

Assessing Child Care Needs at Metropolitan State

The Psyc 363 Community Psychology Class (Spring, 2010)*

Summary

A survey of more than 1100 Metropolitan State students indicated that more than 90% believe that having an on campus day care center would benefit the University. A sizable percentage of the sample (41%) had children under the age of 13 and these individuals expressed concerns that their education sometimes suffered from an inability to find child care. Generally, these parents were interested in a drop-in care center that would be used for short periods of time during class or study time. Parents indicated that most courses were taken on the St. Paul (Mounds Park) campus and in the evening class periods. Surprisingly, about two-thirds of these parents lacked sufficient knowledge about the Minnesota Post-Secondary Child Care Grant (37% were not aware of the program at all, and another 32% did not know if they were eligible). Overall, 46% of the total sample indicated an interest in exploring an internship or employment opportunity at an on-campus child care center. Finally, more than 600 respondents indicated that they knew someone who might choose to attend Metropolitan State if the University did have a Child Care Center. Analysis of open-ended survey comments is in progress. These results suggest that Metropolitan State should take action to meet the child care needs of existing students more effectively, actions which might also help recruit new students.

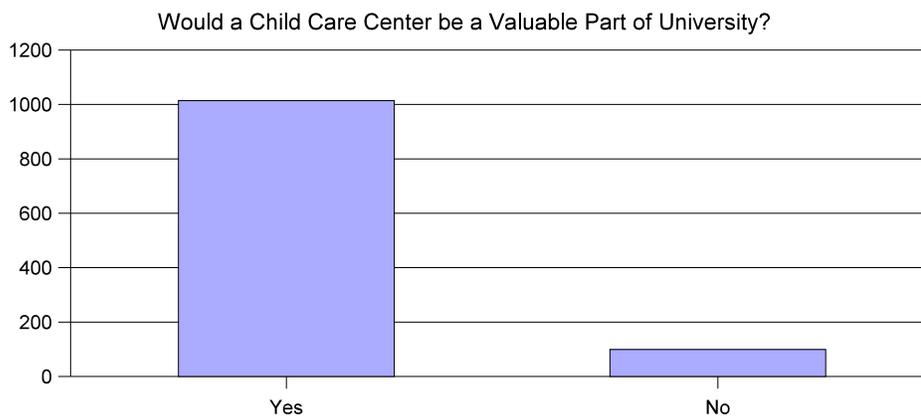
* Please address correspondence to the course instructor, Mark Stasson. Results from this survey will be presented at the Community-Based Research Forum on the afternoon of April 26. Feel free to discuss this survey with us at the Forum, which will take place at the Library Building on the Mound's Park Campus of Metropolitan State University.

Assessing Child Care Needs at Metropolitan State

A community psychology class conducted a survey of Metropolitan State students in order to assess opinions and perceived needs regarding on-campus child care. The class conducted the survey at the request of the Metropolitan State Student Senate. The research project has multiple phases. This is a brief report covering the survey portion of the project.

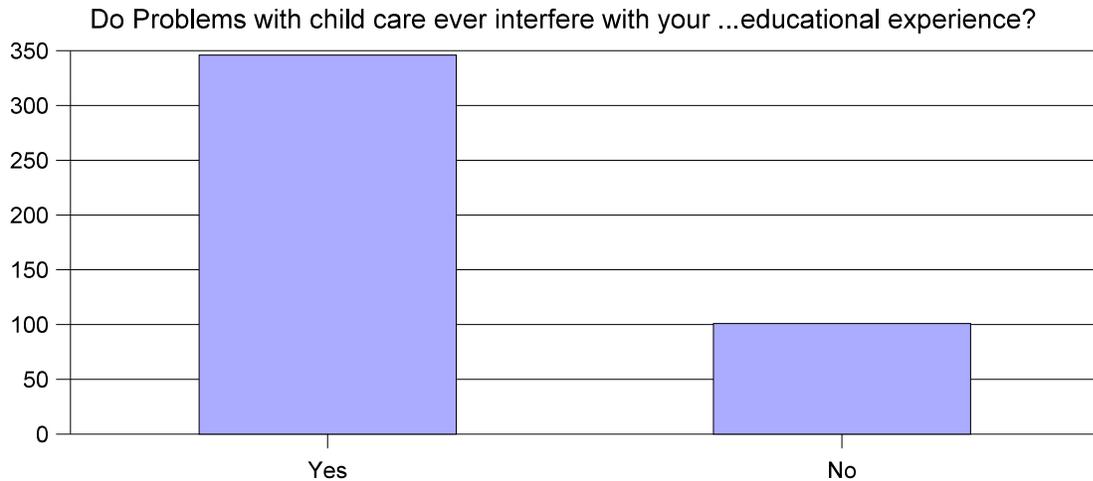
Methodology. A total of 1113 Metropolitan State students responded to an invitation to take a very brief online survey. The survey consisted of six questions, plus an additional set of eight questions which were asked of students who have children under the age of 13. A total of 458 students (41% of the sample) indicated that they had children under the age of 13, a number remarkably similar to the percentage of students who reported having dependents in the 2004 Noel-Levitz survey of Metropolitan State students. (Several surveys conducted by the Metropolitan Student Senate have also indicated that about 40% of students are parents of children younger than 13.) Data collection took place in March 2010.

Results. The first survey question asked “Do you think a University Child Care Center would be a valuable part of the University?” A strong majority of students (91%) answered yes to this question. Two additional items asked near the end of the survey showed similar results (91% and 94% favorable responses for a child care center). The level of support was somewhat higher among students who have children, but the rate was very high even among students without children (88%).



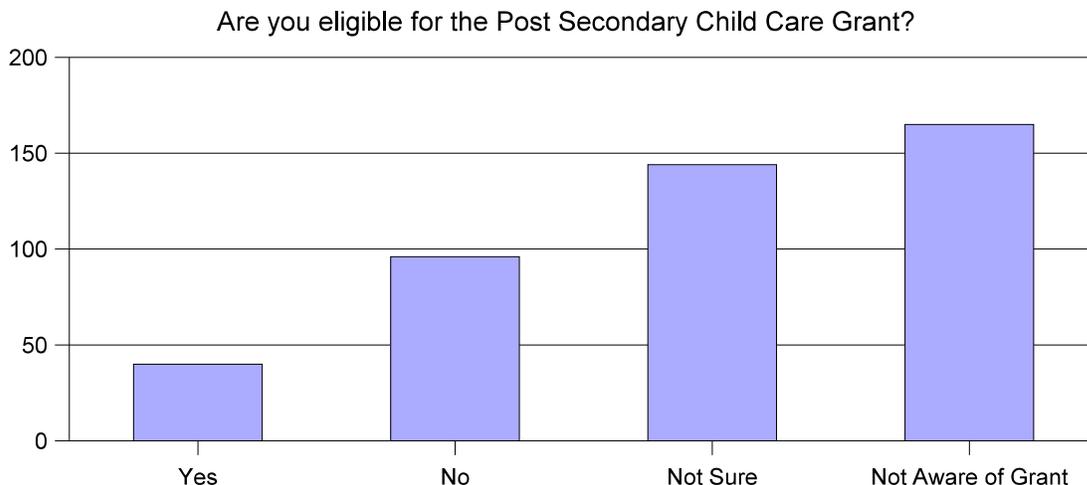
The second survey question asked “Do you have any children aged 12 years or younger?” A total of 458 (41%) respondents said yes, and were asked a number of questions specifically for parents who might use an on-campus child care center. A sizable number of respondents fell into the “parent” category, and the percentage is very similar to results from the 2004 Noel-Levitz survey conducted at Metropolitan State.

A number of questions were asked only of parents. When asked “Do problems with child care ever interfere with your ability to get the most of out of your educational experiences,” 77% of the parents responded “yes.” Also, 70% responded yes to the question “Can you recall any time that child care problems prevented you from attending class?”



To get an idea of what sort of on campus child care center might be desired by students with children, the parents were asked if they preferred a drop-in or full service center. Most indicated a preference for a drop-in center (75%), and fewer desired a full-time center (25%).

Given that most seemed to want a drop-in center during classes and study times, we asked these parents when and where they usually took classes. Most parents said they take courses mostly in the evenings (73%) as opposed to afternoons (15%) or mornings (12%). Furthermore, a slight majority of parents said they take most of their courses in St. Paul (52%), with fewer stating Midway (35%) and Minneapolis (13%). Finally, parents were asked about their awareness and eligibility for one resource available to students with children: the Minnesota Post-Secondary Child Care Grant. As shown below, most parents (69%) either did not know about this grant or were unsure if they were eligible, while only 9% said they are eligible for the grant.



When asked if they might be interested in having some sort of internship, work-study, or employment opportunity in an on campus child care center, 48% of all students (parents and non-parents) said “Yes.” Finally, word of mouth has always been an effective recruitment tool at Metropolitan State, so all respondents were asked “Do you know anyone who might choose to attend Metropolitan State if the University did have a Child Care Center?” Fifty-six percent of all students surveyed answers “Yes” to this question, indicating that availability of on campus child care might be an effective means of recruiting more students to Metropolitan State (perhaps making higher education available to those who might not otherwise attend).

Conclusions. Most students (more than 90%) believe that having on campus child care would benefit the University – it would foster success among students who are parents, could serve as an internship or employment site, and may draw more students to Metropolitan State. Also, we suggest that the University might also publicize resources such as the Minnesota Post-Secondary Child Care Grant, given that this resource was not widely understood by parents attending Metropolitan State (see below). Open-ended responses were submitted by more than 300 students, and those are being analyzed systematically (this phase is not yet completed). When “picking-and-choosing” among those comments, many explain how academic success could be fostered by the availability of a child care center. A few hand-picked comments expressed concerns about how a child care center would be supported, financially. Students are very concerned about tuition and fees and are reluctant to incur new fees to cover resources they might not use. This is not a new issue, the University must continuously balance the types of resources and services available to students. This survey suggests that a child care center should be part of these resource/service discussions as it could impact the academic success of a very large segment of the Metropolitan State student population.

Information about the Minnesota Post-Secondary Child Care Grant Program is at:
<http://www.getreadyforcollege.org/gPg.cfm?pageID=140>

The application for this grant is posted at the financial aid web site:
https://db.metrostate.edu/webapps/drep/0910_child_care_grant_app.pdf

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