

ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENT PARENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Description	Abbreviation
Institute of Women’s Policy Research.....	IWPR
Community College Survey of Student Engagement	CCSSE
National Center for Education Statistics.....	NCES
National Postsecondary Student Aid Study	NPSAS
Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.....	IPEDS
Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study	BPS
Expected Family Contribution.....	EFC

I. INTRODUCTION

Student parents are defined as students who are raising dependent children while attending an institution of higher education. Even though 27% of community college students in the United States are student parents; the presence of this student group has only recently been recognized by researchers. Most institutions do not identify student parents; leaving them an invisible population to the administrators that make decisions and create policies that affect student parents differently than traditional students. Increased awareness of student parents on college campuses is necessary to begin a push for colleges to recognize and support student parents at the institutional level. This support can help more student parents stay in school; increasing institutional retention rates.

This study presents descriptive information pertaining to student parents at community colleges in the United States to promote awareness of this growing population of students. Particularly, data pertaining to the students' financial situations, time spent on non-academic responsibilities, use of student services, and four indicators of academic engagement are investigated. The objective is to provide information for university administrators and policymakers to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced and efforts put forth by student parents.

The information presented in this study includes a quantitative analysis of secondary data pertaining to community college student parents in the U.S. in 2014 to provide insight to the following research questions:

Research Question One: What are the characteristics of student parents in community colleges in the United States?

Research Question Two: Are student parents in different financial situations compared to students without dependents?

Research Question Three: Do student parents have different time commitments to non-academic responsibilities compared to students without dependents?

Research Question Four: Do student parents and students without dependents utilize student services in the same capacity?

Research Question Five: Are student parents more academically engaged than students without dependents?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Colleges and universities are organized in various ways throughout the United States. Student affairs professionals in higher education are charged with providing non-academic support for students and enhancing student growth and development on campus. Most institutions have at least one professional staff member dedicated to student affairs. Many larger institutions have a Division of Student Affairs in which there are numerous departments dedicated to addressing specific issues. A driving force within the field of student affairs is student retention. An institution generally considers a student to be retained if the student remains enrolled at that specific institution. Student retention is important for institutions of higher education to complete their mission; but higher retention rates are also more economically appealing for institutions.

As institutions look to increase student retention and graduation rates, research has emerged to identify factors of student retention and strategies to keep students retained. Three traditional models emerged to explain student retention: Spady, Tinto, and Pascarella (Habley & McClanahan, 2004).

Spady

William G. Spady created a sociological model that contains five variables that relate to social integration. These variables are linked indirectly to the dependent variable: the dropout decision. The indirect links are considered through two variables: satisfaction and institutional commitment. Spady concluded that formal academic potential is the best predictor of retention (Spady, 1970).

Tinto

In 1975, Vincent Tinto introduced his social integration model of student retention. This model suggested that both formal and informal integration are the

dominant determinants of persistence. Tinto explains further that integration needs to happen on both a social and academic level. In 1987, Tinto expanded on this model by incorporating ideas from Van Gennep's Rites of Passage Theory. Van Gennep describes separation, transition, and incorporation as the three stages that mark a person's transition from a teenager to a young adult. Tinto analyzed the way in which these stages influence and interact with student's social integration on their college campus (Tinto, 1987).

Pascarella

Ernest Pascarella introduced his causal model of student retention in 1985. He looked at the characteristics of the college environment along with agents of socialization that directly and indirectly influenced the student's learning and cognitive development. He found that the strongest influencers of academic achievement were residential facilities and the dominant peer group, with student and faculty interaction being the next most influential factor (Pascarella, 1985).

These three scholars provided a basis of knowledge pertaining to academic and social integration and how these factors might relate to student retention. Research in the field of student retention branched out in multiple ways including identifying more variables that affect student outcomes, analyzing retention rates at varying lengths of time, exploring the interrelated factors between institutional variables of retention and individual variables of persistence, strategies to improve retention, and focusing on specific student groups.

More student retention models have been introduced, as well as variations to the ones in existence. In 1993 Tinto added external obligations as one of 7 new variables in his model (the other six are: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, and

learning). In the same book, Tinto recognized that some groups of students (e.g., at-risk, nontraditional, and transfer students) function in distinct circumstances and therefore require group-specific policies and programs. Tinto did not go into discussion about student parents, but his research supports the concept that the variables he identified would affect student parents differently than traditional students.

As previously stated, the goal of this research is to provide more information pertaining to student parents; a specific student group. The remainder of this literature review explores bodies of research that led to awareness of student groups that intersect with student parents, focuses on student parents, and that provides information pertaining to factors that are important to student parents.

Nontraditional Students

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states that there is no agreed upon definition for a nontraditional student; though age and enrollment status are the most common factors cited. The most widely used definition of a nontraditional student is students over the age of 24. Other factors considered to define nontraditional status are unique family obligations (e.g., student parents), demographic characteristics (e.g., race, first generation status), residency status (e.g., living off campus your first year), and levels of employment (e.g., full time workers) (NCES, n.d.).

John P. Bean and Barbara Metzner were the first researchers to notably focus on nontraditional students. They argued that previous models had a strong focus on social integration; which is not a strong factor for nontraditional students. Bean and Metzner concluded that external environmental factors have a much stronger influence on nontraditional students than factors of social integration (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Through the 1990s more research was produced to explore nontraditional students, the challenges that they face, and possible strategies to help them succeed. Throughout this time, student parents remained unrecognized as a population on college campuses.

First Generation Students

First generation students were identified as a specific group of students that tend to have lower retention rates. Research indicates that first generation students face additional barriers when compared to their peers. This can include less family financial and academic support, lack of general knowledge about college campuses or processes, and academic preparation (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004, Nunez & Cucaro-Alamin, 1998).

Student Parents

In 1998 Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods explored conflicting demands among students with a specific mention to family obligations. After this piece, research that focused specifically on student parents began to emerge in the late 90s/early 2000s. In 2002, Medved & Heisler discussed the multiple roles of student parents. Since it was recognized that the majority of student parents are women; the challenges facing student parents was quickly identified as a woman's issue and therefore research often focuses on mothers or single mothers. In 2003, Austin & McDermott explored persistence among single student mothers, and in 2008, Lynch continued to look at single student mothers but more specifically analyzed data pertaining to graduate students. Through the 2000s, individual researchers provided information to create awareness of the challenges faced by student parents.

In 2010, Nuffield Foundation funded a research project aimed at investigating the role of higher education policies that support student parents in England (Moreau & Kerner, 2012). Most of the data used in this project was compiled through 40 interviews collected from the student parents and 20 interviews with staff members (Brooks, 2012; Brooks, 2015; Marandet & Wainwright 2010; Marandet & Wainwright 2010; Moreau & Kerner 2012; Moreau & Kerner 2015). Brooks presents research that focuses on student parents' relationships and gender norms. Marandet & Wainwright present information that identifies student parent decisions and needs.

Isolation was a common challenge identified within this body of research. Marandet & Wainwright (2009) reported that 25.4% of student parents felt isolated or as though they did not belong at the university. Female student parents reported isolation and severe difficulty adjusting (Brooks, 2015).

Role conflict emerged as a common challenge reported by student parents. (Brooks, 2012; Marandet & Wainwright, 2009; Moreau & Kerner, 2013). While managing the roles of student and caretaker, it was found that student parents will still make it a point to resist a positioning as 'problem students' by producing a counter-discourse to reconcile their role conflict (Moreau & Kerner, 2013).

The Nuffield Foundation's research initiative to support student parents provides qualitative information that allowed researchers to identify challenges specific to student parents, such as isolation and role conflict, that are difficult to quantify.

The Institute of Women's Policy Research (IWPR) has contributed largely quantitative research pertaining to student parents through their ongoing Student Parent Success Initiative that began producing publications in 2001. This research initiative aims

to promote awareness about student parents, the challenges they face, and to provide information for policy decisions that affect student parents.

IWPR uses multiple datasets from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Data from National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies (NPSAS) provide information for a large portion of the IWPR analyses. The data in the NPSAS is drawn from institutional records, government data bases, and student interviews. Specifically, government databases are the source of financial aid information and the student interviews provide information pertaining to student's demographics and life situation (NPSAS, n.d.).

The main source of information from government databases for NPSAS comes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). As amended, the Higher Education Act of 1965 requires all institutions applying for federal aid to report basic student and institutional data to IPEDS. The institutions that are included in IPEDS data include 4-year, 2-year, less than 2-year, profit, not for profit, degree granting, and non-degree granting institutions (IPEDS, n.d.). This dataset identifies student parents via federal aid and tax purposes (if the student claimed a dependent on their taxes or not). This indicates that the child had to be living with the parent for at least 6 months out of the year. It becomes more complicated if parents are not married; as only one parent can claim the child as a dependent.

Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Studies (BPS) are one of the groups of student interview studies that fall under NPSAS. The cohort for the BPS studies are drawn from NPSAS, and each cohort member is invited to participate in a survey one year, three years, and six years after they have entered postsecondary

education. The survey tracks demographic information, income, goals, and other factors from the beginning of the student's undergraduate program through the student's transition into a job. IWPR has been reporting information from the most recent cohort that has completed each of the three surveys; the BPS: 04/09 cohort. The BPS: 04/09 cohort contains almost 16,700 students (BPS, n.d.).

The IWPR also created its own data with almost 550 responses through a survey that was distributed to female students at 13 community colleges in Mississippi. The survey captures student's demographic information, financial situation, GPA, their goals and support needs, and basic health information (Hess, Krohn, Reichlin, Roman, & Gault, 2014).

Through utilizing these data sources, the IWPR has provided a foundation of research pertaining to student parents. By analyzing the IPEDS dataset and the NPSAS 2012 dataset, the IWPR reported that 71% of student parents are female (Gault et al, 2014). Forty-three percent of the total student parent population are single female student parents. The IWPR community college survey found that 31% of female community college students are mothers (Hess, Krohn, Reichlin, Roman, & Gault, 2014).

An IWPR analysis of the 2008 NPSAS found that 37% of African American, 33% of Native American, and 25% of Latino students are raising dependents (Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013). Data from the IWPR community college survey shows that 47% of black women in college are mothers (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014).

Throughout the body of research that studies student parents, numerous challenges were identified. Child care and finances were the two factors that consistently were mentioned as the biggest challenges for student parents.

Finances for Student Parents

Financial challenges have been identified as a large source of stress for student parents (Huelsman & Engle 2013; Wilson & Cox 2011; Marandet & Wainwright 2010; Gault, Reichlin, & Roman 2014). These economic strains are even more difficult on single parent households (Marandet & Wainwright 2010). For example, 62% of single student parents have an expected family contribution (EFC) of zero, compared to 20% of students without dependents and 18% of married student parents (Gault, Reichlin, and Roman 2014).

The indication that student parents are in a more sensitive financial situation when compared to students without dependents is supported by data from IWPR. The IWPR found that 55% percent of student parents who withdrew from school cited a lack of finances as their reasoning (Gault, Reichlin, and Roman 2014).

In the survey done by IWPR among female Mississippi community college students, 33% of respondents had to interrupt their college careers; of this population 40% reported financial issues as their reason for interruption (Hess et al., 2014).

Student parent financial challenges present themselves after graduation as well. The IWPR found that one year after graduation student mothers had an average of \$3,800 more in undergraduate debt than female students with no children, and nearly \$5,000 more than male students with no children (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014).

Childcare Challenges for Student Parents

Per Tinto's model, childcare would fall into the category of external obligations that affect student retention (Tinto, 1993). Childcare is one of the largest spanning and most difficult challenges overall for student parents. (Medved & Heisler 2002; Austin & McDermott 2003; Aslop, Gonzalez-Arnal, & Kilkey 2008; Wainwright & Marandet 2009; & Wainwright & Marandet 2010). A survey of 80 on-campus childcare centers showed that 80% of the centers had waiting lists that were as long as 85% of their enrollment (Miller, Gault, & Thorman, 2011).

Despite the increasing number of students caring for dependents, the amount of on-campus childcare facilities dropped 10 percentage points in the past 10 years (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014). Student parents with children under 5 experienced difficulties in locating reliable childcare close to campus (Austin & McDermott, 2003). Austin & McDermott argue that "when parents do not have adequate child care resources, college enrollment is not a viable option".

There are studies that have looked at gender differentiation concerning childcare responsibilities. There is strong evidence that the burden of childcare falls to women across national lines (Brooks, 2015). In one study, 85% of caregivers were women (Aslop et al., 2008).

The IWPR survey distributed to female community college students in Mississippi revealed that 65% of the student parents relied on grandparents or other relatives to provide care for their children, and 77% reported that they did not pay for this care. Twenty-one percent of the student parents reported that neighbors and friends care for their children, 13% reported that older siblings cared for the younger children, and

17% of the student parents had children that were old enough to care for themselves. The survey also revealed that 24% of the student parents had to take time off from school because of insufficient childcare (Hess et al., 2014).

In 2011, Miller, Gault, and Thorman reported that 56% of student parents spend 30 hours per week on dependent care.

III. DATA

In 2008, the University of Texas opened the Center for Community College Student Engagement. The center provides a platform for research, focus groups, and related services that provide information for community and technical colleges to use to improve student engagement and success. The Center is known for various research initiatives, including its annual survey The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (About the Center, n.d.).

This study uses data from the CCSSE that was administered in 2014. The purpose of this survey is to help identify the “institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement” (About the Center, n.d.). The version of the survey that was administered from 2006- 2016 was based on a 2006 validation research study done by the Center for Community College Student Engagement. The purpose of the validation research project was to demonstrate the positive relationship between the student engagement measures used in the CCSSE and student academic achievement. The validation project utilized three diverse data sets with a total of 9,725 respondents. There were 5 outcome measures used: academic success measures, early academic measures, persistence measures, completion measures, and longevity measures. Five benchmarks were used: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners. The validation study revealed that the benchmarks consistently presented positive relationships with the outcome measures; therefore, supporting the validity of CCSSE engagement measures in the determination of student academic achievement (McClenney, Marti, & Adkins, 2007).

The CCSSE instrument was administered to students in randomly selected classes at participating colleges. The number of surveys distributed per institution was determined by the size of the institution. The required quantity of responses to reduce sampling error was also taken into consideration. Some institutions chose oversampling for more extensive data, to pinpoint student groups for a focused study, or to investigate multisite institutional information (Sampling and Administration, n.d.).

CCSSE relied on three individual roles to support the administration of the survey. CCSSE assigned a staff member to act as a liaison to each participating institution and work with each institution's Campus Coordinator. The Campus Coordinator worked with the Survey Administrator who coordinated with instructors and was responsible for the distribution, administration, and collection of surveys (Sampling and Administration, n.d.).

The 2014 CCSSE dataset used in this study provided 108,382 survey responses from 49 states. In this study, this data will be used to provide demographic information describing community college student parents and to explore student's non-academic time commitments, use of institutional services, and academic engagement.

IV. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Most institutions do not have timely access to quality data pertaining to student parents at their own institution. Some institutions might be able to access information pertaining to student parents through financial aid forms that collect tax information in which a student can claim a dependent. Most institutions do not collect information pertaining to student parents via any other means.

The CCSSE instrument used for this study asked students if they have children living in their home. It was determined that 27% of students are caring for children that are living in their home.

Age

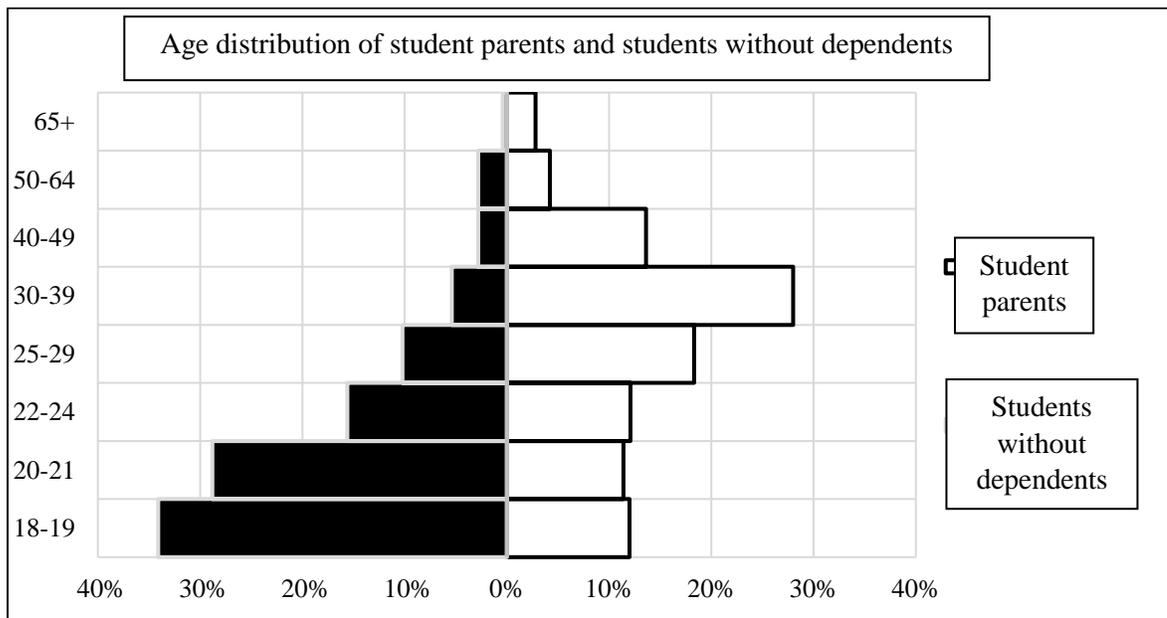


Figure 1. Age distribution of student parents and students without dependents.

Student parent age distribution is positively skewed; opposite of the negatively skewed age distribution of students without dependents. Forty-six percent of student parents are 25-39 years old.

Non-Traditional

This study defines non-traditional as students that are over the age of 24. There are significantly more nontraditional students included in the student parent group, 64%, when compared to students without dependents, 21%. As mentioned previously, a body of research exists that focuses on the unique challenges faced by nontraditional students. Though, it should be noted that 36% of student parents are of traditional age and therefore are likely to seek out different support services and resources than student parents that are over the age of 24.

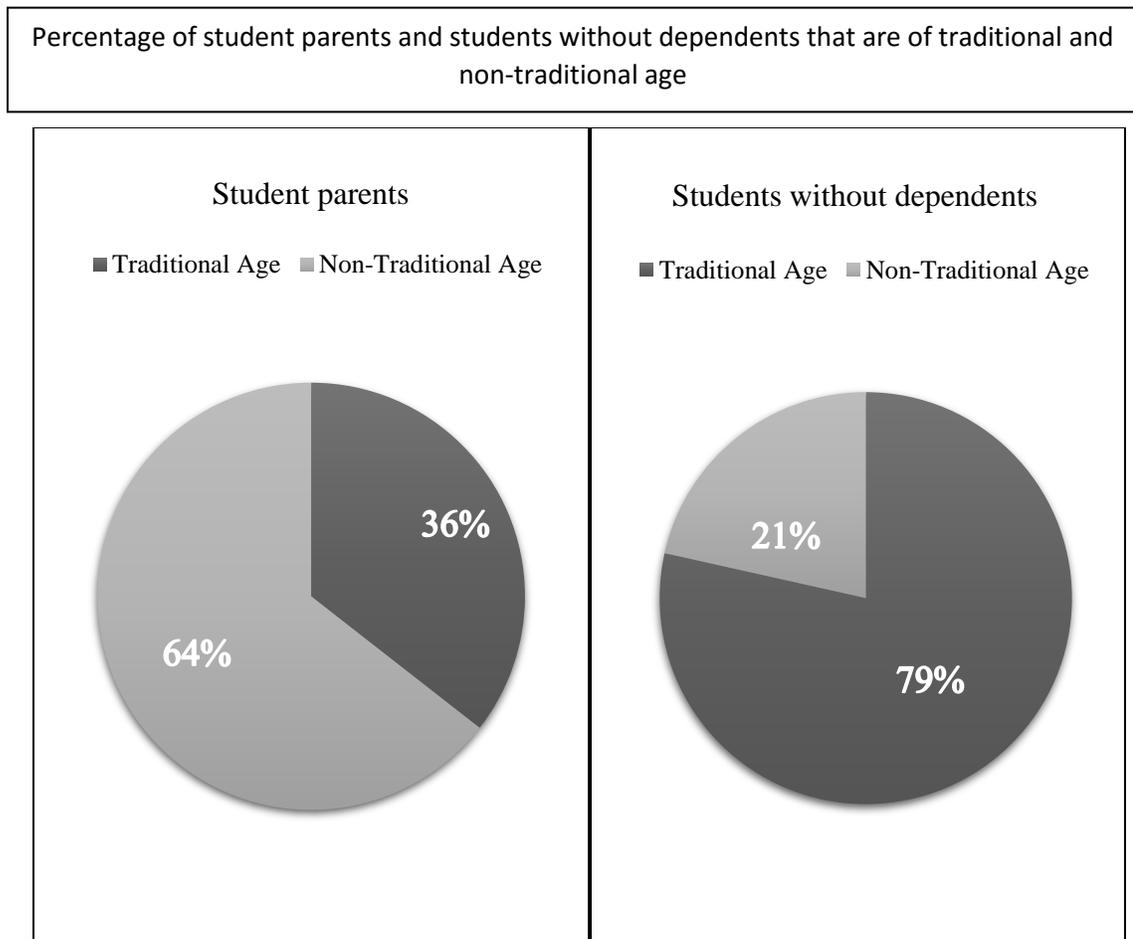


Figure 2. Percentage of student parents and students without dependents that are on traditional and non-traditional age.

Gender

Females make up nearly three-quarters of the student parent population. Students without dependents have a much more equal ratio between males and females.

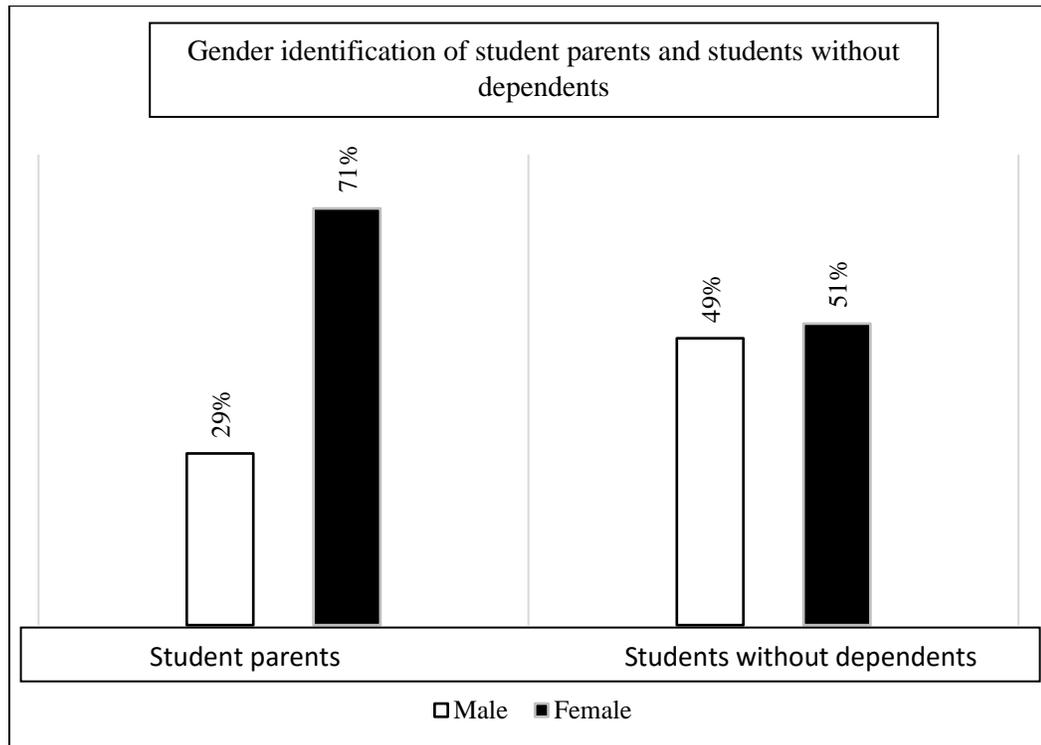


Figure 3. Gender identification of student parents and students without dependents.

Race

Race and ethnicity are one of the most studied factors in student retention. The availability of federal grants for institutions that serve more diverse populations has provided motivation for even more research pertaining to diverse populations.

Racial identities of student parents and students without dependents

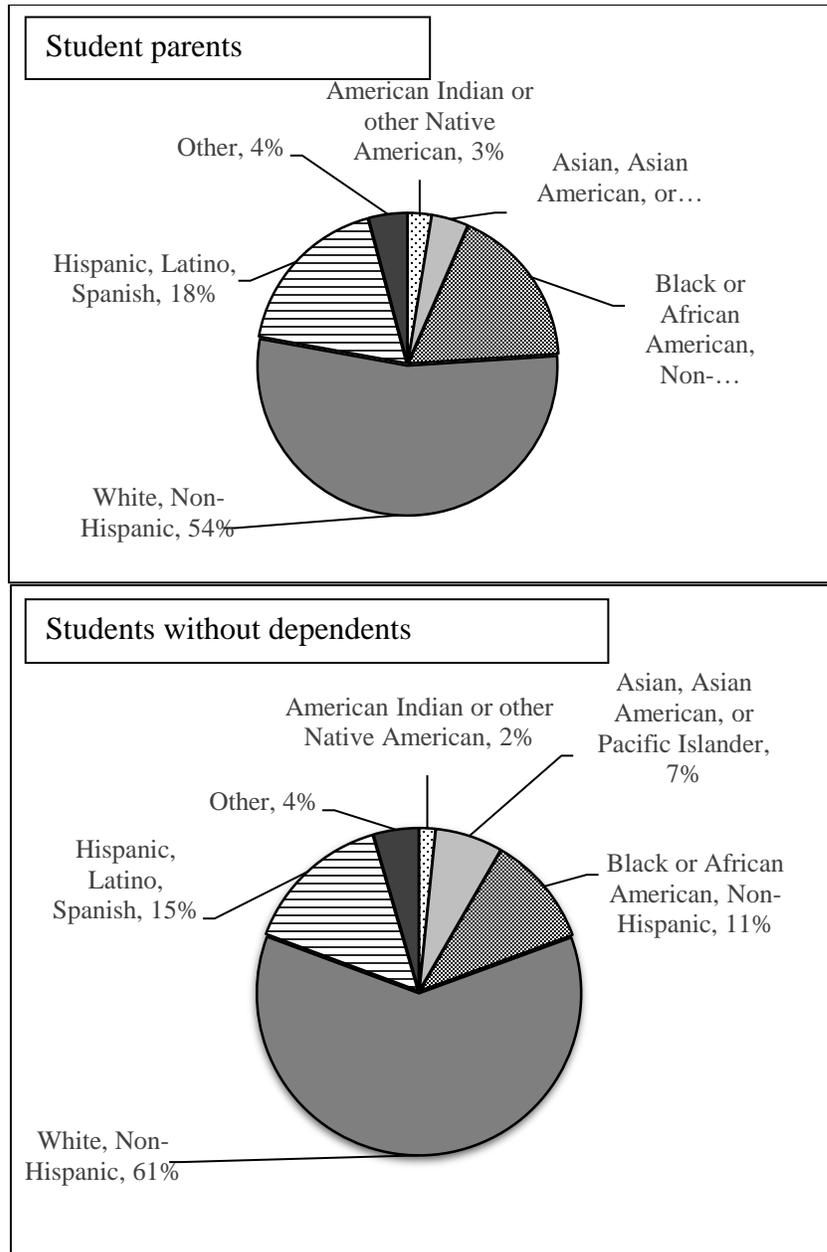


Figure 4. Racial identities of student parents and students without dependents.

This study found the student parent group to be more racially diverse. There are 6% more student parents that identify as African American or Black and 3% more student parents that identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish versus students without dependents.

First Generation

As previously mentioned, first generation students have been identified as being at higher risk for not completing their degree.

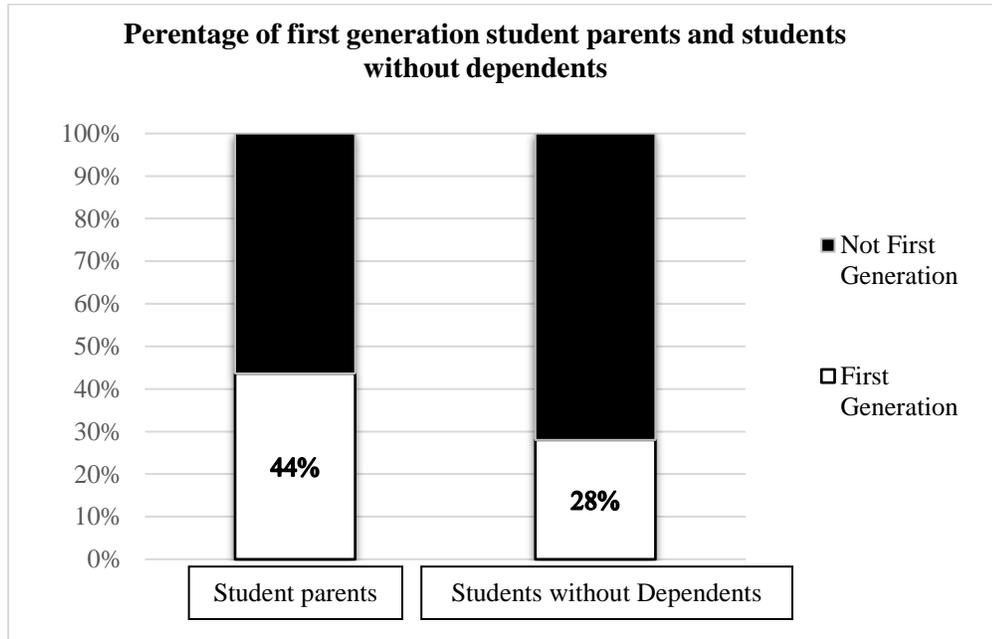


Figure 5. Percentage of first generation student parents and first generation students without dependents.

Forty-four percent of student parents at community colleges are considered first generation.

Marital Status

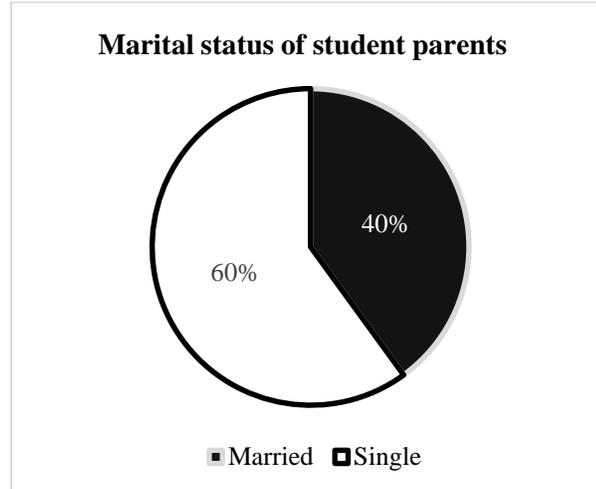


Figure 6. Marital status of student parents.

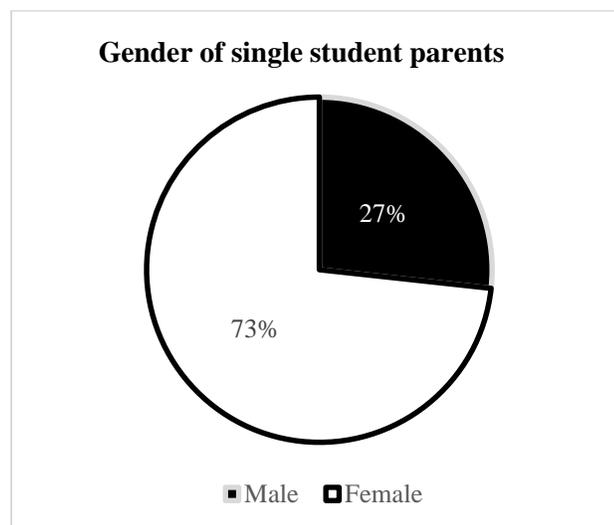


Figure 7. Gender of single student parents.

Sixty percent of student parents are single, and 73% of those single student parents are female.

Conclusion

The descriptive data in this study indicates that a majority of student parents are female and of non-traditional age. They tend to have intersectionalities with student

groups that are considered marginalized or at-risk; specifically minorities and first generation students.

V. COMPARISON OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The descriptive data in this study found results similar to other research that analyzes student parents. The publications from the IWPR's Student Parent Success Initiative provide the most data points for descriptive data concerning student parents. Though, aside from the IWPR analysis of the survey that was distributed to female Mississippi community students, the data that the IWPR utilizes includes information pertaining to students attending 4 year institutions as well as community colleges. The IWPR does distinguish community college student for most data points; but overall this study provides data that is more focused on community college students.

The survey distributed by IWPR to Mississippi community college students and the CCSSE instrument ask students similar demographic questions and questions relating to the student's experiences and possible challenges. The IWPR survey includes more information about the student's financial situation and includes information pertaining to the student's health and healthcare access. The survey that was used for this study includes information that pertains to services provided by the institution and more detailed information about the student's academic experiences. Also, the IWPR survey has a limited number of responses from one state whereas the CCSSE data provides a higher number of responses from 49 states (About the Center, n.d.).

The data used in this study found 27% of the student body to be student parents versus the 30% of community college students reported to be student parents by the IWPR (Gault et al., 2014).

The IWPR reported that 71% of student parents are females; which is the same percentage that was found in this study. Both the IWPR report and this study found that the highest percentage of student parents identify as African American or Black. The

IWPR does not distinguish between community college students for these data points
(Gault et al., 2014).

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Comparison: Finances

This study will identify whether or not student parents face a different financial situation than students without dependents. Below is a comparison pertaining to the sources of tuition utilized by student parents and students without dependents.

Sources of Tuition			
Own Income		Student Parents	Students without Dependents
Not a source	1	43%	36%
Minor source	2	32%	34%
Major source	3	25%	31%
Parent/Spouse Income		Student Parents	Students without Dependents
	1	70%	48%
	2	16%	21%
	3	15%	32%
Employer		Student Parents	Students without Dependents
	1	88%	88%
	2	6%	7%
	3	6%	4%
Grants		Student Parents	Students without Dependents
	1	28%	42%
	2	11%	15%
	3	60%	43%
Student Loans		Student Parents	Students without Dependents
	1	55%	66%
	2	10%	9%
	3	35%	25%
Public Assistance		Student Parents	Students without Dependents
	1	79%	87%
	2	8%	6%
	3	13%	7%

Student parents tend to rely more heavily on grants, loans, and public assistance to pay for tuition when compared to students without dependents. The availability and dollar amount of grants, loans, and public assistance are dependent upon public policy decisions.

The CCSSE instrument also asks students how likely it would be that a lack of finances would cause them to withdraw.

Reported likelihood that financial issues would cause student parents and students without dependents to withdraw from college

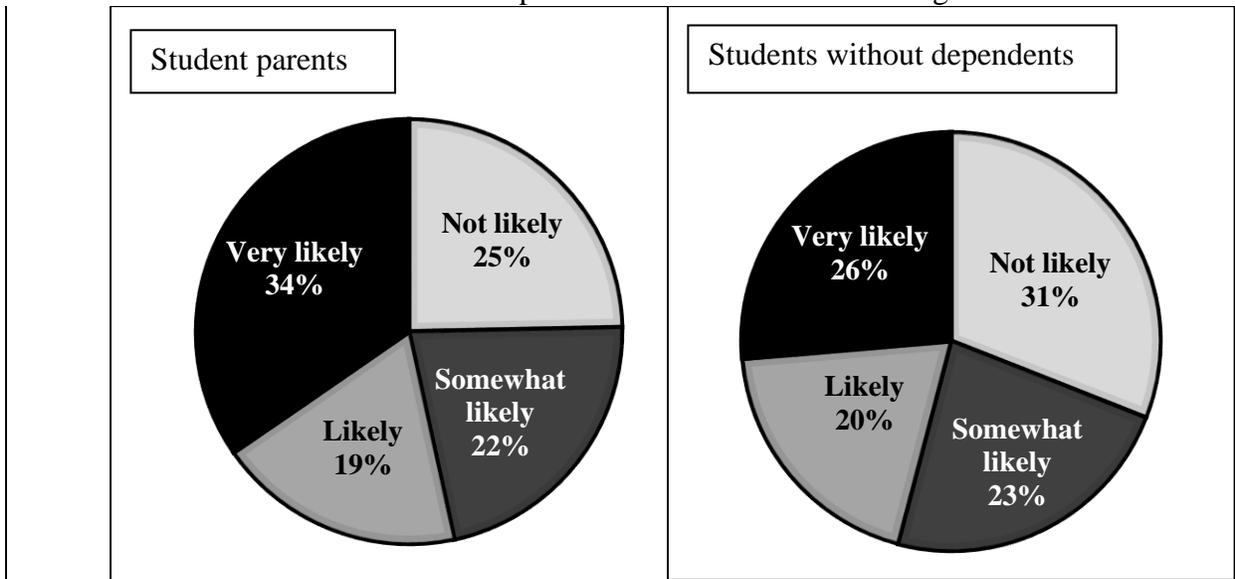


Figure 8. Reported likelihood that financial issues would cause student parents and students without dependents to withdraw from college.

Thirty-five percent of student parents responded that this would very likely be the issue that would cause them to withdraw. Twenty-six percent of students without dependents provided the same response.

In comparison to students without dependents, student parents are more dependent upon federal funding and more likely to withdraw from school because of a lack of finances.

As previously discussed, research has shown that single student parents are the most financially sensitive.

Comparison: Non- Academic Responsibilities

This study analyzed the variables PAYWORK and CAREDE01 from the CCSSE to gain an understanding of the amount of time student parents spend per week on non-academic responsibilities. The questions in the survey that were used for these variables ask the student how much time they spend per week on working for pay or caring for dependents.

Research states that the ideal amount of time for students to spend working while pursuing higher education is 10-15 hours per week (Perna, 2010).

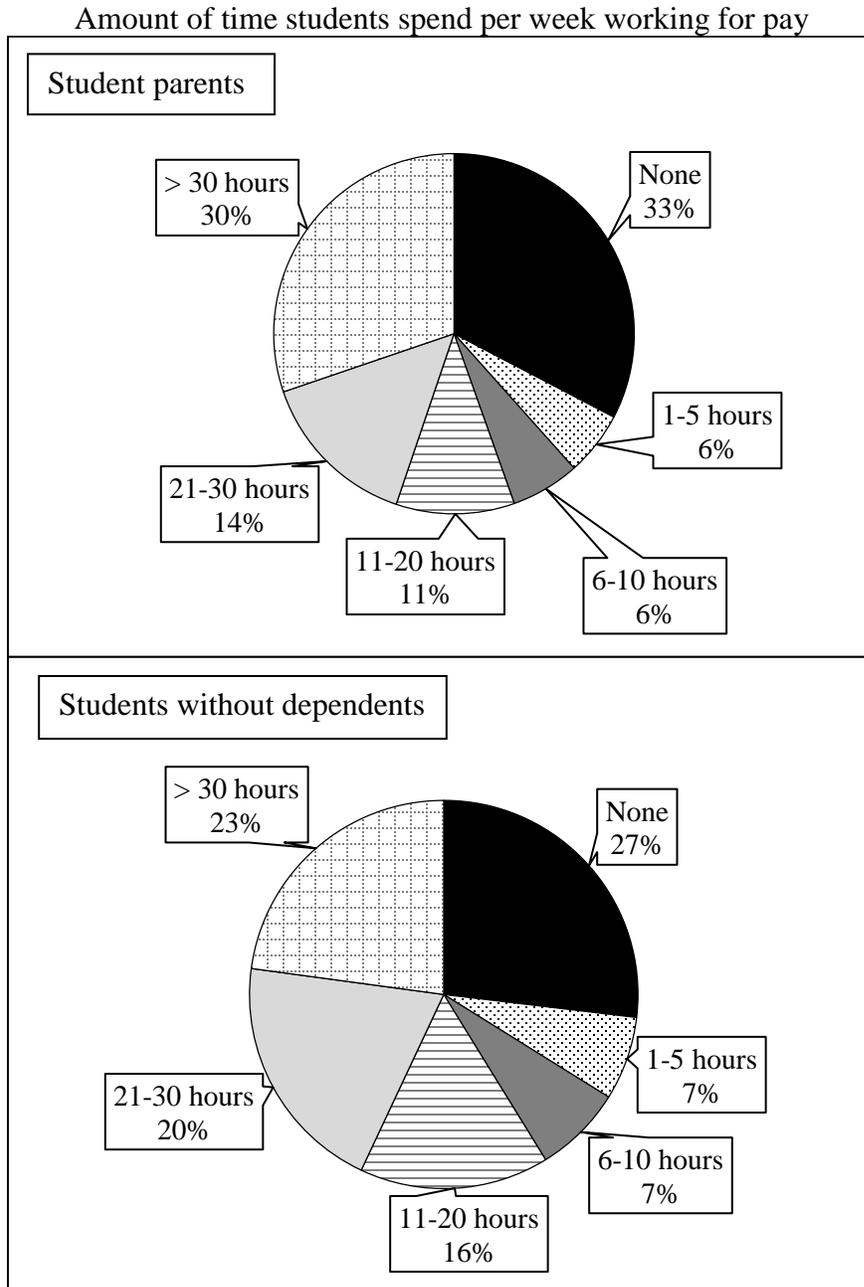


Figure 9. Amount of time student parents and students without dependents spend per week working for pay.

Fifty-five percent of student parents and 59% of students without dependents are spending time working for pay hours above the recommended 10-15 hours per week limit. Seven percent more of the student parent population works 30 hours or more for pay each week versus students who do not have children.

Thus far, research discussing student's non-academic responsibilities has been focused on traditional students. As a result, time spent caring for dependents has not been factored into the equation of non-academic responsibilities. This study includes caring for dependents as another type of non-academic responsibility to provide a more accurate reality of the time commitments that students are managing.

The CCSSE survey asked students how many hours per week they spend caring for dependents. There are students within this study's students without dependents group that report spending time caring for dependents. In this study, student parents were identified by their response 'yes' to the question asking if they have children living at home with them. The question asking students about hours spent per week caring for dependents includes caring for children that are not living in the home, and other family members such as partners or parents.

Amount of time students spend per week caring for dependents

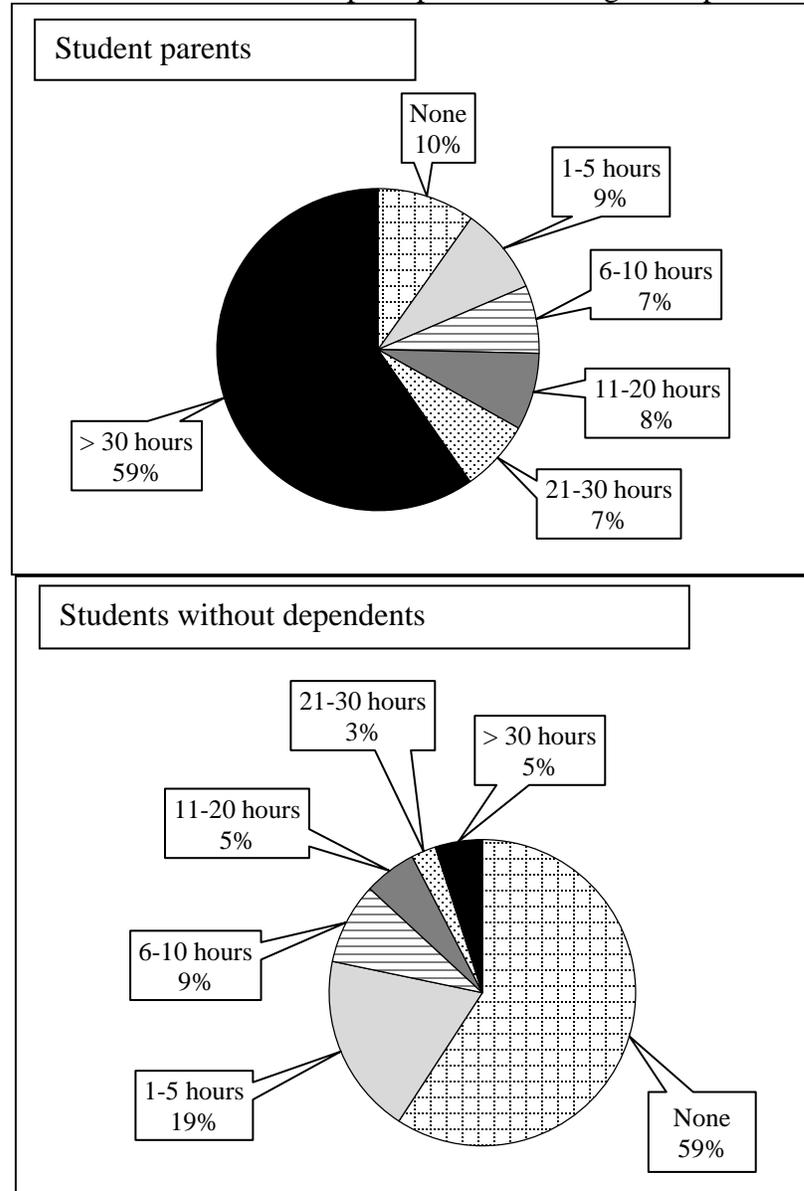
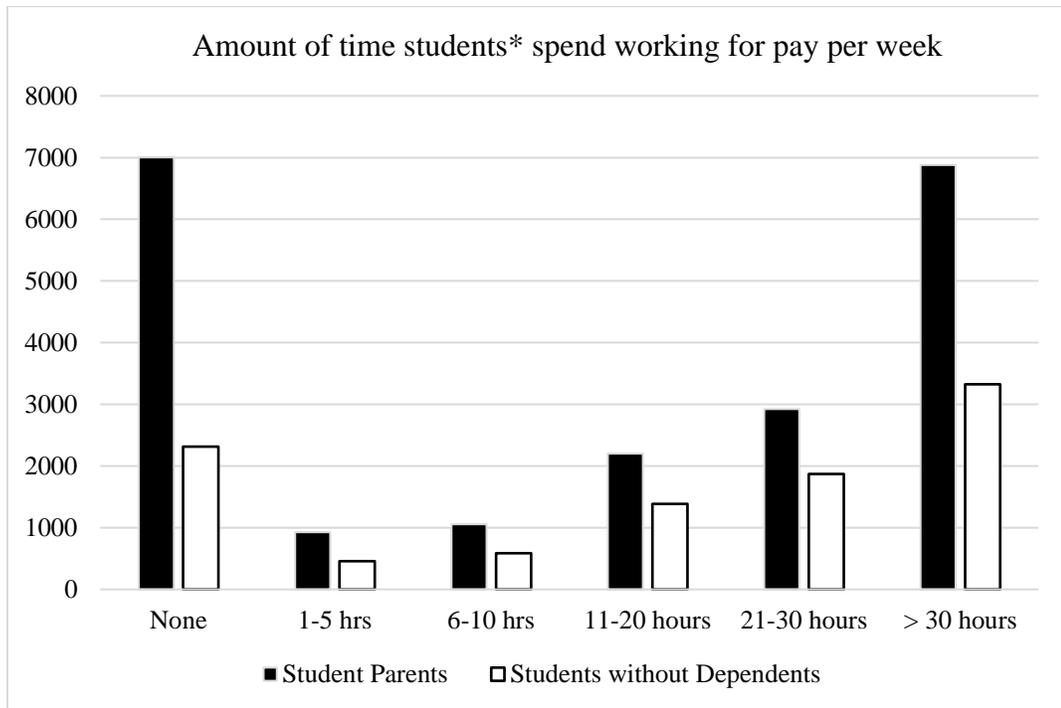


Figure 10. Amount of time students spend per week caring for dependents.

Fifty-nine percent of student parents are committing 30 or more hours per week to caring for dependents versus 5% of students without dependents. Seventy-four percent of student parents are spending more than the recommended 10-15 hours per week on a different non-academic commitment: caring for dependents.

This brings up the question as to how much these two non-academic time commitments overlap for students. Below is a graph that looks at the amount of time

students that are already caring for dependents more than 11 hours a week then spend on working for pay.



*Students that spend 11 hours or more per week caring for dependents
 Figure 11. Amount of time students* spend working for pay per week.

All of the students represented in the above graph, 30% of respondents, are already exceeding the recommended amount of time that student should spend on non-academic responsibilities. Students working for pay 30 or more hours a week and caring for dependents over 11 hours a week, a total of 41 hours of non-academic responsibility, make up 10% of community college students. Student parents represent 67% of the population with 41 hours or more of non-academic responsibility per week.

This study investigated two types of non-academic responsibilities. Fifty-nine percent of students without dependents report spending 11 or more hours working for pay compared to 55% of student parents. The second non-academic responsibility addressed was time spent caring for dependents. Seventy-four percent of student parents spend 11

hours or more caring for dependents compared to 13% of students without dependents. The information provided illustrates that student parents have higher time commitments to non-academic responsibilities when compared to students without dependents.

Comparison: Use of Student Services

This study also looks at how often students report using specific student services: academic advising, career counseling, job placement, skills labs (writing centers, math labs, etc.) and tutoring.

Academic advisors are trained to assist students in identifying resources and course plan options that will help students succeed in their career goals. Students generally meet with their academic advisors one on one to discuss the student's academic goals and timeline then build course schedules utilizing the advisor's knowledge of university degree requirements and policies.

Career counseling is an opportunity for students to have a one-on-one discussion with a professional to help the student identify their personal career goals, gather resources to explore job possibilities within the field of interest, and create a plan to pursue desired job opportunities. This service is generally utilized as the student is forming their career goals and first pursuing them.

Job placement is the service that students would utilize after going through the exploration process and defining their career goals. Professionals working in job placement generally work to build a strong network with companies and recruiters through which they can help students find the jobs they want.

The types of skills labs available differ between colleges and universities. Math labs and writing centers are the most common; but some colleges offer a wider variety

including STEM labs (science, technology, engineering, and math). The operations of the skills labs also vary from one-on-one tutoring to group assistance or appointment based versus walk-in. The goal of all skills labs is to increase retention and help students improve grades.

Tutoring services are similar to that of the skills labs in the variety in ways the service is organized. Tutoring includes soft science subjects and assistance in more general classes that don't require the more specialized equipment or skills that would be found in a skills lab.

The students were able to report if they were not aware of each of these services, used the service rarely or never, used it sometimes, or used it often. Overall, student parents and students without dependents used the services at similar rates.

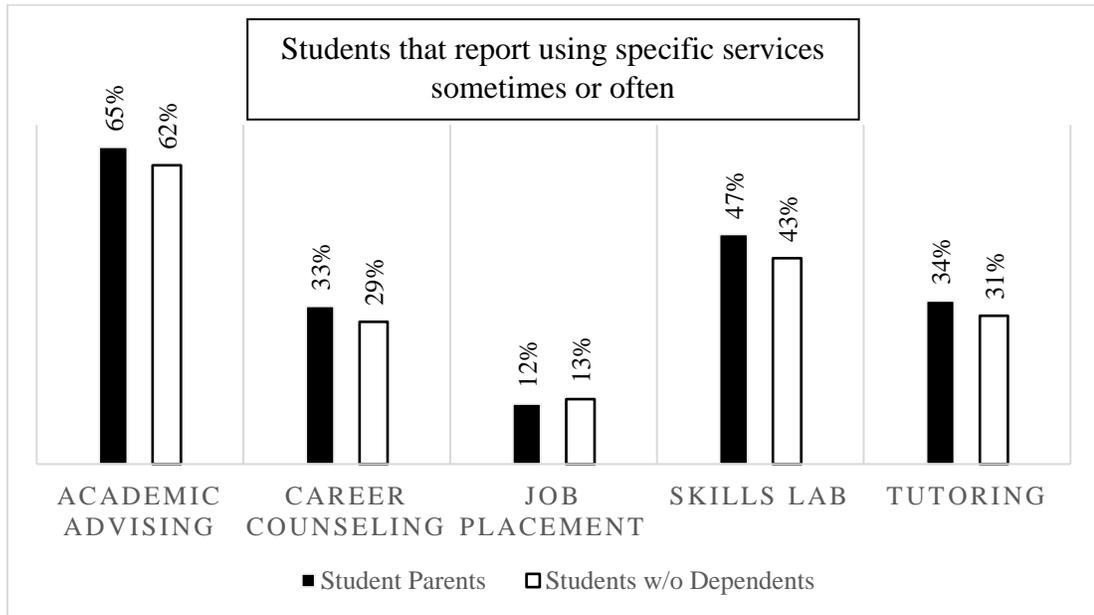


Figure 12. Students that report using specific services sometimes or often.

This information helps administrators and policy makers recognize the importance of each of these services in relation to each other and whether or not certain students are not reaching out to utilize these services. When looking at students who reported using each service sometimes or often, student parents report using each service slightly more than students without dependents (except job placement services).

Comparison: Academic Engagement

Four survey questions were used as indicators of student academic engagement: how often students skip class, attend class unprepared, ask questions in class, and how many hours the students reported preparing for class each week.

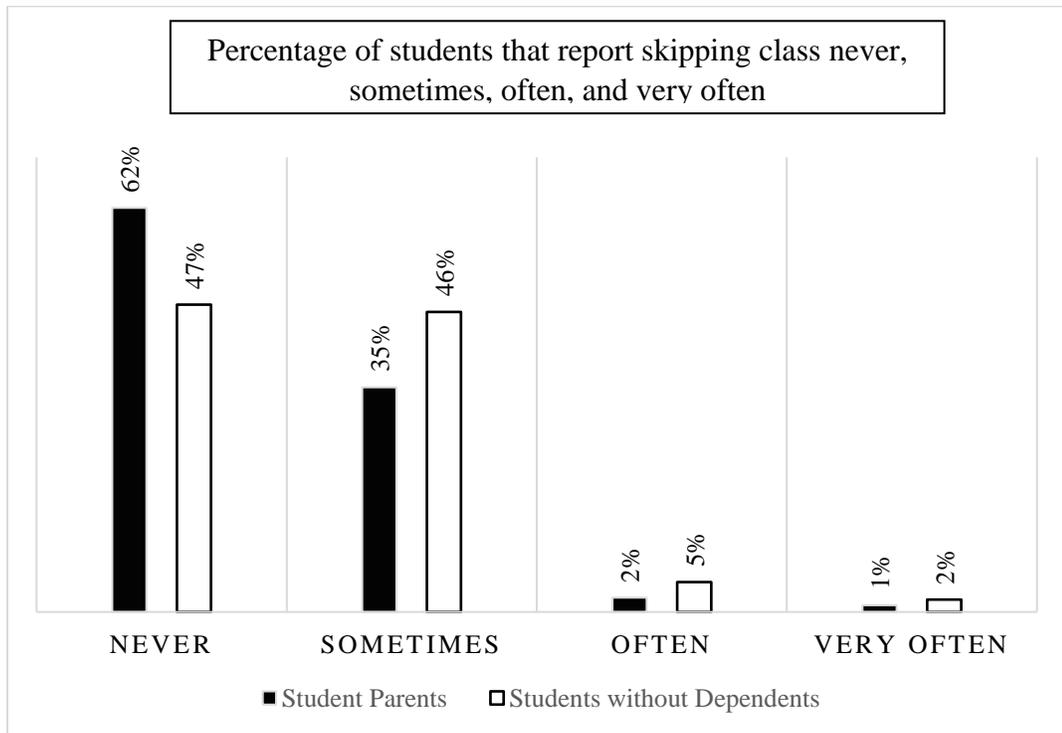


Figure 13. Percentage of students that report skipping class never, sometimes, often, and very often.

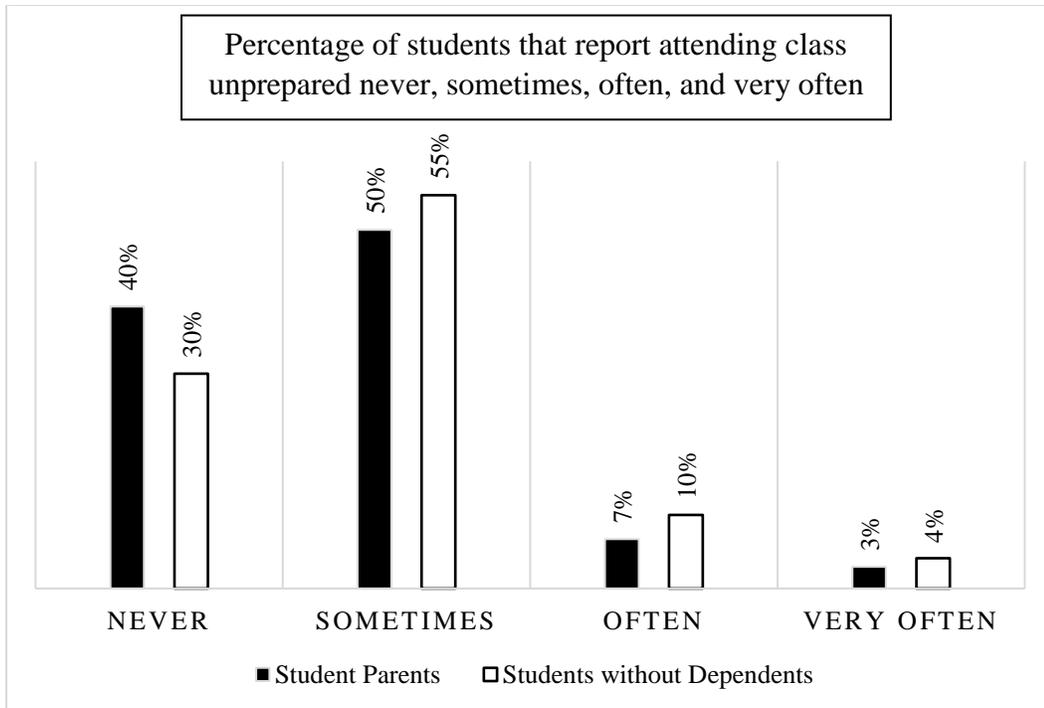


Figure 14. Percentage of students that report attending class unprepared never, sometimes, often, and very often.

There is a difference in the number of students that report never skipping class: 62% of student parents report having never skipped class versus 47% of students without dependents. Student parents also attend class unprepared less often than do students without dependents. Both of these variables indicate more academic engagement from student parents when compared to students without dependents.

The number of hours spent preparing on coursework relates to the number of classes in which the student is enrolled. Therefore, when analyzing the number of hours spent preparing for coursework, students that were enrolled less than full-time were taken out of the dataset.

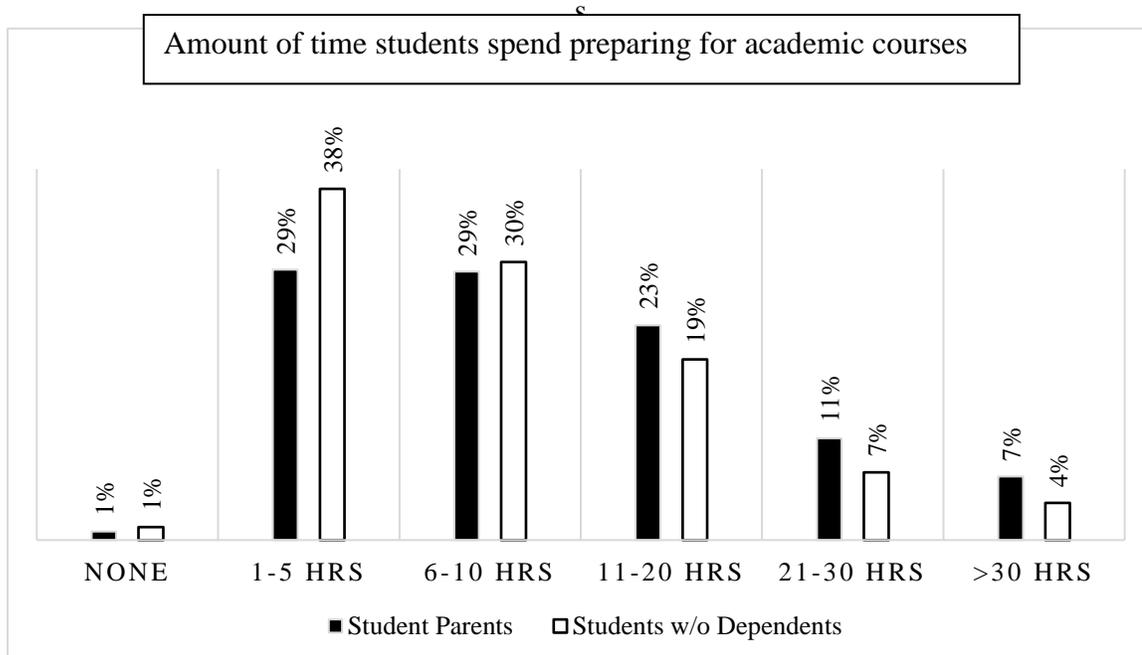


Figure 15. Amount of time students spend preparing for academic courses.

Fifty-nine percent of student parents spend 10 hours or less on coursework per week versus 69% of students without dependents. As a group, student parents are spending more time preparing for their courses, indicating higher levels of academic engagement.

Further investigation of academic engagement includes an analysis of how often students ask questions during class.

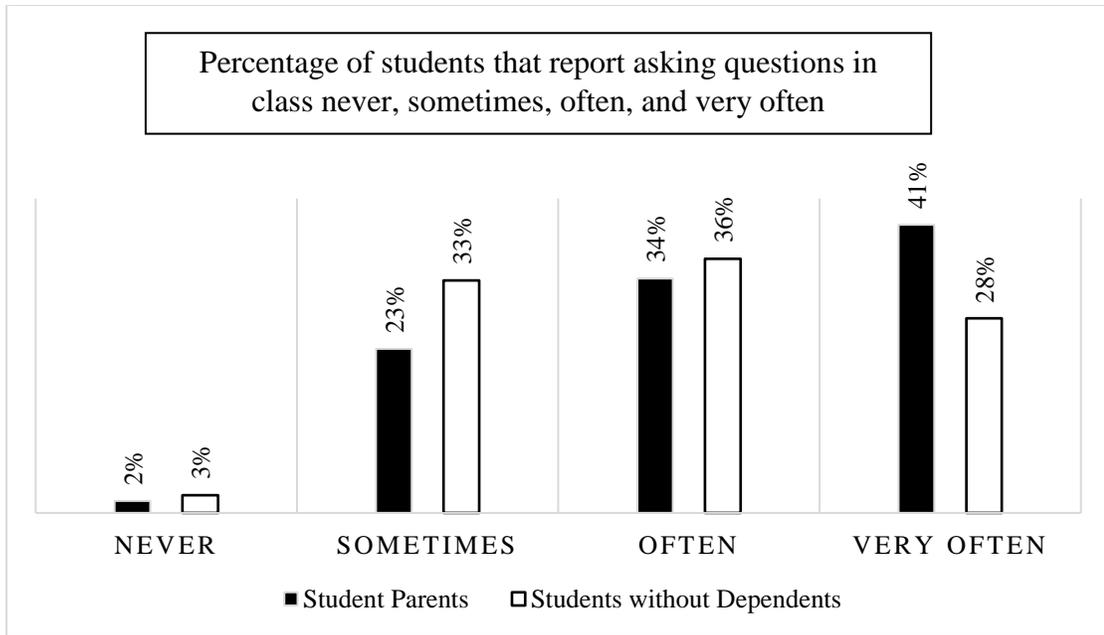


Figure 16. Percentage of students that report asking questions in class never, sometimes, often, and very often.

There is a difference in the amount of student parents that report asking questions during class, 41%, versus the 28% of students without dependents. This variable also indicates more academic engagement from student parents compared to students without dependents.

VII. DISCUSSION

As previously mentioned, most institutions do not collect data pertaining to student parents, and as a result, student parents remain a largely unrecognized population on college campuses. The data that has been presented provides evidence of the unique challenges, and academic engagement of student parents. Without acknowledgement that student parents are an academically capable growing population on campus, their unique challenges cannot be considered thoughtfully by institutional administrators or by federal and state policy makers.

Data collection pertaining to student parents at an institutional level is important for the continued awareness and support of the student group as a whole. Currently, the only way for an institution to systematically identify student parents is to pull their financial aid information to assess if they have claimed a dependent. There are two issues with this form of data collection.

The data from financial aid information is not released in a manner that is timely enough to allow administrators to reach out to student parents prior to the end of their first year in college. A majority of student retention data pertains to student retention between their first and second years of college- indicating that the data collected from financial aid forms has little utility in improving retention rates.

Secondly, as previously mentioned, the data pulled from financial aid information only includes students that claim dependents on their taxes and therefore excludes parents that are not married and do not have legal custody of their child.

The lack of data pertaining to student parents keeps the student group and their unique challenges invisible on campus. This alone allows the space for the isolation and

role conflict issues faces by student parents that were previously discussed. It also prevents administrators and policy makers from addressing the challenges of the population.

One example of this issue is the Child Care Access Means Parents In School (CCAMPIS) grant. CCAMPIS is a competitive grant for which universities can be awarded funds to improve and make on campus childcare more accessible and affordable for student parents. As discussed in this study, childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing student parents, as student parents commit a large amount of time to the non-academic responsibilities of caring for their families. The CCAMPIS grant has the potential to be a driving force in assisting student parents with their child care challenges.

The potential of the CCAMPIS grant is hindered by a lack of support. Funding for the CCAMPIS grant has declined to \$15 million since its peak in 2001 at \$25 million (Sykes, Reichlin, and Gault 2016).

Another hindrance of the CCAMPIS grant is institution's diminishing capacity to write many grants; and the grants institutions view as affecting too few students are the first ones to get cut. A combination of the lack of institutional attention to the CCAMPIS grant combined with a lack of funding from the federal government limited the grant to only 85 campuses across the United States in 2014.

Another potentially helpful policy for student parents that is often hindered is the 2006 Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. This act provides federal funding to support career and technical students through postsecondary education. The allocation and awarding of funding between states is done by the federal government. The states then implement the policies and programs that support the mission of the 2006

act. These funds can be an enabling resource for many student parents, but unfortunately have multiple limitations that hinder the effectiveness of the programs for student parents on college campuses.

The requirement for the Perkins programs vary between states as they are able to create their own policies. In general, the funding for child care assistance requires both parents (if the child is in a two parent home) to be working 30 hours a week or in school full time.

When analyzing the educational requirements for the Perkins Act, there are a few limitations that present themselves. First, there are six states that choose to not recognize institutions of higher education (including community colleges) as 'school'; limiting the parents schooling options to vocational or technical training programs. Other states limit the amount of time attending school full time serves as a valid form of eligibility for each parent; leaving student parents with a limited amount of time to try to complete a two or four-year degree. Further limitations include possible grade requirements and lack of recognition of post-graduate work as eligible educational training.

Student parents that are not able to gain eligibility through their educational efforts can try to gain eligibility through work hours. This would mean that the student parent would have to be working at least 30 hours a week for pay to be able to gain child care assistance to also juggle classes. To exacerbate the issue, some institutions limit students that work on campus to 20 hours or less per week. This policy is in the best interest of traditional students, but it can leave student parents in a difficult position, as it is ten hours short for child care assistance.

Another challenge is that this form of child care assistance is not guaranteed to be provided in a timely manner. When a student applies for the assistance they generally will not know when she or he might hear back about acceptance to the program. The initial response concerning acceptance can easily take 6 months or more to receive.

Awareness and consideration for student parents on the institution and federal level is necessary. Administrators and policy makers need to address the fact that student parents, when compared to students without dependents, are more financially sensitive and face significant hurdles managing large time commitments to non-academic responsibilities. It is important to acknowledge that despite these challenges student parents are still more academically engaged and just as willing to utilize student services when compared to students without dependents

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