

GRADUATE STUDENT PARENTS - ISSUES AND RESOURCES

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About me



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2015-2019 International status

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1 Child (4yrs old)

Purpose

- The GSA represents a diverse community of graduate students at the University of Waterloo. Graduate students (both domestic and international) with families may experience particular impediments to pursuing and completing graduate education.
- The purpose of this report is to
 - review the issues and resources (e.g., housing, health/dental for dependents, on and off-campus resources, etc.) applicable to graduate student parents in order to provide more supports for these members of our community.

Issue

The Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) in the report on the completion of graduate studies (2003) shows that

- the median graduation rate for master's students is above 70% for all fields of studies (i.e. humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and life sciences)
- more dramatic situation applies to doctoral students, where the median completion rate is within the range of 45 and 75% (with the lowest rate for the humanities studies).
- The challenges of obtaining a graduate degree increase when students are parents and try to balance graduate education and family responsibilities

Issue - continued

The Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey conducted in 2016 shows that

- the majority of graduate students (58.6%) are women
- nearly half of the students are within 26 and 35 years of age
- 45% of students live with a spouse
- 22% of students have at least one child.

Why is the issue important

- graduate parent students are a significant part of the graduate student community.
- limited literature is published regarding that group of students
- understanding of the needs of graduate parent students is needed at the scientific, national, and local levels. This report represents the local response and the effort taken at the University of Waterloo (UW)

Background

The basic idea of the difficulties of graduate parent students can be found in the CAGS's completion report (prepared for graduate students in general). Amongst the major issues, the following factor can be found:

- insufficient funding,
- lack of constructive supervision,
- or academic isolation

For graduate student parents:

- financial issues include the cost of healthcare and daycare
- Issues related to supervision are extended by aspects of flexibility (for example allowing working from home) and understanding of parental commitments
- Isolation problem is also more significant as parent students do not have as much free time as regular students and cannot take an active part in events organized for graduate students

Background

Unique aspects that apply to graduate student parents:

- Work atmosphere
- Daycare
- Health insurance
- Assistantships
- Family housing
- International student issues (less resources)

Background – survey @ UW

The review of the issues of graduate parent students discussed in the available literature helped to design a survey and get preliminary insights on the situation amongst the University of Waterloo graduate students.

The following categories were discussed:

- financial support,
- daycare,
- health care,
- accommodation during classes,
- social isolation,
- stress,
- transportation,
- spousal support,
- resources on campus,
- and housing option (both on and off-campus)

Background – survey @ UW

DAYCARE

- Daycare represents one of the main issues for graduate student parents. The availability of daycare spots is limited and represents a real issue. Only one daycare centre offers priority to UW students and faculty; however, the same centre is known for an extremely long waitlist.
- The high cost of daycare was also reported (in comparison to a TA salary), and provincial subsidy is only available for the domestic students (and permanent residency applicants).

Background – survey @ UW

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- A guaranteed TA position each term was reported in the study. A continuity of assistantship provides a great relief to family budget and planning. However, guaranteed teaching assistantships are not university policy. Which means that students are not treated uniformly.
- The issues related to finances are more affecting international students. Limited financial support for international students was reported.
- Additionally, time constraints on federal and provincial child benefits affect international students (18 months of residency is required to be eligible for the benefit).

Background – survey @ UW

HEALTH CARE

- The main concern regarding the offered health care is related to a limited amount of doctors in the family clinic at the UW.
- Moreover, there are no walk-in appointments for family members.
- Additionally, dental coverage (offered through the Studentcare plan) is very limited.

Key considerations - currently available resources

Currently available resources, addressing the key issues found in the survey, are discussed:

- Daycare
- Housing
- Financial support
- Parking options
- Additionally, a strategic plan for accommodating students with families to ensure their success was postulated in the survey and seems to be necessary for the future.

Key considerations - currently available resources

DAYCARE

The University of Waterloo has only one centre that could be considered as a daycare facility. The Psychology Department runs a research facility called the Early Childhood Education Centre (ECEC)

- only morning and afternoon sessions for children 30 months to 4 years of age. Therefore, there is no continuous care throughout the whole day, and there are no programs for infants.
- Assuming the fees, the combined cost of five mornings and four afternoons is not competitive with the regular daycare centres.

Key considerations - currently available resources

DAYCARE - continued

- Additionally, only one private daycare centre offers priority for the University of Waterloo community. However, that includes faculty, staff, and students, which means that students will have the lowest priority. At the same time, Bright Starts is known to have an extremely long waitlist.
- Region of Waterloo offers financial help paying for childcare. However, this is only available for domestic students and permanent residency applicants.
- International students can apply for Graduate Student Day Care Bursary. However, this option is only available for full-time students (therefore, the part-time students are penalized), and the program is subject to change each year and is determined by available funding. Therefore, it does not provide a necessary sense of stability for those in need.

Key considerations - currently available resources

HOUSING

- The University of Waterloo offers two family-housing options; however, only one is directly run by the university. Columbia Lake Village-North (CLVN) offers a couple of units for graduate students with families. Only the full-time students are eligible for the CLVN unit (so again, part-time student parents are penalized). The number of units is limited, and the Fall term is known to have a long waitlist.
- The other option is available through St. Paul's University College (further referred to as St. Paul's). St. Paul's offers 1 and 2 bedroom apartments. However, the rent is not very competitive, with \$1,297 for a 1-bedroom apartment and 1,633 for a 2-bedroom apartment (<https://uwaterloo.ca/stpauls/suites-private-rooms-grad-apartments/rents-fees/apartment-rents>).

Key considerations - currently available resources

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Availability of assistantships:
 - a lack of universal rules was observed (and unequal treatment)
 - an increase of TA rate or a supplement pay for student parents was postulated in the survey.
- International students, in general, have less financial support options.
 - Not eligible for OSAP, Tri-Agency Canada Graduate Scholarships, and are eligible for only a limited number of OGS scholarships.
 - May not be eligible (or the eligibility can vary) for childcare subsidy.
 - Additionally, international student graduate parents will see time constraints for the federal and provincial child benefit and are not eligible for the Canada Student Grant for Full-Time Students with Dependents (which again, penalizes part-time students).

Key considerations - currently available resources

PARKING OPTIONS

- for those living in the CLVN, they are only allowed to buy the parking permit for other than the CLVN lot (due to the limited parking spots around the main campus). This creates an extra problem when these students have to drop-off/pick-up their children from daycare/school.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the literature review and the survey prepared by the author, the following recommendations can be offered for the GSA.

1. Postulate and collaborate with Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA; and other University of Waterloo entities such as Department of Psychology) on the preparation of a University-wide, comprehensive study on the needs and issues of graduate student parents.
2. Develop a University-wide strategic plan for accommodating students with families to ensure their success.
3. Have regular (e.g. annual) meetings reviewing the policies ensuring the success of graduate student parents
4. Have a GSA section dedicated to graduate student parents
5. Work with Waterloo Residences on the strategic plan guarantying more family units in the future. Review the rent subsidy options for graduate student parents.
6. Work with the ECEC on how to extend the program and offer full daycare service, or develop an independent University-operated daycare centre. Work with Region of Waterloo on offering more priority for graduate student parents.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the literature review and the survey prepared by the author, the following recommendations can be offered for the GSA.

7. Work with the GSPA on having more transparent rules and increased support for international students through improved Graduate Student Day Care Bursary
8. Postulate University-wide assistantship standards, an increase of TA rate, or a supplement pay for student parents.
9. Work with the GSPA on providing an equivalent of the Canada Student Grant for Full-Time Students with Dependents for international student parents
10. Review the current resources (elevators, ramps, changing stations, lactation rooms, etc.), provide better labelling for increased accessibility (elevators, changing stations, lactation rooms, etc.).
11. Work with UW Parking Services on providing a campus-wide parking pass available for graduate student parents
12. Work with Campus Wellness to provide extended service by the family health clinic (more doctors available so students can choose their family doctor, and offer walk-in appointments for family members)