

# **Aggie Pregnant and Parenting Student Organization**

## **Student Needs Focus Groups**

### **Spring 2020**

#### **Purpose of Assessment**

The Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization, in conjunction with the Texas A&M University Women's Resource Center (WRC) contacted Student Life Studies to assist in assessing the needs of pregnant and parenting students on the Texas A&M College Station campus. Early in the spring 2020 semester, all students on the College Station campus were surveyed about their parenting status, as well as interest in participating in subsequent focus groups. The purpose of these focus groups was to inquire about the experiences and needs of Aggies who are parents, or becoming parents while attending the university.

#### **Key Findings with Recommendations**

Several key findings were identified as well as actionable recommendations that may be taken based on the results. These results and any changes based on the results should be shared with various stakeholders including the focus group participants, survey respondents, members of the Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization and staff within the Offices of the Dean of Student Life, Undergraduate Studies, Becky Gates Children's Center, Veteran Resource and Support Center, Office of Graduate and Professional Students.

- Focus group participants (parenting students) indicated struggling to have their needs considered or their status as parenting students acknowledged by University administration, faculty, staff as well as their fellow students. The Women's Resource Center staff could inquire with the Division of Enrollment and Academic Services about how parenting students can currently self- identify their parenting status, either upon admission or as a continuing student, which may also intersect with identities as first generation students and student veterans. If one exists, marketing to students its availability and the benefit of identifying their status could be helpful, so, in the least, University administrators would be aware of the number of student parents and, if possible, share that with those on campus who are in positions to advocate and provide needed services. If no such means to self-identify their status currently exists, implementing one could provide the administration that needed information, and per these focus group participants, be welcomed by these students as a start to acknowledgment of their presence on campus.
- When asked questions regarding current resources available to pregnant and parenting students, focus group participants seemed to be unaware of many resources, or believed resources, like child care, were inaccessible to them. More specifically, the participants indicated the need for child care services offered through the University or surrounding community that fit the schedules of parenting students, and at a cost, they can afford. Also, they would like more child-friendly spaces on campus, from more changing tables in more academic building bathrooms to places where parents could study accompanied by their children without worry about disruption to or by their fellow students.
- Focus group participants noted that the role of a student organization, such as Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization, was to act as a liaison between University administration and advocate for pregnant and parenting students. It could market resources to pregnant and parenting students, but should not be the primary purveyor of those resources as they felt that role belonged to the University. They also thought of parenting student organizations as a means

to create a community for pregnant and parenting students and their families, and becoming an additional support resource for them.

- Sending this survey to all students on campus resulted in a very small response (less than 1%) and about half identified themselves as parenting or pregnant students. However, a base of current parenting and pregnant students is now known, snowball sampling (virtual snowball sampling) or respondent-driven sampling techniques may be considered for future assessments of Aggie pregnant and parenting students. Contact Student Life Studies for assistance with future assessments of this student population.

## **Method and Sample**

A 13-question survey was developed using Qualtrics®, a survey design software for creating web-based forms and databases. One question was qualitative and the other 12 questions were demographic; due to survey branching, not all of the respondents saw all of the questions. Data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®. The survey was sent to students from the Texas A&M University College Station campus spring 2020 student enrollment file. Students received an email invitation to take the survey on February 18, 2020, and non-respondents were sent one reminder with a close date of February 24, 2020. Of the 59,097 students who were sent the survey, 139 students responded to at least one question on the survey, a less than 1% response rate.

Leadership from the Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization, and Women's Resource Center staff created the questions and Student Life Studies staff assisted in designing the focus group protocol. Both focus groups were facilitated by Student Life Studies. Leadership from the Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization randomly selected the potential participants from the survey respondents who indicated they were parenting students, stratified by undergraduate and graduate student status. Twenty students were invited through email to participate, selecting the date they wished to participate. Sixteen students responded (16), of which three students indicated they could not participate on either date. Six students participated in the February 27<sup>th</sup> focus group and six in the February 28<sup>th</sup> focus group. The focus group participants were provided with food and refreshments during the focus groups and received a \$10.00 gift card, courtesy of the Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization. Each focus group was digitally recorded and an outside company transcribed those recordings.

Focus group data were analyzed in a formal content analysis conducted through four meetings held via Zoom virtual meeting technologies on May 24, June 4, June 9 and June 12, 2020. Two WRC staff, one leader of the Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization and one staff member from Student Life Studies participated in the formal content analysis.

## **Results**

This report presents the results of the initial survey sent to the student body and the qualitative themes developed from the content analysis of the responses to each question asked during the two focus groups. Survey results include frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. Since the survey was sent to the census of students enrolled during the spring 2020 semester, the demographics of students sent the survey and those responding are also presented based on their UIN (Unique Identification Number), which was used to gather demographics from the University student database. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%.

Questions presented to the students during the focus groups ranged from concentrating on their overall experiences as an Aggie pregnant or parenting student to specific questions regarding their knowledge of services available to them. The complete interview transcripts can be found in separate documents.

### Survey Results

The first question requested students provide the email address they prefer as a contact to participate in the focus group. Those 132 email addresses can be found in the attached documents.

The next question requested respondents to identify their gender. Of the 139 who responded, 88% selected female and 12% selected male. No one chose the option "I identify as" with a write-in response, nor chose "Prefer not to say".

Respondents were next asked to share their marital status. Married and single respondents made up the majority of respondents. Those who selected "other" could write in a response, and one person indicated they were divorced and in a long-term relationship.

<b>Respondent Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency %</b>
Married	42%
Single	42%
Relationship	9%
Divorced	2%
Prefer not to Say	2%
Separated	1%
Other	1%
Civil Partnership	--
Widowed	--

Table 1: Marital Status (n=139)

Respondents were also asked to indicate their race/ethnicity in a select all that apply format. Half those responding identified as White. Those who selected "I identify as" could write a response, and three chose to write Turkish American, White and Asian, and Middle East.

<b>Respondent Race/Ethnicity (self-report)</b>	<b>Frequency %</b>
White	50%
Asian	23%
Hispanic/Latinx	21%
Black/African-American	9%
Prefer not to Say	4%
I identify as:	2%
Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native	--
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	--

Table 2: Race/Ethnicity -self-report (n=139)

Respondents were asked to provide their age. The ranges of ages provided by the 139 respondents noted in Table 3, on the next page, shows nearly half indicated they were 18 to 22 years old. The data is presented in Table 3 in ascending age range order.

Age of Respondents	Frequency %
18 to 22 years old	45%
23 to 25 years old	8%
26 to 30 years old	14%
31 to 35 years old	16%
36 plus years old	17%

Table 3: Age (n=139)

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of study, i.e., classification. Almost half of the respondents indicated they were pursuing their undergraduate degree. Those who chose “other” could write a response, but as no one chose that response, there were no comments.

Level of Study (classification)	Frequency %
Bachelors (Undergraduate)	46%
Ph.D.	29%
Masters	23%
Professional (J.D., DVM, etc...)	1%
Certificate	--
Other	--

Table 4: Level of Study – self-report (n=138)

Respondents were asked if they were a full-time student. Of the 138 respondents, 83% indicated they were full-time students, 15% indicated they were part-time students, 2% chose the “other” selection and 1% chose “prefer not to answer.” Those who selected “other” could write a response, and three indicated three-quarter time, about to graduate in May and Ph.D. student and staff.

Next, respondents were asked if they were employed and were asked to provide their income range. Of the 132 who responded, 65% said yes they were employed, 32% said no, 2% selected “other” and 2% indicated they prefer not to answer. Those who selected “other” could write a response, and one indicated they were employed part-time back at home. The income ranges the respondents reported are noted below in Table 5, in ascending per year income range.

Range of Income	Frequency %
Under \$10,000 per year	48%
\$10,000 to \$20,000 per year	20%
\$20,001 to \$30,000	13%
Greater than \$30,001	15%
Prefer not to say	6%

Table 5: Reported Income per Year (n=128)

When asked if they were a primary caregiver of a child below 18 years of age, 50% of the 132 respondents answered no, and 46% responded yes. Two percent (2%) selected the “other” response and 2% indicated they preferred not to say. Those who selected “other” could write in responses, and three comments included two indicating pregnant and one stating that the student was not a primary caregiver, but had a niece and nephew that they take care of on weekends.

Those who indicated they were a primary caregiver were asked two questions about the children under their charge. They were asked how many children they cared for, and 60% of the 60 who responded indicated one child, 28% indicated two and 10% indicated three. Another 2% indicated they cared for more than three children. No one indicated they preferred not to answer. When asked if the child or children were currently living with them while they study, 95% of the 62 respondents indicated yes, 3% selected the “other” response and 2% indicated no. Those who selected “other” could write a response and one shared they visited their children over the weekends. None chose preferred not to answer.

The final survey question asked all respondents where they lived. Of the 132 who responded, 86% noted they lived off-campus and 14% indicated they lived on-campus. One percent (1%) indicated they preferred not to say.

Table 6 shows the demographics of College Station campus students in spring 2020 and survey respondents, based on their UIN gathered through the University’s student database. Doctoral, masters’ students and female students were more heavily represented in the respondents than in the student population. International and Black students also were more highly represented within respondents than within the overall spring 2020 student population. Data presented are in descending order per respondent demographics.

Demographic Category	Respondents	2020 Spring Population
<b>Classification</b>	[n=139]	[n=59,097]
Doctoral	31%	7%
Senior	23%	32%
Masters	21%	11%
Junior	11%	21%
Sophomore	11%	19%
Freshman	3%	9%
Professional	1%	1%
<b>Sex</b>	[n=139]	[n=59,095]
Female	88%	47%
Male	12%	53%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	[n=139]	[n=59,095]
White	45%	55%
Hispanic/Latinx	19%	22%
International	19%	8%
Black only or multi-racial with Black	6%	3%
Asian	6%	8%
Multi-Racial, Excluding Black	4%	2%
Unknown / Not Reported	1%	<1%
Native American/American Indian	--	<1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	--	<1%
<b>First Generation Status</b>	[n=139]	[n=59,095]
Not First Generation	51%	66%
First Generation	27%	23%
Unknown	22%	11%

Table 6: Demographics per University Database

### Focus Group Responses

Of the twelve parenting students who participated in the focus groups, nearly half (5) were male and seven were female. One-quarter of the focus group participants were undergraduates, and three-quarters were graduate students.

#### Services and resources available to pregnant and parenting students

The focus groups opened by asking participants if they knew of services or resources offered on-campus for parenting or pregnant students. Half of the participants of both focus groups indicated they were not aware of any services on campus for parenting or pregnant students. One of the participants was aware of services offered by the Pro-Life Aggies student organization, as she was a member. Others indicated they were aware of lactation rooms on campus and Student Assistance Services. The participants who indicated they knew about services were asked to describe the organization and the services they provide, and the Pro-Life Aggies student organization, its scholarships and baby-sitting services were described. No further highlights of lactation rooms or Student Assistance Services were provided.

Nine additional questions, interspersed throughout the focus group protocol, focused on asking about the level of the participants' knowledge of various services and programs, on-campus and off-campus. Those questions are listed below in Table 7 by the order asked, and followed by common themes based on the participants' responses. Lack of awareness of resources and some awareness of resources were prevalent themes, along with finding resource inaccessible for reasons of cost, scheduling and rules of participation.

Question 2: Tell us if Texas A&M provides financial aid (scholarships, loans, dependent care, etc.) to pregnant and parenting students?
Question 6: Do you know of any organization on-campus that provides services for pregnant and parenting students?
Question 7: Tell us what you know about off-campus resources that provide services for pregnant and parenting students.
Question 8: Have you heard of the Women's Resource Center?
Question 9: Tell us if you have heard about Becky Gates Child care Center? If so, please tell us what you think about their cost and services compared to other daycare centers in the BCS area.
Question 10: Do you know of any federal program that provides financial aid to pregnant and parenting students? If so, please tell us about them.
Question 11: Do you know of any state program that provides financial aid to pregnant and parenting students? If so, please tell us about them.
Question 12: Do you know of any local programs which can provide aid to students who have children in child care facilities?
Question 13: Do you know of local organizations that provide breastfeeding support free of charge or for a small fee?

Table 7: Resource Knowledge Questions

Participants were primarily unaware of any financial aid that Texas A&M provides to pregnant and parenting students (question 2), although two mentioned scholarships available through two student organizations, Pro-Life Aggies and the Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization. Other than these two student organizations mentioned by fellow focus group participants, there was a lack of awareness of on-campus organizations that provide services for pregnant and parenting

students(question 6). In response to question 7, the participants were aware of some off-campus resources that provided child care, parenting classes, resources that were faith-based, some federally funded food programs (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children-WIC) and mental health programs. However, the participants also mentioned these programs were inaccessible or had limited accessibility to parenting students due to income eligibility and residency status requirements or not fitting student parent scheduling needs.

When asked if they had heard of the Women's Resource Center (question 8), nearly half were aware of the WRC, and some were aware of the WRC website. Three indicated they were not familiar nor heard of the WRC on campus. All focus group participants indicated they were aware of the Becky Gates Children's Center, but indicated varying degrees of familiarity with their services. In response to the second half of question 9 regarding its cost and services, many respondents perceived the Becky Gates Children's Center as inaccessible to students due to it being too expensive and saw it as a service primarily for parenting faculty and staff. Also mentioned as a barrier was the Center's age requirement as the Center does not care for infants under 12 months.

Questions 10 and 11 asked the participants about their knowledge of federal and state programs, and most did not differentiate between federally or state sponsored programs. Of the eight who responded to both inquiries, more than half spoke about child care assistance programs and half of those indicated those programs were inaccessible to students due to residency and income requirements. Specific programs WIC (The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) and CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) were mentioned as well.

All participants were unaware of local programs that provided aid to parenting students with children in child care (Questions 12). Question 13 asked participants about their knowledge of local breastfeeding support for a reduced fee or free of charge and one-third indicated knowing about the local La Leche League, informal support groups of other mothers and support provided by WIC.

#### Experience as parenting students at Texas A&M

The third question asked in each of the focus groups was how the Aggie community could create a more integrating environment for parenting students and their children. The themes of the participants' responses are noted below.

- University support; facilities/physical spaces supporting students with children (10 responses)
- Parking on campus and transit accessibility for pregnant and parenting students (9 responses)
- Child-friendly/family-friendly physical space on campus for studying (8 responses)
- Acknowledgment of pregnant and parenting students on campus by others (8 responses)
- Child care; more affordable, student-schedule accommodations (7 responses)
- Lack of awareness of University policies affecting parenting students by faculty, staff and students (6 responses)
- Flexible faculty (4 responses)
- Lack of University resources supporting partners and family of parenting student (3 responses)
- Signage of existing resources (3 responses)
- Sexism (3 responses)
- Miscellaneous (3 responses)
- Community resources; lack of and inaccessibility of resources (2 responses)
- Community resources versus campus resources (2 responses)
- More flexible attendance policy (2 responses)

- Inflexible faculty (1 response)
- University resources for basic needs (1 response)
- University resources – general (1 response)
- No overall University policy supporting parenting students (1 response)

Participants spoke about how adding University support through facilities and physical spaces that supported students with children, i.e. family-friendly spaces would help create a more integrating campus environment for them. These students would like more changing tables in restrooms in all academic buildings, and family restrooms that their children would be comfortable using when needed. Others spoke on creating study spaces on campus for parenting students, which would be child-friendly. Suggestions included rooms in a library that parents could study with their children near them, playing or keeping themselves occupied, but a place that the children would not disturb other non-parenting students. Similarly suggested was a place on campus that parenting students could gather to study and use a “co-op” like shared care to watch their children while they study.

Related to the creation of more child-friendly spaces on campus as improving the campus environment for student parents was more discussion by the participants regarding available, accessible child care. They indicated there was a lack of child care available to them, or what was available was inaccessible due to cost or child care to fit the scheduling needs of student parents. Student parents needed child care that would work with their class schedule, which includes more intermittent child care, which may include only a few hours per day or includes evenings while they were in class. Current offerings through the University do not include that scheduling flexibility and were perceived as too expensive for most students.

Parking accessibility and transit on campus was also a topic of concern that these parenting students would like to see changes that would be more accommodating for them. Assigned parking spaces which are “miles” away from classes and the need to bring children on bus transit with strollers and very tight, overcrowded situations were described as barriers by participants. Prohibitive costs of parking to get closer to buildings was also mentioned, as well as the inability to get temporary parking permits for closer accommodations for students near end-of-term pregnancy, especially with tight scheduling between classes.

Overall, the participants lamented the lack of acknowledgment of their existence on campus by “traditional” students, faculty, staff and University administration. As one student explained about their fellow students, faculty and administrators who create policies seemed to recognize only one type of student on campus. They said:

I think A&M's version of a student is very insular. You... bike to school. You live 10 minutes away, you don't have familial obligations, you don't commute. You are just one person. This is their consideration of a student. So not only are you off of that model to have children, but even if you have more than one or if you have a job. You just cannot fit or you don't fit.

The student parents also expressed frustration with current policies or the lack of awareness of policies surrounding class attendance and participation requirements. Some indicated that faculty were not accommodating if their child was sick and it prevented them from attending class, and some indicated they found their professors very understanding. The participants themselves acknowledged they were not clear about attendance policies involving a sick child, so could not advocate for themselves when the need arose. Others indicated they were aware of policies, but found those attendance policies unrealistic for a



parent of young children (requiring a doctors' notice for when their child's sickness prevented them from attending class) or thought attendance requirements were too rigid and had little bearing on their academic performance.

The next question (question 4) asked the focus group participants if they thought a student organization on campus might be able to meet the needs of pregnant and parenting students and what services should such an organization provide. The themes derived from the participants' responses are outlined below:

- University's responsibility for provided resources/services (5 responses)
- Flexibility needed in class scheduling (5 responses)
- Student organization meet community needs (5 responses)
- Acknowledgment by other students, faculty, staff and administration (4 responses)
- Dedicated department/services for Pregnant and Parenting students on campus (2 responses)
- Pregnant and Parenting student organization as Liaison to the University Administration (2 responses)
- Awareness of student organization services in support of child care (2 responses)
- A housing locator – lack of awareness of current services (1 response)
- Student organization helping with marketing resources (1 response)
- Financial aid (1 response)
- No, a student organization cannot meet resource need (1 response)
- Does not enable continuity of services (1 response)

There were five negative responses to a student organization being able to meet the needs of these students, and indicated that the University should be responsible for providing these resources and meeting the needs. Similarly, respondents spoke of needing a center dedicated to parenting or pregnant students. The theme of acknowledgment by their fellow students, faculty, staff and administrators that pregnant and parenting students exist on campus again arose, as participants shared that for the campus to be fully inclusive, recognition of them on campus by the administration and fellow students is needed. They indicated that recognition by administrators could help improve flexibility in class scheduling that better serve parenting students' needs. One expressed that recognition by the Student Government Association on campus as part of their diversity and inclusion efforts, similar to other small demographic student groups on campus, would help to get their voices heard and needs to be considered.

The participants also spoke about the role a student organization could play in meeting the needs of pregnant and parenting students, including acting as a liaison between University administration and pregnant and parenting students, assisting in marketing resources out to pregnant and parenting students, and creating a community of pregnant and parenting students for themselves and their families which itself could be a support resource for them. Others suggested indicated the student organization could provide small amounts of financial assistance, child care resources and act as a university housing resource, as these participants were perhaps unaware of avenues for these resources that may already be available.

Participants were queried in question five about their knowledge of services provided for pregnant and parenting students by any higher education institution, and asked how those institutions differed in size and opportunities from Texas A&M. Four higher education institutions were mentioned as providing services to pregnant and parenting students, including Brigham Young University (BYU), Oklahoma State University, Endicott College and the University of Texas, San Antonio (UTSA). Participants spoke of opportunities BYU provides to student parents regarding child care and a socially accepting environment,

and participants said Endicott College offered a holistic student parent experience, including scholarships, grants, child care and housing for student parents. The students mentioned both Oklahoma State University and UTSA as providing accessible child care for students. None of the participants provided information about the size differences of these institutions compared to Texas A&M. One of the participants talked about a scholarship offered for student parents through the Texas A&M University College of Architecture as well.

Participants' general conversation surrounding the topic of services offered by higher education institutions specifically for student parents resulted in more discussion about dissatisfaction with services offered at Texas A&M, acknowledgment of parents as students at the institution, and the possibility of development funds or University fees funding needed services for pregnant and parenting students. When asked if they believe Texas A&M can and should provide these types of services, nine of the participants said yes, and one expressed disappointment that the institution does not already do so.

The last question asked the focus group participants for suggestions they had for Texas A&M University to provide additional support to pregnant students and parenting students. Similar themes arose from these responses as resulted from previous questions, but new suggestions were also included as noted below:

- Quality child care that is affordable, accessible and accommodates student-schedule (11 responses)
- Miscellaneous (8 responses)
- University support; facilities/physical spaces supporting students with children (5 responses)
- Acknowledgment of pregnant and parenting students on campus by others (5 responses)
- Awareness of University policies affecting parenting students by faculty, staff and students (5 responses)
- University assessment to learn of student parents/student parents self-identify (5 responses)
- University health services provide pregnant student services (3 responses)
- Title IX awareness (2 responses)
- Awareness of resources provided by the community or University (2 responses)
- Need overall University policy supporting parenting students (2 responses)
- Flexible academic class rules (1 response)
- A community for parenting students and families (1 response)
- University supported housing resource (1 response)
- University support is sufficient, but would welcome more (1 response)
- Single student parent resource area (1 response)
- Inequitable opportunities for parenting students (1 response)
- Support group for families of parenting students (1 response)
- Advisors knowledgeable of resources for parenting students (1 response)

Most suggested proposals surrounding the need for quality child care that was accessible to the student parent, including flexibility in accommodating class schedules, and more affordable than current offerings from the University. Others spoke about facilities and physical spaces that supported students with children, which were more child-friendly. This includes spaces that allowed student parents to study with children at hand, family restrooms, restrooms with changing tables and more spaces for lactating parents.

Participants spoke again about the need to be acknowledged as parenting students by their fellow Aggies, and provided ideas about how to accomplish that, including opportunities for parenting students to self-identify officially so that University administration and student government can better account for and

recognize their presence on campus. They felt this could lead to the development of universal and equitable policies affecting parenting students, as well as more overall awareness by student parents, faculty and staff of current policies. In addition, the participants suggested a formal mechanism to self-identify would enable an avenue to centralize resources available to parenting students, or at least, provide a clearinghouse for these students to learn about available resources and pursue those that best fit their needs, such as support groups for their spouses/significant others, more financial support or child care.

### **Department Background**

In MaroonLink ([maroonlink.tamu.edu](http://maroonlink.tamu.edu)), the Aggie Pregnant and Parenting student organization indicate its purpose is “to promote the overall well-being and to enhance the academic success of pregnant and parenting students at Texas A&M University through advocacy, service, research, and education.” Likewise, on its website (<https://studentlife.tamu.edu/wrc/about/>) the Women’s Resource Center states its mission is “to pursue equity and enhance the campus climate for women through visibility, advocacy, support, and programming. The Center advocates by educating campus and community constituencies on women’s issues and functions as a resource and referral center.”

### **Project Details**

The Department of Student Life Studies provides quality assessment services, resources and assessment training for departments in the Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs and student organizations. Services by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at <https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/>. Additionally, division staff can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.

To work with Student Life Studies for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at <https://slsform.dsaapps.tamu.edu/>.

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