58	42	71	-7.05
Most of my high school friends went to college (%)	73	89	-1.83	49	78	-4.67
I have made many new friends in college (%)	52	81	-2.87	60	63	-0.39
I feel like I fit in with other students at my college (%)	60	80	-1.93	69	73	-0.76
I feel more comfortable with friends from college rather than from home (%)	12	28	-1.48	23	18	1.56
Mental and Physical Health						
I'm upset or worried because I don't have enough money to pay for things	3.9	3.1	3.41	3.7	3.1	8.85
Self-reported physical health	3.5	3.8	-1.36	3.5	3.7	-2.02
Self-reported mental health	3.3	3.7	-1.18	3.3	3.5	-2.02
Source: Fall 2008 student survey						
Notes:						
(1) Data is imputed using multiple imputation for missing cases, thus sample sizes equate with those for full analytic samp						
(2) Results do not differ for non-imputed sample						

Table 5. Changes Occuring During the Year Following the Transition to College by Parental Status and Sector

(all items are on Likert scale of 1-5 unless indicated)

	4-year students			2-year students		
Characteristic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic
Educational Expectations and Aspirations						
Highest degree aspired to (%)						
Associates	3.9	2.7	0.19	-1	-1.6	0.11
Bachelor's	-0.8	0.04	-0.32	12.9	0.7	1.59
Master's	1.9	0.8	0.08	-12.4	2.3	-2.4
Doctorate or Professional	0	-0.1	0.21	2.1	-0.2	0.37
Likelihood of transfer to a 4-year college	0	-0.3	0.53	-0.4	-0.3	-0.3
Likelihood of transfer to a 2-year college	0	0.1	-0.07	-0.2	-0.1	-0.62
Likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree	-0.4	0	-0.95	0.44	0.46	-0.09
Likelihood of dropping out of college	0.11	0	0.69	0	0	0.24
Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Adulthood						
I have a better chance of finishing college compared to most people like me	0	0	0	-0.2	0.1	-2.12
I am just as smart as the people I go to school with	0	0.1	-0.22	-0.2	0.1	-2.91
The extent to which I think of myself as an adult	-0.3	0.3	-2.36	-0.5	0.2	-3.72
Time Allocation						
Hours spent with a child (last 24 hours)	3.4	0.1	1.63	-5.5	0.3	-3.25
Hours spent in class (last 24 hours)	-1.1	0	-1.62	-0.8	-0.1	-0.38
Hours spent studying (last 24 hours)	-2.1	0	-2.31	-0.9	-0.1	-1.99
Hours spent sleeping (last 24 hours)	1.1	0	1.74	0.6	0.3	0.77
Hours spent with friends (last 24 hours)	1.2	-0.2	1.38	1.6	0.1	2.4
Hours spent exercising (last 7 days)	1.7	-0.4	0.93	1.1	0.4	1.14
Hours spent partic. in student org (last 7 days)	0.4	0	0.55	0.3	0.2	0.49
Hours spent working (last 7 days)	3.4	2.9	0.1	-3	-1.6	-0.54
Budget, Expenditures, Financial Knowledge, Loan Aversion						
Monthly earnings from employment ($)	47	-199	1.43	-270	-149	-0.64
Total monthly expenditures ($)	-55	175	-1.07	-247.29	59.47	-1.64
Family loans per month ($)	33.9	-0.03	0.67	1.3	-1.6	0.16
Family gifts per month ($)	-6.4	-10.6	0.1	-5.5	-1.6	-0.4
Relationships and Forms of Support						
Material help from family or friends (scale 0-12)	-0.8	-0.7	-0.11	-0.2	-0.9	1.41
Family encourages me to stay in college	0.17	-0.1	0.44	0	-0.2	0.87
I feel obligated to support my family financially	-0.2	-0.1	-0.28	-1.7	-0.4	-3.7
My family expects me to do well in college	-0.7	-0.4	-0.77	-0.1	0	-1.07
I'm confident that if faced with financial problems, I could get help and not drop out	0.12	-0.1	0.66	0.6	0.1	2.03
Mental and Physical Health						
I'm upset or worried because I don't have enough money to pay for things	-1.5	0	-3.37	-1	-0.1	-4.28
Self-reported physical health	-0.1	-0.1	-0.17	0.2	-0.1	2.13
Self-reported mental health	0	-0.2	0.32	0	-0.1	0.46

Source: Fall 2009 student survey

Notes:

(1) Data is imputed using multiple imputation for missing cases, thus sample sizes equate with those for full analytic samp

(2) Results do not differ for non-imputed sample

Table 6. College Enrollment Patterns by Parental Status and Sector						
(percents shown unless indicated)						
	4-year students			2-year students		
Characteristic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic	Parents	Non-Parents	t-statistic
Persistence to end of first semester (Fall 08)	70	86.9	-1.36	93.9	90	0.8
Persistence or completion Spring 2009	63.3	85.5	-1.6	89	82.4	1.4
Persistence or completion Fall 2009	52.5	79.3	-2.22	71.1	66.7	1.14
Persistence or completion Spring 2010	61.8	75.8	-1.1	67.8	60.6	1.69
Cumulative semesters enrolled (#)	2.5	3.3	-1.76	3.2	3	1.4
Source: National Student Clearinghouse						