

# A Proposal for the “Office for Family Life”

SUBMITTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI FAMILY FRIENDLY CAMPUS COMMITTEE

SPRING 2013

Dear Chancellor Deaton:

The MU Family Friendly Campus Committee is pleased to present documentation of work to date related to the committee’s charge:

*“Meeting the needs of MU student, faculty and staff families”*

Three areas have been discovered as significant concerns. These observations should be viewed as provisional and serve as the framework for the proposal.

## *Concerns Identified by the Committee*

- Childcare:
  - Affordable, quality care for day to day needs
  - Unusual or flexible schedules
  - Capacity
- Eldercare:
  - An emerging issue with demand trends growing
- Benefits, tenure, class accommodations:
  - Students – classroom obligations when childcare situations arise
  - Faculty – tenure and promotion culture clash with family health obligations
  - Staff – Policy interpretation inconsistent across departments

## *Proposal to start addressing the concerns:*

Extend the *One Mizzou* philosophy to include a celebration of our children, our seniors, and our families by creating “The Office for Family Life.” Conceptually, this would be a staffed unit tasked as a University-wide resource for students, faculty, and staff with the goal being:

*Tie together existing services and information with a focus on the family*

This unit could operationally reside within an existing department or division, but be funded by multiple sources as the service would cross all aspects of people connected with MU. We believe we can achieve this mission by addressing the following objectives, which are further defined in the attached report.

- Childcare: resource to connect faculty, students and staff with information about providers either on or off campus.
- Eldercare: the office will be a resource to gather information and help administration to understand this evolving situation.
- Benefits, tenure, class accommodations: assist in articulating best practices and provide guidance within the purview of benefits guidelines, stated tenure procedures, or course conduct approaches.

The role of the Office for Family Life would entail:

- Communicator: web presence and training for departmental administrators & faculty
- Ombudsman: an expert to moderate equitable application of family friendly procedures
- Champion: identify funding opportunities, identify needed services, and ideas how to fulfill

Your thoughts related to these concerns and guidance for moving forward with the proposal is necessary as the committee continues to meet its charge.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dale Fitch, PhD, FFCC Chair

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## 1 WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

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The Family Friendly Campus Task Force was formed in the Fall 2010 under the leadership of Anne Deaton and Ellen McLain with the stated aim of “meeting the needs of MU student, faculty and staff families.” The task force began the process of becoming a standing committee during 2011 and achieved that status in 2012 under the leadership of Ellen McLain, Carol Mertensmeyer and Jeff Zeilenga. One initial task of the committee was to achieve a definition for the word “family” that includes, but is not limited to, relationships of marriage, blood, adoption, living and/or sharing the same resources of two or more persons that is reflective of a community of people of differing genders, racial-ethnic backgrounds, languages, religious beliefs, sexual orientations, disabilities, national and geographical origins, socio-economic class, veterans’ status, and political views. Today, comprised of students, staff and faculty representing 19 constituencies on campus, the Family Friendly Campus committee has sought to identify the most pressing needs confronting our families on campus. Early efforts have succeeded in creating a Family Friendly website, increased lactation rooms, and the inclusion of Family Friendly promotional materials during various campus events.

Despite these successes, the on-campus child care options appear to be limited and last semester the Adult Day Connection lost its United Way funding. Those two items, coupled with feedback from students, staff and faculty regarding the difficulty in locating assistance, along with lacking connections across campus, and discrepancies in benefit information, have led the committee to think about possible solutions. In sum, we would like to propose an Office for Family Life (alternatively, an Office of Work Life) to address the needs of our university families. How we have arrived at this point is outlined in the following proposal.

## 2 WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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This section will discuss issues in each of the three areas that have been discovered through focus groups, various meetings on campus, and administrative data. In all regards, these observations should be viewed as provisional as a formal needs assessment has not been performed.

### 2.1 CHILDCARE

The most pressing issue appears to be childcare. Recent campus statistics from FAFSA applications indicate 1,383 students have dependent children. A percentage of these children one would assume will need child care services. Other national studies indicate 13% of students at 4 year institutions are parents and 6% are single parents. These numbers do not include students who do not receive financial aid, international students, staff, and faculty who may have dependent child care needs. Unfortunately, the university has no mechanisms in place to determine what those precise needs may entail across all students, staff and faculty. Regardless, taken together there would appear to be a very conservative estimate of around 1,000 children who may need some form of quality, affordable child care services, either all day or before/after school programs. Undoubtedly these families are finding services through existing providers in the community, with other families, or friends. However, to date, we do not actually know how these needs are being met.

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While our Child Development Lab and Student Parent Center provide exemplary service, they in no way meet this estimated demand. The work of the Family Friendly Campus Committee may have identified some contributing factors. Foremost is that our students, staff, and faculty appear to have had a broad range of experiences balancing child care needs with work and study with many situations being less than desirable. In sum, students feel they must continually compromise either their role as a student or a parent while they are achieving their degree. This experience has been touted by students all along the spectrum from undergraduates through PhD students. While students have been appreciative of the child care services offered on campus, the cost of campus care and the number of slots available is not in line with the potential demand based on demographics of those students requesting financial aid and who claim a dependent.

Secondarily, accommodations for having a sick child appear to be very unevenly applied across campus. That is, some students report faculty who are willing to work with them while others make no effort at all. We heard stories of students with sick children who, because of the illness, could not use their regular daycare. One instance happened on a day a test was to be administered and the professor gave the student no other options. As such, the student took the test with a sick child lying in her lap. This kind of story has been shared numerous times and illustrates that while some faculty and advisors have been a helpful resource for students, others have not been, and that that support has made all the difference between students being successful and graduating versus giving up and withdrawing from the university.

Furthermore, parenting students who have \$0 EFC, based upon their FAFSA application, receive no more financial aid than students without children. This issue becomes problematic for our parenting students who receive the message they should be spending their financial aid on child care. These issues are even further compounded for students Mizzou actively recruits, specifically, graduate, PhD, international, transfer, nontraditional, and minority students.

On the other hand, some students have reported receiving tremendous support from their advisors, classroom professors, and their departments. Accommodations were made for course scheduling and scholarships and other forms of financial aid. This fact alone confirms it is possible to have a more family-friendly campus environment due solely to the efforts of educating faculty and departments on what family sensitive education may entail. However, since there is no entity that can centrally coordinate such efforts, our students have disparate experiences. Nevertheless, we believe if some students can receive positive experiences, then all students should be afforded that same opportunity. If students perceive the university to be more family friendly, that may then increase the need for child care services. Through an Office for Family Life, we would be able to monitor changing needs and make sure the university is poised to address those issues.

## 2.2 ELDER CARE

A growing concern in the decades to come will be the demands placed upon society dealing with our aging population. Already described as the “Sandwich generation,” the demands placed upon this segment of society will grow exponentially as federal spending to address elder care needs goes in the

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opposite direction. As such, provisions will have to be made to accommodate staff, faculty, and students who experience dependent caregiver needs. Reports published by the AARP Public Policy Institute and the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California-Hastings have already delineated a long list of issues that organizations in the future will need to address in order to protect not only employees, but more importantly, the family members dependent upon their care.

The Adult Day Connection has provided much-needed services over the years in addressing the needs for seniors who have significant needs with activities of daily living. However, due to space and resource constraints, the Adult Day Connection is not able to serve those seniors with less severe needs who, nonetheless, could benefit from a safe setting to enjoy their day. Easily accessible daily assistance for this lower-needs population would be one less stressor for students, staff, and faculty who are responsible for ensuring the safety of older family members.

## 2.3 BENEFITS

Information about benefits appears to be unevenly applied across campus. While some departments appear accommodating of employee needs within the purview of benefit guidelines, other employees experience a different interpretation of those guidelines and thus a perceived denial of benefits. Two, while there is a campus website about benefits accessible through the Human Resource Services website, <http://hrs.missouri.edu/about-us/index.php>, most of the information is geared toward employment needs as opposed to benefits. All of the links related to benefits directs the reader to the UM System site giving the impression, correct or not, that there is not a go-to person on campus for questions related to benefits outside of one’s department.

For instance, the interpretation of the Family Medical Leave Act seems to vary across campus. In one case a mother whose child was born premature was informed by her supervisor that maternity leave had to begin immediately upon delivery. Her child, on the other hand, had an extended stay in the hospital. The employee had wanted to work during the time her child was in the hospital, but no provision was allowed. As a result, the mother had already used up her maternity leave by the time the child was ready to be discharged from the hospital.

Members of the university community are well aware that the University has to have benefit policies that adhere to federal and state statutes. However, we are also aware these statutes serve only to establish minimum standards. As such, there is nothing statutorily to preclude the university from exceeding those minimum standards. To that extent, numerous needs were cited related to health insurance policies and health care for spouses and children of MU international students, same sex students, graduate students, and other visiting scholars, as well as benefits related to leaves and educational fee reduction. The Committee is cognizant of fiscal and political constraints with these issues, but we are also aware the University may be able to attract and maintain many high quality scholars, staff and faculty who, in turn, may be able to provide a financial return to the university exceeding the cost of those benefits.

## 3 WHERE SHOULD WE GO AND WHY?

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In a sense, we would like to extend the *One Mizzou* mission to include a celebration of our children, our seniors, and our families. The Office for Family Life would be an organizational unit that leverages existing functions in Human Resources and Student Affairs with a focus on the family as an operational entity. That is, the common denominator linking students who are parents, and staff and faculty who not only have child care, but also elder care responsibilities, is accountability to their families. We believe we can achieve that mission by addressing the following objectives:

## 3.1 CHILDCARE

The proposed Office needs to monitor a broad range of services related to childcare in addition to the direct services it needs to provide. Uniting campus child care services under the Office for Family Life allows parents a “one stop shop” to easily access information, resources and services available by the campus. That is, while the University needs to consider expanding the number of childcare slots available to students, staff, and faculty, many of those same people will want to have access to other types of services, such as, co-ops, community care, or simply babysitting services. At the current time there is no central resource for any of those services. Second, numerous reports produced by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research have shown that universities with a dedicated office for campus childcare activities have staff who are better able to monitor available federal and state grants and scholarship opportunities available for child care. These universities are also better prepared to address the broad range of child care issues that cover the spectrum of staff, faculty and student needs.

## 3.2 ELDER CARE

The needs of our elder dependents are still quite uncertain. While not as clear or pressing as our childcare needs, they are nonetheless growing as our population ages. As previously mentioned, the Adult Day Connection is able to address some needs, but only for those seniors with high acuity demands. Elder care services, resources and information would additionally gain campus connection through the Office for Family Life to monitor potential federal and state funding opportunities.

## 3.3 BENEFITS

The most immediate need in this area is some type of resource for staff and faculty who experience an interpretation of benefits that denies them assistance other staff and faculty in similar situations have received. Staff from the Office for Family Life could serve as an Ombudsperson/Liaison who could assist staff in best articulating their need within the purview of existing federal and state benefits guidelines. This staff person could also proactively reach out to academic units and programs on campus to make sure there is a consistent interpretation and application of benefits for all employees. Finally this staff person could amend the current Human Resource Services website to increase linkages to personnel on campus while also maintaining the existing links to the UM System level where appropriate.

In sum, just as we have “universal design” to accommodate for those with disabilities, we also need concomitant efforts put toward universal design for families.

## 4 HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE THIS VISION?

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Our mission needs to be the establishment of this Office. Critical in doing so will be making this initiative a project in the next Capital Campaign. However, other aspects of this mission can be achieved through leveraging existing funds.

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## 4.1 CHILDCARE

It is our hope that having a person(s) dedicated to accessing external funding sources for child care assistance will produce results that will directly benefit parenting students on our campus. One such staff person at the University of Michigan has been able to secure additional funds from federal and state programs for child care tuition assistance. *These amounts total \$1.3 million/year for child care assistance to families.*

Even though increasing services at the Child Development Lab and Student Parent Center will be inevitable, we also know the range of services needed by our families will need to extend beyond those programs. A one-size-fits-all solution will never work. Needs among students, faculty and staff differ, abilities to pay differ, and scheduling demands differ. As such, that range of services might include:

- Evening child care for second and third shift families
- Continue to support semester scheduling that community child care providers do not allow
- Reconsider use of existing space to accommodate child play areas and child-friendly study and work areas, such as the CubHub

In addition, the University of Michigan Work/Life Resource Center manages a U-M Family Helpers website. At this website University of Michigan students, who have passed a State of Michigan background check, have created personal profile pages listing services they are interested in providing, many of which are child care services. Any U-M faculty, staff or student can contact a family helper to request assistance. All fees are negotiated between the student and those requesting the service. Something similar could easily be developed at Mizzou.

## 4.2 ELDER CARE

For seniors with lower needs levels, an intergenerational center that combines both child and elder care might be ideal. Also worth exploring will be technological innovations being pioneered by our very own Tiger Center. Making remote monitoring technology more readily available to staff and faculty may go a long way toward reducing the stress of caregiving demands.

## 4.3 BENEFITS

Meta to all of these specific issues is the broader focus this Office needs to achieve. For example, it has been suggested there be an orientation for spouses of students, staff, and faculty when those respective parties go through their own orientations. Doing so highlights the importance of ‘family’ in the life of the university and will provide an opportunity for these individuals to meet and begin to provide social support. This Office will also need to be responsible for information postings to MU Info, attending new employee/faculty orientation events, messaging to department chairs, and by staffing a Family Friendly table at all major campus events.

The Office for Family Life will also be responsible for integrating various web resources that have a critical family focus. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor publishes the *Workplace Flexibility Toolkit* that contains a plethora of ideas that address the work of organizations by balancing the needs of employers and employees. With family issues noted as the most significant impediment to fulfilling

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workplace obligations, the Office for Family Life will have as its singular goal the addressing of those issues in order to make Mizzou the place to learn, work and thrive.

Finally, this Office would be well-served by maintaining an inclusive mindset of the secondary gains afforded by other programs. For example, recognizing disability status as a family friendly concern and asset in that disability access also means it is easier to navigate strollers on campus while making it easier for everyone who has their hands full by being able to use automatic doors.

## 4.4 WEB PRESENCE

Connecting all of these initiatives will demand an increased integrative effort on the part of information provided via the web. To do so we would recommend linkages from the major sites, e.g., Student Services, Human Resources, and other sites to the Family Friendly web site. Operated under the auspice of the Office for Family Life, this site will be the central resource for all family-related issues and will also systematically monitor incoming web hits to determine areas on campus perhaps underserved by existing outreach efforts.

## 4.5 FLEXIBILITY

A recurrent theme in all of our discussions has been the discussion of accommodation and flexibility among the various entities and the institutional structures in which they operate. It also appears to us that the degree to which the institution is accommodating of that flexibility can strengthen the overall organization. For example, parenting students undoubtedly benefit from flexible scheduling when it comes to balancing the needs of being a student, parent, and family member. Coincidentally, the university is attempting to reach out to non-traditional students via its online course offerings. One possible win-win would be to use student parents who are already graduate instructors to cover some of those courses in that a degree of flexibility is introduced that may make it easier to arrange child care services.

## 4.6 ORGANIZATIONAL MONITORING

As previously stated, many of the programmatic services already exist on campus and those will be maintained. They would continue to maintain their own identities and fiscal lines of authority. However, the Office for Family Life would offer broad family outreach and promote student, staff and faculty retention in order to meet the needs of our university families. Through outcome and process monitoring of these services, periodic surveys and focus groups, the Office for Family Life would make sure we are not only meeting the needs of today, but will also be cognizant of the needs and resources our families will require in the decades to come.

## 5 WHAT IS IN OUR WAY OF REALIZING OUR VISION?

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As with all complex issues, establishing an Office for Family Life will not be easy. One obstacle is simply its novelty. There are very few offices like the one proposed in today’s university settings. The scope of our endeavor crosses several university institutional traditions. Child care issues for parenting students have customarily been addressed through an Office for Student Life, much like they are currently addressed at Mizzou. On the other hand, employee benefits which primarily serve staff and faculty are handled through the System level. As noted above, the campus manifestation of these benefits, through the Office for Human Resource Services, primarily serves the institutional needs of the organization.

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These issues notwithstanding, certainly the single largest obstacle will be funding.

## 6 WHAT WILL WE DO TO REACH OUR VISION?

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The committee is now at a point where we feel we have gathered as much background information that we need to in order to put forth this proposal. Certainly additional needs data will be sought. However, all preliminary indicators at this point certainly point to the need for some type of organizational initiative to take place.

Our long term goal is to have a seamless system with many points of entry in which a student, staff or faculty member can find the services they need without feeling like they need to concede between their family and being the best student, staff, and faculty member they can be. As the members of our university community engage in their intellectual pursuits to learn, teach, and add to the body of knowledge, we hope that family life is seen as more of a complement to university obligations and less so as a compromise or conflict.

Finally, since money is the single largest obstacle to achieving such an office, our concluding recommendation is that funding for establishing an Office for Family Life (alternatively, an Office of Work Life) be sought through making this initiative one of the goals for the University’s next Capital Campaign. We have reason to believe that many of Missouri’s proud alums may have struggled with family obligations during their tenure at the University and would, through the pledging of funds, want to make the needs of today’s students a little bit less of a struggle.

Respectfully submitted,

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