

**Recommendations for Best Practices
at Colleges and Universities
serving Pregnant and Parenting Students**

Feminists for Life of America recommends the following to better serve pregnant women, expectant fathers, parents, and birthmothers attending colleges and universities.

Our recommendations are based on two decades of collaboration with administrators, student groups, and community leaders first begun at Georgetown University in January 1997. FFL President Serrin Foster moderated the first-ever Pregnancy Resource Forum in the country. During the Forum, Ms. Foster led a panel of key stakeholders including administrators and an off-campus maternity home started by GU alumni to serve economically challenged women in a poor section of Washington, D.C. First, they heard a letter from a pregnant student who was unable to find the support she needed. The audience participated as the moderator helped the panel identify resources on and off campus and identify areas of improvement. They presented a blueprint for progress to the Board of Trustees, who supported the measure. Over the years, they have built a child care center and [expanded resources and information for pregnant students](#).

FFL's recommendations for colleges and universities include the following:

START WITH POLICIES TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE ON CAMPUS

- ❑ Establish policies that support pregnant women, expectant fathers, pregnant students and staff, and birthmothers. For example: This university is committed to ensuring that pregnancy or parenting does not terminate an education. Our support extends to undergraduates, graduate students, administration, faculty, and staff and extends all pregnant women, expectant fathers, birthmothers, and parents. A copy of FFL's model policies for you to adapt is can be found [here](#).
- ❑ Establish policies to allow students to attend part time and allow up to a year's leave without losing credits.
- ❑ Administrators should establish a supportive culture on campus.
- ❑ Ensure that all key departmental staff and their staff that counsels students are familiar with laws against pregnancy discrimination (Title IX) and in support of families in need of

leave (FMLA) and prevention of domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment (VAWA).

- ❑ Emphasize training of staff in departments whose staff will most frequently hear about pregnant and parenting student needs (health centers, residential advisers, financial aid, Title IX officer, counselors, chaplains, athletic department, student affairs, child care, etc.).
- ❑ Educate administrators, faculty, staff, and students an ongoing and annual effort about policies, resources, and support.
- ❑ Include house mothers, house fathers, and Panhellenic officers in ongoing education if a Greek system exists on campus.
- ❑ Professors and advisors should all know to accommodate pregnant women or parents who need to adjust their schedule or take time off for maternity leave or sick leave for parents and children.
- ❑ All Athletic Department staff must know and adhere to NCAA policies that would redshirt a pregnant student, rather than rescind her scholarship.
- ❑ Each school adheres to the Family and Medical Leave Act for their employees, with special attention being paid to professors on the tenure track who take maternity/paternity leave.

ORGANIZE SERVICES

- ❑ Establish one department to serve as a central point on campus, (most likely the health center, counseling department, or student affairs) to assist pregnant women, expectant fathers, and birthmothers.
- ❑ If none already exists, create a safety net across all departments to ensure no pregnant woman, expectant father, parent, or birthmother falls through the cracks.

COMMUNICATE WITH PREGNANT STUDENTS

- ❑ All pregnant women shall be given information (including policies, on-campus support, off-campus resources including federally funded programs) and time to make a decision that is best for them, including support throughout pregnancy, knowledge about available support for single and married parents, kinship care and guardianship options, open, closed, and semi-open adoption, along with information about all the resources available on and off campus.

- ❑ If a woman receives a positive pregnancy test from the health center, give her information in writing that states no matter what her choice, she will not be expelled from school; that she will be supported if she chooses to carry the pregnancy to term, if she has an abortion, or places a baby for adoption; and if she loses a child through miscarriage or stillbirth, abortion or adoption, reproductive grief counseling is available.
- ❑ She should also be informed in writing that it is illegal for a man to coerce a women into an abortion by threats not to pay child support. If she chooses to carry the pregnancy to term, he can voluntarily establish paternity at the hospital upon the birth of the child. If he is unwilling to accept his responsibility to her and the child, ask her to get as much information as you can about the biological father, including his full name, address (school/and parents/legal address), employer, and Social Security number. Contact social services for next steps to establish paternity and child support payments.
- ❑ Pregnant women should be informed that they may stay in the dorms while pregnant.

SERVE AT-RISK PARENTS WITH RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- ❑ Parents should be assisted in their search for family housing, on or off-campus, and the availability scholarships and loans.
- ❑ Establish a parenting group on campus, including a dedicated Facebook group.
- ❑ Collaborate with those in the community that can connect financially challenged families to SCHIP, WIC, TANF, and other federally funded programs.
- ❑ Make public how many spaces are available for child care, including infants, toddlers, and children, or make public the length of waitlists for those who apply for infant/child care while the universities determines the amount of space available. The length of time to be waitlisted is not immediately apparent on any websites.
- ❑ Expand of telecommuting options to increase graduation rates among women who are parenting. Family-friendly options would include the ability to watch the professor via live feed, ask questions during a class, have notes from a white/blackboard be emailed to a student, and ability to record the class to accommodate the needs of parents and children.
- ❑ Special accommodations should be met. Including rescheduling exams, excused absences, extended deadlines due to pregnancy, labor and delivery, postnatal recovery, or child illnesses/well baby doctor visits, providing alternatives to complete missed work, including accommodations for doctor ordered bed rest. Solutions may be a notetaker during missed classes, a recording of the class, and/or notes sent electronically by the

professor. Pregnant and postpartum women may require a larger desk (without a flip down writing table), breaks during class while pregnant or nursing, access to elevators if restricted.

- ❑ Wherever possible, reserve parking for pregnant women and new mothers.
- ❑ If they so choose, nursing mothers should be offered private lactation rooms with a comfortable place to sit, a refrigerator to store breast milk, the ability to lock the door or mark it “in use” and ideally a CD player or radio with some calm music.
- ❑ Financial aid for housing should not be tied to campus housing. Parents may be able to find less expensive and more suitable housing in the community.
- ❑ Establish student housing, or if more affordable, help students find off campus housing by working with realtors to find affordable, safe homes in nearby areas.
- ❑ Establish child care if none is on campus with a sliding scale for student parents, and provide a link to financial aid.
- ❑ Establish scholarships from private funds for child care, housing, diapers, and other costs for at-risk students.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- ❑ Communicate resources on the university/college website using easily searchable for keywords “pregnant” and “student parents” and all under a .edu/pregnant & parenting student page (not to be confused with parents of students in school).
- ❑ Communicate pregnancy and parenting policies, resources, and support in orientation and make it an ongoing effort to students as they continue their education through advertisements and/or forums. As reported in Feminists for Life of America’s 2008 report [“Perception is Reality,”](#) women often think that administrators won’t accommodate them. Yet often, the administrators can and will provide accommodations--students just don’t know it.
- ❑ Educate pregnant women, expectant fathers, and parents about how to establish paternity and child support and if he is unwilling, what she needs to know.
- ❑ Include child care, family housing, lactation stations, elevators, and diaper decks on the school map.
- ❑ Connect students to off campus resources as needed.

OTHER

- ❑ Evaluate available resources annually by using [FFL's Pregnancy and Parenting SurveySM](#) and determine next steps for progress.
- ❑ Consider hosting an annual FFL Pregnancy and Parenting Resource ForumSM. (Contact info@feministsforlife.org for information about bringing in an experienced moderator.)
- ❑ There is no "one size fits all" set of solutions. Tailor resources to urban, coastal, or rural areas.
- ❑ Think regionally as you identify needs and make priorities for various solutions. For example, colleges and universities in more rural settings may have land to build or more affordable housing off campus may be residential, but those in urban settings may find telecommuting options more affordable options for the Board of Trustees to consider as well as students.
- ❑ Act locally. For universities like Tulane and Loyola in New Orleans, (who are literally across the street) and many universities in other major cities, shared housing and child care could be developed (as Loyola and Tulane they have done with meal vouchers.)
- ❑ Creative work/study solutions might include [paid apprenticeships](#) where credits also apply (especially in STEM) for working student parents.
- ❑ Consider partnerships with other schools within the state or even across state lines, especially in regards to telecommuting options where credits are of equal value.
- ❑ Share WomenDeserveBetter.com with your students and staff (especially pregnant women, expectant fathers, parents and birthmothers) who are in need or who serve others via your website. It will help them with additional support in the areas of "work, learn, live, and love."

By Serrin M. Foster

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