"Childcare Concerns from Faculty, Staff and Students at Indiana University Bloomington"

The Office for Women's Affairs (OWA)

Background Information: The Office for Women's Affairs (OWA) has consistently been involved with the issue of childcare, primarily in serving as a member of the campus childcare coalition, and in being a sounding board and advocate for parents' concerns. This role grew in intensity in the fall semester of 2008 and the early spring semester of 2009 when faculty, staff and student parents in the Indiana University community contacted OWA regarding staffing issues at the Hoosier Courts Childcare Center and a host of other concerns about childcare on our campus.

Absent from much of the discussions surrounding these issues were current data on the concerns of faculty, staff and students regarding childcare at Indiana University – Bloomington. In an effort to provide accurate information necessary to advocate effectively, OWA launched a survey-based study of childcare by sampling faculty, staff and student parents on our Bloomington campus. Below, we report the major results of respondents' concerns and needs.

Our report below is divided into six sections:

(i) Who Cares for Our Children? Childcare Arrangements among Faculty, Staff and Students

(ii) Significant Stressors and Issues in Childcare

(iii) What Difference Does Childcare Make? Impacts on Recruitment, Retention, Work and Academic Performance

(iv) Recommendations for Improving the Quality and Accessibility of Childcare at Indiana University, Bloomington.

(v) Conclusion

(vi) Appendix: Survey Methodology and Demographics

As is evident throughout the report, the bottom line is that while there is some satisfaction with the quality of care offered at the campus childcare centers, there is concern about accessibility to and affordability at these centers. In terms of satisfaction, respondents extended praise in the areas of communication with parents/guardians, involvement of parents in decision-making, training of the childcare providers, the curriculum and the discipline strategies utilized. On the other hand, respondents are dissatisfied with issues of access, costs, teacher salaries, inconvenient hours of operation and the physical environment of facilities. Furthermore, faculty, staff and students all report that lack of adequate childcare resources impacts their work or studies at IU in negative ways.

I. Who Cares For Our Children?: Childcare Arrangements Among Faculty, Staff and Students

In the words of one faculty respondent, "It's really a mess trying to put something together for childcare" at Indiana University, and this sentiment was repeatedly echoed by staff, students and other faculty. In fact, largely because of space and costs concerns, only a minority of the respondents utilize IU day care

centers, with most of our respondents utilizing other nonprofit as well as for profit childcare centers and preschools in the larger Bloomington community.

Over half of all respondents noted that either they or their partners had changed jobs or schedules at a job in order to meet the childcare needs of their family. Some of these changes were made on a short term basis, but others have been for a longer term, and as such, have long term consequences. For a small minority of respondents, particularly dual faculty couples, there have been positive consequences, as in the case of one person who shared "We both adjusted our schedules so that we don't need childcare during the academic year. I consider the ability to do that a good benefit of my job." However, most respondents have experienced less positive consequences (other than the obvious positive of having more time with their child). As one staff member said, "My husband is a student and has had to change schedules and work most evenings to be able to fill in for me while I'm working because we have not been able to afford full-time childcare."

For some respondents, changing work or school schedules in order to meet childcare demands leads to long term vulnerability. While the impact of childcare on work and academic progress will be explored more fully in a later section, the words of a faculty respondent illustrate this dilemma: "I ended my full-time teaching contract (a clinical lecturer appointment) when my second child was 2, because I could not continue to meet both of my responsibilities….For the past 9 years, I have been teaching part-time, as an adjunct. The university has gotten a great bargain for my services….Now that my children are older and I am able to teach more, there is not a full-time slot with benefits for me here at IU. If I want to return to a fully-supported academic career, I will need to go on the job market again."

II. Significant Stressors and Issues in Childcare

Though IUB is a somewhat diverse community, parents in all categories of respondents are similarly challenged by certain childcare factors that negatively impact their performance in the research field, the office and classroom settings. The factors that are most challenging for parents in the IU community, aside from affordability are: a mismatch between hours in which childcare is available and when work needs to be done; the need for "emergency" coverage due to weather and illness; and continuous summer care.

In terms of the mismatch between available hours for childcare and actual childcare needs, there are stressors at both the beginning and ending of the day for parents of young and school aged children who are not old enough to be at home unsupervised. Staff respondents note being late for work because of childcare centers that open at 8 am, which is the same time they need to be at their offices. Additionally, respondents in all categories noted that when there are faculty or staff meetings scheduled late in the day, when classes occur after 5 pm, and when departments host evening events, they are constantly forced to make difficult choices of how to provide care for their children.

The need for "emergency" childcare due to weather or illness is particularly stressful for faculty who teach early-morning classes, and staff. As one staff member noted, "Because of a 3-day school closing, and the time schedule and sick policies of our current day care, it has been an especially difficult two months. I have had to miss work to stay at home with my son. Any time I miss work, it is a negative impact on my ability to perform my job. I can do some work from home, but this is not preferable to my supervisor, and there are some tasks I cannot perform from home. I have not missed any deadlines,

however, my work load is high and the pile-up of work has placed an extra burden on me during the hours I am at work." Both student and faculty respondents noted that when they experienced challenges associated with weather or illness, they were able to make accommodations such as taking children to class with them, or cancelling/being absent from class. Clearly this meets the need for childcare, but has negative implications for academic continuity.

Every respondent is challenged in some way by summer care. One staff member said "It's a source of anxiety" and this emotion was evident in an overwhelming number of responses across all categories. Staff who are in inflexible jobs reported that they need childcare for 9 to 10 hours per day but that many of the desirable childcare options for the summer (in terms of quality) have a camp-like truncated schedule. This observation was echoed numerous times.

Faculty, too, are challenged by limited options for summer care. They report that the shortened hours of available childcare negatively affect their ability to do their research. In the words of one faculty member, "I am in a real childcare bind in the summers. I can only afford part-time care, but I need to be able to work full-time on my research. Since I am a tenure-track professor, and I have to balance parenthood, work, and teaching, the academic year leaves me little time for extended research and writing. However, it is also often difficult to find childcare that will allow flexible changes from full to part time. At our current preschool, switching between the two is not possible. They won't guarantee that there will still be a full-time spot for my daughter if we switch to part-time for the summer." Other faculty commented on this stressful necessity of "paying to hold a spot" for their child at the same time they were paying for childcare in other places due to being in the research field, either domestically or internationally over the summer.

III. What Difference Does Childcare Make? Impacts on Work, Academic Performance, Recruitment and Retention

As indicated in previous paragraphs, faculty, staff and students routinely have to make accommodations to their work or academic performance in order to meet the childcare needs of their families. To some extent, this is understandable because emergencies, by their very definition, are unplanned. However, the results of this survey indicate that IUB does not have all of the resources in place that could alleviate some of the more expected challenges associated with childcare. In short, many of the respondents perceive that there are certain deficits in this area.

Staff respondents, for the most part, were the least likely to have lived other places where they needed to access childcare, and so they had limited points of comparison about how Bloomington, both the campus and the community, fares in terms of childcare resources. One staff member said "I would need to find childcare no matter where I work, but it would be great to have more support in this area" and the spirit of this statement was repeated a number of times. In terms of impact on work, staff members report lost work time (both tardiness and absenteeism) as an outcome of childcare challenges. Staff members, along with students, were also more likely to note the guilt and stress they experience when they leave their children in childcare placements that they feel are unsatisfactory. In the words of one staff mother, "It is so extremely stressful to know that your kid really needs you to be home with them, but if you take a day off or consider leaving early, you are compromising your job. This is the hardest thing to go through. You feel like you are failing at everything you do. There is not an option for many of us working moms, we have to work, or we can't pay the bills."

In terms of the student perspective, student parents noted that they could not work or go to school at IU without childcare. Comments from student parents make it clear that childcare resources impact recruitment of graduate students as well as the performance of graduate students. One student shared: "Although at the time of my application to IU I did not think of childcare services; today, with a child, the importance of childcare could be decisive in my decision, especially knowing that IU has not been involved in my scholarship at all." Another student commented that "This is a negative of going to IU that we found out later," while a final student shared, "there is nothing worse for me than the instability…of the childcare center which occupies my mind at the time when I need every minute to think of my degree."

There is no question that the lack of childcare resources impacts recruitment and retention of faculty members. As one faculty member said, "I would seriously consider leaving IU for a job in a town where I could get childcare that was better than barely adequate." Another faculty member shared that "I was told that there was a high quality childcare program at IU -- that was a major factor in our decision to come here. After arriving, I was told that there are not many options for childcare in Bloomington and none that compare with high quality options elsewhere." Another faculty member simply stated, "IU needs to do more with childcare if it wants to attract and retain world class scientists."

A comment from a faculty member who is not currently in need of childcare further illustrates how the current level of childcare resources impact recruitment and retention: "In the past I've felt that certain issues related to childcare options were a factor in my department's attempt to recruit senior faculty members. We were trying to hire a professor with a 2-year-old, and we could not guarantee her any spot in an IU facility for the Fall; she later told me that this was a factor in her decision not to come here….I do think IU needs to think more seriously about how they can make childcare part of the package of what they offer faculty."

In addition to impacts on recruitment and retention, the challenges that faculty members experience with childcare impact their productivity during the time in which they are at IU. One member of a dual faculty couple shared that "The lack of programs that comprise more than a parking lot for children has made it necessary for us to shift our work schedules radically and displace much of what should be done during normal business hours to nights and weekends. Needless to say, this is not ideal." Another faculty member wrote about how the search for childcare consistently puts her household into a "tailspin," which impacts her work as well.

IV. Recommendations for Improving the Quality and Accessibility of Childcare at Indiana University Bloomington

Survey respondents also offered specific recommendations about improving the childcare situation at Indiana University Bloomington. We have summarized them below:

1. Each year, expand the number of IU childcare slots available to IU faculty, staff and students.

2. Apply for funding from government sources and private foundations to provide sliding-scale options for staff, students and faculty as well as increased salary support for staff at campus childcare centers.

3. Increase the hours of operation at campus childcare centers so that they more adequately meet the early-morning and late afternoon needs of campus parents.

4. Incorporate IU's strengths in music, language, technology, science, and education to enhance the quality of the childcare curriculum.

5. Where permissible, campus units should investigate, and where feasible, permit the use of flex-time and telecommuting options to address select childcare issues.

6. The Director of Campus Childcare should hold an annual forum, open to all members of the campus community, to apprise parents, administrators and others about the state of childcare on campus. Such communication may lead to innovative solutions, development opportunities and support from the broader campus community.

V. Conclusion

As evidenced by the response to this survey, the issue of childcare is one that touches many members of our campus community. In reading through the qualitative responses to our survey questions, it is striking how many emotionally laden words like "nightmare," "emotional tailspin," and "guilt inducing" are used to describe issues and experiences related to childcare. Since children are the key to our future, our campus community must be more vigilant and resourceful in addressing this issue. OWA is looking forward to working with the Childcare Coalition and other members of our campus community to better address this issue. It is an investment that will strengthen our children, our families and our beloved IU.

VI. Appendix: Survey Methodology and Demographics

In an age where people are often inundated with surveying request, OWA's survey on childcare concerns benefitted from the participation of 1,583 respondents and a 77% completion rate, with the generous participation of staff (63%), faculty (35%) and students (2%). (Though only a limited number of students responded to the survey, it is important to nonetheless take their input into account. For undergraduates with children, access to quality and affordable childcare is a necessity to successfully complete a degree. For graduate students, who are parents or who are at the age where they are considering becoming parents, research has shown that childcare resources are frequently a determining factor in deciding where to matriculate for graduate study.)

Almost 50% of respondents had children under the age of twelve. While most respondents were female, almost one-third of the respondents were male. The modal response, the response that occurs most frequently, for age of respondent is the category of 36 to 45, (31%). Twenty seven percent of respondents reported their age to be 26 to 35, and 24% of respondents are in the age range 46 to 55.

In terms of race, 90% of respondents are White, 4% are Asian and 2% are African American. Respondents in other groups totaled less than .5% and the remaining respondents did not answer the question about racial identification. Just over 2% of respondents indicated Hispanic ethnicity. With the exception of African Americans, response rates for persons from other groups are similar to their representation on campus.