

# Parenting Students and Time Poverty

~ Andrea Hansen, fall 2023

As the academic year ends, I send an enthusiastic “Congratulations!” to all students. Whether you have completed your degree or your first college semester, be sure to celebrate. Of course, attend to the immediate feelings of relief and exhaustion. That extra hour of sleep and a calendar empty of due-dates may even feel like a vacation! Do not let anyone tell you being a college student is easy or not “real work.”

Back to school is for adults too! Parenting students who make up 22% of all undergrads know well the effort and hours required to complete each course and every semester. It is not the course content, assignments, or technology that threaten to overwhelm. I have heard more than one student say, “Learning shouldn’t be so much fun!” They light up when talking about loving a class or a professor. They even tell me they feel a bit selfish being in college! Their enthusiasm must contribute to the higher GPAs on average parenting students earn over traditionally-aged college students (Nelson et al., 2013; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019).



Why, then, do less than 20% of student parents finish associate or bachelor degrees within 6 years? Being a motivated and engaged learner should lead to degrees, right?

A recent study (Conway et al, 2021) explores the impact of [time poverty](#) for parenting students. Defined as “having insufficient time for studying and completing college work,” this study makes it clear [time poverty](#) is a critical equity issue. Compared to non-parenting students, the study

finds these students, and particularly mothers:

- have significantly less time for their studies
- have lower quality of study time (studying in the presence of children)
- are more likely to enroll part-time (slowing degree progression)

Of course, income and wealth disparities make a huge difference in degree attainment. Decades of defunding education and the virtual lack of childcare funding have created significant challenges. Effective “time management” skills can help, but they are inadequate for the task. What will help is understanding [time poverty](#) as an issue worthy of attention and research. Interventions, strategies advocacy, and policy changes follow. A promising strategy is urged by Conway et al to include measures of [time poverty](#) in the calculation of student financial aid award. Unpaid work is as important as paid work in determining a student’s ability to persist to a degree.

Recent improvements to Title IX law, clarify the responsibilities to students. Two new federal laws, the PUMP Act and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, offer needed protections at worksites.

*"How will I be able to do everything?"* is SSP participants' top question every session. SSP provides time to assess the demands of class sessions and studying, explore strategies and supports, and calculate financial and time trade-offs. Most importantly, students learn from each other, and the experts – the student parents and other adults who have made it work.

To learn more:

- [\*Time Poverty and Parenthood: Who Has Time for College?\*](#)  
Katherine M. Conway, Claire Wladis, and Alyse C. Hachey
- [\*Why It's So Hard for College Students Who Are Parents to Actually Earn Their Degrees\*](#)  
Kenadi Silcox
- [\*4 Ways to Meet Student Parents' Needs on Campus\*](#)  
Ashley Mowreader
- [\*Higher Education Can Support Parenting Students and Their Children with Accessible, Equitable Services\*](#)  
Renee Ryberg, Rachel Rosenberg, and Jessica Warren