

Perception is Reality

When pregnant and parenting students can't find campus resources, the message is clear:

“Your college experience here is over.”



perception is reality

By FFL President Serrin M. Foster
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In 1996, a board member of Feminists for Life shared her experience of facing an unplanned pregnancy while in college. “Without housing, day care and maternity coverage, it doesn’t feel like you have much of a free choice,” she told the board.

In the course of a decade of hosting groundbreaking FFL Pregnancy Resource Forums at top colleges across the country, Feminists for Life has seen the same problems over and over: vital resources are missing, policies are not in place, and services that do exist are not communicated to students or even between staff in different departments.

Are these widespread problems for pregnant and parenting students at colleges and universities across the country? Is the lack of resources “only in her mind”—a misperception by students who are in crisis and overwhelmed?

Or are pregnant and parenting students “missing on campus” because resources are nowhere to be found?

In November 2007, Feminists for Life and Students for Life of America asked 400 pro-life student leaders to put themselves in the shoes of a pregnant or parenting student. Could these activists—who were not feeling the shock of facing an unplanned pregnancy, whose predisposition was to find help for a woman considering abortion and to support parenting students—find the basic resources needed for a pregnant woman to have her baby and continue her education, and for a parenting student to get that all important degree?

Who chose to walk in her shoes?

Out of 400 campuses with pro-life student groups, 165 respondents from 117 different colleges and universities took on the challenge and completed FFL’s Pregnancy Resources Survey.

85% percent of the student respondents were undergraduates.

8% were graduate students.

3% were alumni.

Fewer than 1% of the respondents were faculty members.

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Yet basic resources often go unpublicized, and students remain unaware of the services available to them in the event they face an unplanned pregnancy.

For these students, the **perception** that they have no resources or support is their **reality**.

The majority of schools represented were state schools (58%), with equal representation of private and religious colleges (21% each).

The goal of Feminists for Life’s first-ever nationwide Pregnancy Resources Survey was to determine students’ perceptions about the availability on their campuses of resources and support for pregnant and parenting students.

According to FFL’s Survey, respondents were often able to find information about housing, and most of them indicated that housing was unavailable for these students.

Many were confused about the scope of childcare options. The overwhelming perception of respondents was that faculty members and staff have priority access to on-campus childcare. Undergraduates and foreign students were believed to be the least served.

Most respondents were unaware of policies regarding financial aid, healthcare, and education about resources and support. Financial aid and healthcare are among the most complex and demanding components of student life—even more so for pregnant and parenting students. The fact that many respondents did not even know how to find information on healthcare and financial aid suggests a serious gap in the way college administrations educate students about their most basic resources.

Responses in the financial aid section suggest that students have not been educated about the range of options available to pregnant and parenting students to secure federal financial aid for housing, tuition, and childcare costs.

Additionally, students are woefully uneducated about paternity establishment and the rights and responsibilities of fathers. Both of these elements are crucial for establishing the financial security of a pregnant or parenting student.

Some campuses offer information on pregnancy resources via posters and brochures, but many survey respondents had not seen these materials. When primary sources like first-year orientation, student handbooks, and even RAs (resident assistants or residential advisors) are lacking or perceived to be lacking in information, pregnant and parenting students have nowhere to turn for answers.

There is also a demonstrated need for resources to be available in more than one visible place on campus—that is, the school website, handbooks and RA training materials, as well as widely disseminated printed materials (posters, brochures, etc.).

A number of colleges and universities have some on-campus resources, and others are taking steps to create a supportive academic environment for pregnant and parenting students. Flexible class scheduling is far and away the best-known resource for pregnant and parenting students. This resource is useful to traditional and parenting students alike, and most respondents indicated that online, evening, or weekend courses are available on their campuses.

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The responses to FFL's Survey reveal hard truths about the situation for pregnant and parenting students on campus: either there is a genuine lack of resources on campus, or there is ignorance about existing resources—even among student activists who are most vested in supporting services for pregnant and parenting students.

Whether it is a lack of resources or ignorance, the result is the same from students' perspectives. Pregnant and parenting students do not see themselves as welcomed or supported on most college campuses.

These survey findings point to the vital importance of Feminists for Life's efforts to help administrators establish policies that support pregnant and parenting students and staff, develop and communicate on-campus resources—and educate students about the supports already in place.

One key to educating students is providing a clear source of information. The confused responses about where to find information point to the need for a well-publicized central office or staff person to handle queries about pregnancy and parenting on campus. Feminists for Life has advocated such an innovation in the development of the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Pregnant and Parenting Student Services Act. If passed, this legislation would establish a pilot program to provide grants to encourage institutions of higher education

to establish and operate a pregnant and parenting student services office. The on-campus office would serve parenting students, prospective student parents who are pregnant or imminently anticipating an adoption, and students who are placing or have placed a child for adoption.

THEY SAY I HAVE A



FREE
CHOICE

But without housing on
campus for me and my baby,
without on-site day care,
without maternity coverage in
my health insurance,
it sure doesn't feel like
I have much of a choice.

The stakes are high. The Guttmacher Institute reports that half of all abortions are performed on college-age women. Lack of resources and support is the root cause that drives women to abortion.

Lack of resources and support also drives many parenting students to abort their education and career plans. *With little or no college education, parents face reduced employment prospects—even poverty.*

Pregnant and parenting students deserve better. They deserve equal access to opportunities in higher education. And society deserves to benefit from the unique contributions that their education will allow them to make.

Feminists for Life believes that colleges and universities should not only mirror the advancements for women and parents that we have seen in recent years in the workplace, they should be models for resources and support.

Pro-woman activists are beginning to rally for long overdue on-campus resources—and push colleges and universities to provide leadership in supporting women and parents as valued members of our communities. ❖

Refuse to Choose Women Deserve Better

Can I stay in school and have the baby?

First things first—there maternity coverage in my healthcare plan?

Without healthcare coverage, a pregnant student will likely fear the cost of carrying a pregnancy to term.

77% of respondents did not know if their student health plan offers maternity coverage.

16% said maternity coverage is not available.

7% indicated that maternity coverage is offered as part of the student health plan.

If I have the baby, what about a pediatrician?

Additionally, respondents were asked if insurance riders are available to cover the children of students.

79% said they did not know.

14% said students cannot obtain riders to cover their children.

7% said the school offers riders for student parents to obtain healthcare coverage for their children.

An analysis of the data yielded no statistically significant differences in the responses from students at state, religious, or private colleges on the questions pertaining to healthcare options and availability.

Where would I live if I have the baby?

46% said there is no housing available on campus for parenting students.

31% said they did not know if such housing is available.

22% said housing is available on campus for parenting students.

When asked who could benefit from this housing:

89% said this housing is open to graduate students.

87% said it is available for undergraduates.

73% said foreign students on an education visa would be eligible for residential housing.

What about off-campus housing?

74% of respondents indicated there is housing available near campus for parenting students.

15% said they did not know.

An analysis of the responses showed that students at private schools were less likely than those at state and religious schools to indicate that their campus had housing for parenting students.

Who will take care of my baby when I am in class?

Childcare is one of the most vital resources a college campus can provide for pregnant and parenting students.

45% said their colleges do not offer on-campus childcare.

30% said their schools offer on-campus childcare.

2% said plans are under way.

22% said they did not know if childcare is available.

Can I access on-campus childcare—or are some people's kids more equal than others?

When asked who has priority access to on-campus child care, respondents said:

faculty (87%),

administration and staff (83%),

graduate students (79%), undergraduates (77%), and

foreign students on an education visa (55%).

Most students surveyed (66%) did not know if their school provides referrals to off-campus childcare.

Does anyone know if there is infant care, or how much it costs?

Another barrier to access to childcare for pregnant and parenting students is the issue of infant care, which entails additional staffing and other requirements.

27% of the respondents who affirmed that on-campus childcare is available said infant care is also available.

68% did not know whether their on-campus childcare center would accept infants.

5% stated that the childcare center has an expressed policy against accepting infants.

Who will watch the baby if we go to watch a game?

When asked if the college connects parents to volunteer or paid babysitters,

- 55% of respondents said they did not know.
- 27% said the college does not facilitate connections between student parents and babysitters.
- 17% percent said their college issues some kind of list of babysitters or otherwise facilitates connections between student parents and babysitters.

An analysis of the data showed that students at state schools were more likely than students at private and religious colleges to indicate that their campus offers childcare. Further analysis revealed that students at private colleges were more likely than students at state colleges to indicate that their schools help connect students with babysitters.

What about *him*?

When asked about child support,

- 46% of respondents said students are not generally aware of paternity establishment and child support enforcement laws that give fathers rights as well as responsibilities.
- 45% said they did not know if students are educated about these issues.
- 54% percent said they did not know if women on their campus are aware of the information they need to establish paternity if the father resists his responsibilities.
- 41% said they believed women on their campus are aware of this information.

You try walking to campus when you are eight months pregnant!

Ninety-one percent of respondents said their campus does not offer designated parking for pregnant women or parents with infants.

- Only 1% said they had seen such designated parking on campus.

If I need to go across campus with a baby, how can we get around?

When asked if their campus is accessible for parents using strollers as well as people using wheelchairs,

- 87% of students said their campus has elevators, ramps, etc.
- 7% said their campus is not physically accommodating to those transporting children.

An analysis of this section showed that students at state schools were more likely than students at private schools to deem their college "stroller-accessible."

And where could I go to change a diaper?

Respondents were also asked if diaper-changing stations are available in restrooms on campus.

- 23% said they are.
- 62% said they had not seen diaper changing stations in restrooms.
- 1 respondent said their campus has plans to install stations.

How would you like to nurse in front of fraternity row?

When asked if there is a private place for women to nurse or pump breast milk,

- 77% of respondents said "no."
- Only 3% said they knew of such a location on their campus.
- 20% did not know if their school provides a private place for nursing mothers.

What about flex time and telecommuting options?

Alternative scheduling is the most prevalent resource known or perceived to be available to pregnant and parenting students.

- 78% of respondents reported that their school offers flexible class times (evening, weekend classes).
- 53% said their school offers telecommuting or distance learning opportunities.

An analysis of the data based on the type of school indicates that more state schools offer flexible class times, telecommuting and distance learning opportunities.

I'll be better able to take care of my child if I have a degree.

The financial affairs portion of the survey proved the most difficult for respondents to answer. When asked if loans or scholarships are made available specifically to parenting students,

- 69% of respondents answered, "I don't know."
- 25% said there are no such financial supports available.
- 6% said they knew of special loans or scholarships for parenting students.

When asked if loans or scholarships are made available to pay for family housing on or off campus,

- 67% of respondents said they did not know.
- 23% said that no such loans or scholarships are available,
- 9% said there is such financial support.

Respondents were also asked if student loans or scholarships are available for childcare costs.

70% said they did not know.

26% said there is no financial support for students seeking childcare.

3% indicated there are loans and scholarships available to cover the cost of childcare.

May I take a “time out”?

Respondents were asked if the athletic department has a protective “red shirt” policy for students on athletic scholarships who become pregnant, allowing them to avoid activities as needed for the duration of the pregnancy and still retain their scholarships.

79% said they did not know if there is such a policy.

4% said the red-shirt designation is applied to pregnant students,

16% said student athletes are not protected from loss of scholarship if they become pregnant.

An analysis of the responses regarding financial aid showed students at state schools were significantly more likely than students at religious schools to indicate there are scholarships/loans available for family housing.

So where’s our resident “know-it-all”?

When asked if there is a person or central office on campus responsible for helping pregnant and parenting students:

50% said they did not know.

33% said there is no central place for pregnant or parenting students to seek assistance.

16% said there is a person or office in charge of assisting these students.

When asked how they could find information about resources and support for pregnant and parenting students, respondents indicated there are few sources for such information.

40% said they could not find these resources on their campus website.

48% said they did not know if these resources are on the website.

62% said there had been no mention of pregnancy and parenting support in their first-year orientation.

45% said resources for pregnant and parenting students are not in the handbook.

45% did not know.

Educational materials and brochures are the most likely sources of information about resources and support.

17% of respondents said those sources were readily available on their campus.

42% did not know if their college provides educational handouts or brochures to pregnant and parenting students.

38% said their university does not use educational materials and brochures.

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The next most likely source of information about resources is ads and signs on campus.

15% of respondents said they had seen ads or signage on campus that provided information and support for pregnant and parenting students.

56% said they did not believe these materials are used on their campus.

Respondents were asked if resident assistants or residential advisors (RAs) were aware of the scope of pregnancy resources available on and off campus.

30% perceived the RAs to be unaware.

57% said they did not know if their RAs receive any information or training in this area.

In evaluating the differences in responses between students at state, religious, and private colleges, students at state schools were more likely than students at private or religious colleges to indicate that their school provided information for pregnancy support services on the college’s website.

Feminists for Life encourages all colleges and universities to evaluate the resources available for pregnant and parenting students on their campuses—as well as how they educate students about these resources—and begin to implement changes to better meet their students’ needs.

How does your college, university or alma mater rate? Take the Pregnancy Resource Survey™ for yourself!

Feminists for Life is committed to helping schools realize these goals and will continue to advocate for support for pregnant and parenting students across the nation.

If you are a college administrator or student activist willing to help pregnant and parenting students on your campus, please contact Feminists for Life’s College Outreach Program Coordinator at coordinator@ffloncampus.org to tell us about the resources and support on your campus, to host a speaker, or to host a Pregnancy Resource Forum.SM

IF SHE’S IN TROUBLE



HE’S IN TROUBLE, TOO.

Like mothers, the father has both rights and responsibilities.

Thanks to legislation that strengthens child support enforcement, a father may no longer abandon his child financially.

Not without penalty.

Telling Comments

from our respondents

“Without housing,

“The ‘family’ housing complex is currently the center of some controversy as it is kind of dilapidated, but it is currently undergoing review to increase the budget to renovate.”

“Affordable off-campus housing is not necessarily the safest housing.”

day care,

“I think the major flaw in the child care system is that it only takes children up to 5 years old!”

“The campus used to provide day-care on campus, but again, the President got rid of it.”

“The student handbook mentions something about parking places for day care employees, but I didn't find any other information about the day care in the handbook or on the school's website.”

and maternity coverage,

“I do not know about health care for pregnant and parenting students on my campus. The health plan at my college covers abortion.”

“All student insurances specifically state they will NOT cover pregnancy. No help is available to students applying for alternative forms of insurance.”

it doesn't feel like much

“A friend of mine who was pregnant last semester was not allowed to park in lots near her academic buildings, despite her pregnancy and inclement weather.”

“Several women have lost their athletic scholarships because of pregnancy. There was an article about it recently in the school newspaper.”

“While loans or scholarships are not available for parents, we did find out that the unborn child counts as a dependent for the mother. Thus, she can change her FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) status and may be eligible for more financial aid.”

of a free choice.”

“I rarely see people pregnant women or people with small children on campus, so I doubt any of these services are easily accessible, if at all available.”

“I looked around the school websites for this information, but I couldn't find any answers.”

“Ours is very much a pro-life campus, but I'm afraid our weakness lies in being a small, private college; the fervor of the pro-life attitude is unfortunately stronger than being pro-mother.”

“For the most part, it feels like an unspoken rule at my school that if you do get pregnant, your college experience here is over.”



Feminists for Life of America recognizes that abortion is a reflection that our society has failed to meet the needs of women. We are dedicated to systematically eliminating the root causes that drive women to abortion—primarily lack of practical resources and support—through holistic, woman-centered solutions. Women deserve better than abortion.

Established in 1972, Feminists for Life of America is a nonsectarian, nonpartisan, grassroots organization that seeks real solutions to the challenges women face. Our efforts are shaped by the core feminist values of justice, nondiscrimination, and nonviolence. Feminists for Life of America continues the tradition of early American feminists such as Susan B. Anthony, who opposed abortion.

Since 1994, FFL's College Outreach Program has been a catalyst for change on college and university campuses across the country. FFL breaks through rhetoric that pits women against their children and then works to foster creative solutions for pregnant and parenting students.

FFL's Pregnancy Resource ForumsSM bring together students, faculty and administrators to assess local resources for pregnant and parenting students—and create new solutions on campus. Our experience shows that people really are willing to work together toward practical goals, to change the culture of their campuses.

Through other education and advocacy efforts, FFL has worked to reduce poverty among women and children, to encourage the active support of fathers in the lives of their children, to improve child support enforcement, to prevent coerced abortions, and to prevent violence against women and children.

"Sweeter even than to have
had the joy of
caring for children of my
own has it been to me to
help bring about a better
state of things for mothers
generally, so their unborn
little ones could not be
willed away from them."

Susan B. Anthony

Join our revolution

To join Feminists for Life send \$25 (\$15 for students) to FFLA, Dept 0641, Washington, DC 20073.
www.feministsforlife.org

If you are a college administrator or student activist willing to help pregnant and parenting students on your campus, please contact Feminists for Life's College Outreach Program coordinator at coordinator@ffloncampus.org.

If you are in a position to help fund Feminists for Life's revolution on campus, please contribute to our efforts at www.feministsforlife.org/support.

Feminists for Life of America is a 501(c)3 corporation.
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