



Attracting Top-Tier Talent:

The Case for Child Care in Academic Institutions

What is the impact on colleges and universities of not providing comprehensive child care supports?

Multiple studies in recent years all point to the same conclusion: academic institutions must become more family-friendly or risk being at a competitive disadvantage in the recruitment and retention of faculty and graduate students. Specific concerns include:

- Under-representation of women among tenured faculty and senior administrators
- Loss of young academic talent — both men and women — who choose to pursue careers in private industry because of perceived opportunities for faster advancement, higher salaries, and better quality of work/life integration
- Competition to attract top undergraduate and graduate students, as well as post-doctoral fellows, who look to faculty for potential mentors and advisors

The majority of existing studies focus on faculty, with little attention to staff or student impacts. Moreover, the emphasis has been on the faculty's individual and collective outcomes, such as varying tenure achievement rates (based on their parental status) and utilization of family-friendly benefits, such as tenure clock stoppage or reduced duties. Little has been written about the institutional impacts resulting from a failure to address the work/life and child care needs of the entire campus community — staff and students, as well as faculty.

During the past two years, the Bright Horizons Consulting Practice has surveyed more than 97,000 faculty, staff, and students at public and private universities to learn the impact of child care in an academic setting. Our survey questions probed a variety of potential institutional impacts and asked respondents to quantify their experiences as much as possible. The aggregate responses present a profile of the qualitative and quantitative impacts on the educational institutions resulting from the child care challenges faced by faculty, staff, and students.



“My department lost two faculty with new children to private industry because of better family benefits.”

“Expanded child care solutions will help us with our recruiting efforts. I have spent hours recruiting top achievers, and if we can’t help them with their child care, it can all fall apart. The loss looms larger when you can’t get the faculty you need.”

Loss of Talent

Colleges and universities are at risk of losing key contributors as they begin and raise families. Forty percent of faculty, staff, and students with young children reported they are considering seeking a position at another institution or outside of academia. Approximately one quarter of each constituency has seriously considered leaving their current institution due to child care concerns.

	Faculty	Staff	Students
Considered seeking a position at another university or outside academia	41%	40%	41%
Seriously considered leaving current university	22%	25%	26%

Of survey respondents currently expecting a child, 12 percent indicated that they are not planning to return to work/school following the birth of their child. However, 88 percent of these respondents would return if campus child care were available.

Given the predicted labor shortage and the higher percentage of undergraduate and graduate degrees earned by women, child care and work/life concerns will increasingly become a factor in recruiting new faculty and attracting graduate students. Moreover, as more institutions respond to child care concerns, the competition for talent will intensify at colleges and universities that do not offer these types of programs.

Reduced Productivity

Faculty, staff, and student respondents with young children reported that child care challenges impair their ability to concentrate, meet expectations, take on more responsibilities, and complete projects on time. A higher percentage of students reported difficulty with these areas of productivity compared with faculty and staff, with the lowest percentage of difficulty reported by staff.

	Faculty	Staff	Students
Unable to concentrate, be as productive as possible	68%	50%	76%
Unable to meet performance expectations	33%	18%	51%
Unable to accept a position with more responsibility	34%	35%	51%
Unable to complete a project within a designated timeframe	49%	24%	42%

In addition to respondents’ self-reports of loss of productivity, our study found that 67 percent of parents have left early or arrived late to work/class an average of 10.5 times in a six-month period due to child care issues. Forty-two percent have missed work/school altogether due to their child care arrangement not being available an average of 3.6 times within a six-month timeframe.

Survey respondents further illustrated their diminished productivity due to child care issues:

- Sixty percent of responding faculty have cancelled office hours or student/faculty appointments.
- Thirty-five percent of both faculty and graduate students have been unable to apply for a grant or participate in an externally funded study or have interrupted or suspended their work on a grant or research initiative.
- Sixty percent of responding graduate students with young children have been unable to complete their degree as quickly as their ability would

indicate, and 37 percent have considered ending their education before completion. These data points indicate a loss to the academic field in terms of having candidates to fill future positions.

- Given the high cost of child care in many parts of the country, 40 percent of graduate students report taking on an additional job to pay for child care. This additional job takes time away from their studies, research, and/or sleep, which all impact on their overall ability to be productive and achieve their academic goals.

Bright Horizons survey data found that the same percentage of respondents from higher education institutions have children under 6 years of age as respondents from a wide variety of other industries. This indicates that faculty, staff, and students are no longer willing to put starting a family on hold. With women filling a growing percentage of positions at colleges and universities, the impact on productivity at educational institutions is likely to continue to grow unless the necessary child care supports are put into place.

“You get tenure and promotion during your child-bearing years and then, as we start our families, we are asked to move into administration. It is extremely difficult, and I know many women who have turned down these opportunities.”

“One of my graduate students is the primary caregiver for his child. It is hard on him, but it puts pressure on me, because I am paying him and getting less work out of him due to his caregiving responsibilities.”

“We’ve had a baby boom in my department. I think we are starting to see that this generation is not willing to wait until they have tenure to start families.”



“A [child care] center would be a real benefit to the [university] community. It would help with retention and recruitment, and employees will do better work because they will be less stressed.”

“I manage a department with several young parents. Coordinating work and family schedules causes much stress for my staff. Anything that can be done to provide affordable, accessible child care would reduce their stress. [The university] would benefit too — from a more productive workforce.”

Higher Stress Levels

The Bright Horizons study also investigated the impact of stress on an academic population, as related to access to child care. Graduate students reported the highest stress levels that negatively affect their work/school assignments (80 percent), followed by faculty (70 percent), and then staff (59 percent). It is assumed that graduate students feel the most stress because they are often at a point in their lives where they are trying to prove themselves the most and have the fewest resources to support themselves and their families while doing so. Young faculty are also under pressure to earn tenure while juggling the demands of raising their family.

Diluted Culture

Parents trying to manage work/school responsibilities and personal responsibilities often have to forgo participation in important campus and departmental events. Their absence has a negative impact on the culture of their institutions. Survey respondents reported that they are missing opportunities to attend meetings or other university-related activities due to their child care responsibilities. Graduate students reported the highest percentage (77 percent) of missed opportunities, followed by faculty (73 percent), and staff (54 percent).

“Several students have told me that having children prevents them from participating in campus activities. It’s a sacrifice they choose — such as missing a lecture, not participating in a club, etc. They are not able to be involved in campus life because they do not have back-up support.”

A campus child care center addresses obvious and quantifiable challenges around recruitment, retention, absenteeism and productivity. A campus child care center also facilitates relationships and networks among individuals who might not

otherwise cross paths. It supports resilience and problem-solving among young parents juggling multiple roles.

“We are writing grants, teaching, and doing papers, and we all have young children. You can’t really talk about this at any other place because you don’t want it to come out that you are complaining or can’t handle things.”

A campus child care center makes a powerful statement that a college or university is family-friendly and cares about its faculty, staff and students’ needs by providing them with the necessary supports to be successful. While a center alone will not address all of the work/life challenges faced by faculty, staff, and students, it demonstrates an investment by the institution in their futures. Finally, through their child care centers, colleges and universities live out a core commitment to the cultivation of new generations of students with a love of learning.

“Child care is the largest issue faced by faculty, administrators, and graduate students.”

For more higher education resources, please visit www.brighthorizons.com/highered.