

University pilots grant program for childcare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Beginning this spring, the University will pilot a grant program for graduate students with children, a move which is intended to help those students partially defray the costs of childcare, in response to concerns raised by graduate student parents.

The pilot grants will be available to doctoral students only, and not to other graduate students. According to Brooke Noonan, Director of Graduate Student Affairs, doctoral student parents were chosen to pilot the grant program because of exceptional financial need.

"The various stipends that doctoral students receive are difficult, if not impossible, to raise a family on. The [grant] program is an effort on the part of the University to take this into account," Noonan said.

Sarah Burgin, a Resident Head in South Campus Residence Hall and the mother of a young child, concurs that it can be difficult for student-parents to live on stipends alone.

"I know several [student parents and their families] that are on food stamps or other forms of public assistance," she said. "It can be easy for childcare to take up a student's entire stipend."

In tandem with the grant program, the University also plans to relocate the Family Resource Center (FRC) over the summer from its current location in the basement of Ida Noyes Hall to a larger building at 960 East 61st Street. The FRC offers play space and childcare services and serves as a resource hub for student parents. Many of its services are free for student parents.

According to Noonan, the move coincides with increased demand for childcare services. She feels the changes place the University ahead of peer institutions regarding services for student-parents.

"In the past few years, it became apparent that more and more students needed to have childcare services available on campus. The new FRC location will incorporate an outdoor play space, which I think is a real 'value added'," she said. "When compared to other institutions, Chicago is close to the front of the pack. For example, the University of Pennsylvania has developed their own FRC, and Stanford began to offer a childcare co-op after Chicago did."

While UChicago offers childcare services at the FRC and plans to offer grants via the new pilot program, Penn's FRC does not offer childcare, and Stanford does not provide grants to student-parents, according to their websites.

Though she recognizes the University's efforts to expand childcare services, Burgin thinks more could be done, noting that the Student Health Service (SHS) does not provide pediatric care for the children of student-parents.

"The pilot grants for doctoral student-parents, as well as the excellent services of the FRC, have done a great deal towards making graduate students feel supported," she said. "However, to the best of my knowledge, the SHS does not offer specialized pediatric services. Having pediatric services available to student-parents would continue to make those students feel valued."

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