

# Child care for all! Harvard must support student parents <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Schwartz, Madeleine M.

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## EXCERPTS:

In 2010, Harvard cancelled the Doctoral Child Care Student Scholarship Program, a pilot program aimed at graduate student parents with a household income below \$80,000. Representatives of the University told The Crimson that the program was not benefitting enough people and that a working group was "actively exploring new strategies to support doctoral student parents."

But rather than expand the program or set up an equivalent, the University now offers no financial support for its graduate student parents. This has widened an already enormous gap in privileges offered to the schools' faculty and its students. Such a lack of support is distressing and destructive. Harvard must support its student parents by extending the benefits currently offered only to faculty.

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The weight of Harvard's current policies falls disproportionally on women. According to a survey put together by a number of graduate students in 2008, about 30 percent of student fathers had a stay-at-home partner; no student mother had a stay-at-home partner. And where most fathers took less than a month off or no time at all, only 15 percent of student mothers were able to return to work a month after giving birth.

The survey, of course, does not account for women who left their graduate programs after realizing that it would not support their needs or those who never applied, figuring becoming an academic and raising a child were incompatible.

Harvard is well aware of the important role affordable child care plays in retaining women in academia. The 2005 Report from the Task Force on Women in Science and Engineering stated that "child care needs influence many women to drop out of the academic pipeline," and urged the University to "create new childcare scholarships for doctoral students and increase the amount awarded to postdoctoral fellows." "Before the financial crisis struck in 2008, GSAS was close to approving a proposal for expanded assistance to graduate student parents," Jeff Neal, an FAS spokesperson wrote in an email.

But since then, the school has not put forth a full support system, citing the financial crisis as a pretext. "Our emphasis now is on helping students meet their needs by making sure we are fully exploiting existing resources and by opening robust lines of communication with departments," Neal wrote.

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Harvard must offer support on all levels of academic development, not just once its students become faculty. An extension of existing benefits would not only aid current student parents but also increase the diversity of future faculty. Otherwise, the University might as well be blunt about its implicit position: Female students can't have children if they hope to advance in academia.

- reprinted from the Harvard Crimson

**Region:** United States <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[3]</sup>

mother's labour force participation <sup>[4]</sup>

workplace child care <sup>[5]</sup>

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