



# GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

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## Daycare Supplements for Vanderbilt Graduate Student Parents

### OVERVIEW

#### Problem

The cost of childcare has been skyrocketing in the United States, increasing almost twice as fast as overall inflation since the end of the recession in 2009.<sup>1,2</sup> This has made it increasingly difficult for families to afford childcare. In many cases, there is not an option for a parent to stay home and take care of preschool-age children because the additional income is necessary to meet budget requirements, especially if it is a single-parent household. Graduate students, in particular, are trying to further their education and make a better life for themselves. They often meet their life partners or start a family while in graduate school. However, their income range is anywhere from a small stipend to accruing more student loan debt. It is as if graduate students have to choose between higher education and a personal life, leading to Vanderbilt potentially losing some very talented students. While there are daycares in Nashville that have scaled tuition based on income, the prices are still a significant percentage of household income. Waitlists for these daycares also tend to be very long, making availability an issue, and some parents have to resort to even more expensive services due to the immediate need for childcare. In addition to the financial burden, there is also a lack of a support system for graduate student parents.

The Graduate Education Study Group, appointed by Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Susan Wentz, laid out a report entitled “A New Vision for Graduate Education at Vanderbilt” in May 2015.<sup>3</sup> The report included responses from enrolled graduate students about how they believe the university should be helping this community. They echoed that graduate student parents need more resources beyond what is available, which is very little other than navigating the internet themselves to try and find solutions to daycare, health insurance, school choice, etc. It was suggested that Vanderbilt could “prioritize student parents, or scale the cost of daycare to income. ... Even if Vanderbilt is unable to expand these services, a dedicated staff person could be identified to help with referrals to programs and services...” However, none of the above has been accomplished, and this endowment to better graduate

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student education at Vanderbilt would have a very significant impact on this struggling community of students.

Based on survey data collected by the Graduate Student Council (GSC), we estimate that ~12% of graduate students are parents. Approximately one third of survey respondents spend 30-50% of their income on childcare with another third spending 20-30%. In addition, individuals communicated their personal struggles, financially and socially, that are unique to graduate student parents. Together, the survey results reveal a definite and significant need for daycare supplements provided by the university through this endowment grant. See Appendix A for survey data.

## **Solution**

Supplements for daycare costs would be provided through this funded grant for qualifying Vanderbilt graduate students. The students would apply to receive funding that would reduce their daycare expenses to 20% of their combined household income. In addition to receiving helpful supplements, a support system would be implemented that would inform graduate student parents of their daycare and insurance options in Nashville, as well as foster a community for this group of people. A website would be available and kept updated that would allow graduate student parents to see what resources are available to them and post family-friendly events around campus and Nashville. In addition, it would facilitate families getting to know each other through a public forum where advice and support could be provided.

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## **IMPACT**

This grant would set apart Vanderbilt in a number of ways. It would let the community know that Vanderbilt is not only a top academic and research institution, but that it cares for the well-being of their graduate students. This would foster an improved work-life balance due to lessening the financial burden on graduate student families. In addition, talented graduate students would not have to choose between an advanced degree and a family life. In fact, this would incentivize qualified graduate students with families or who wish to start a family to attend Vanderbilt because of this grant program. In turn, Vanderbilt then gets a largely untapped population of potential graduate students who not only greatly contribute to research and academics, but also enhance diversity and community within the university.

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## GOALS

1. Provide supplements for graduate student parents that have their children enrolled in daycare
2. Grow a community of graduate student parents to share information on daycare, insurance options, work-life balance, and parenting advice or tips
3. Enhance the diversity of Vanderbilt's community by facilitating the financial ability for parents to attend graduate school

## IMPLEMENTATION

The grant would be implemented through a yearly application process for this funding. The Graduate School would oversee this process, and the addition of a new staff member should not be necessary, as this will only occur once a year. The application could be digitized to make accounting of the information easy and accessible. Applicants would have to provide household income information, where their child attends daycare, and the tuition cost for the child. To alleviate financial burden, the qualified applicant would then receive a monetary supplement that would lower their net daycare cost to 20% of their combined household income. Using a percentage scale allows for this grant to be need-based. For example, someone who does not receive a stipend would receive more aid than someone who has a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (NSF GRFP) stipend (see below).

The graduate school also needs an official central location, such as a website, that has information regarding any services or advice for new or existing graduate student parents. This website would be created by Vanderbilt IT and maintained by the Graduate School. A paper version of this information should also be available in the form of a packet upon request from the Graduate School. The Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center used to have a "Life with Children" program, but that link and the associated information does not seem to exist anymore. There was also a little known Vandy Moms Facebook page, but it is not in an official capacity and not available to all students. The proposed website would also contain a forum-type platform that would allow parents to ask questions and receive answers from other graduate students, fostering communication and community between these students. For example, new parents and incoming graduate students with children need to know that Vanderbilt's daycare program has an extremely long waitlist, requiring them to sign up as soon as they find out they are pregnant (or find alternative services). They need to know that there are government programs, such as CoverKidsTN, that provide health insurance for children in Tennessee if they cannot afford adding a dependent onto their student insurance but make too much for Medicaid. They need to know that Metro Nashville Public Schools have a lottery-based school choice program and how to navigate it. They also need to know that they have the support of other graduate student parents when they are studying for qualifying exams but are also sleep-deprived from a newborn. These, and many other aspects of the unique life that graduate student parents live, need a place for conversation within the Graduate School and university.

## ESTIMATED COST

The estimated cost for this grant has a wide range, which depends on the number of families in need. A budget is provided below (Table 1) that includes a few assumptions. The budget assumes that there are 264, or 12% of the approximate graduate student body (2,200), graduate student parents. The percentage was determined by averaging the results from the two surveys conducted by the GSC. It also assumes the worst-case monetary situation in which each family has an infant. Infant classroom costs are much more expensive than a preschooler due to the individualized care required for infants. The infant classroom prices are based off of the 2016-2017 prices from Vanderbilt childcare. However, it should be noted that across Nashville, infant classroom tuition can reach or exceed \$1,000 per month. There is also a comparison of prices between two extremes of graduate student income: no income versus having an external NSF GRFP fellowship of \$34,000 per year (based on 2016-2017 awards). For example, to reduce the amount of daycare cost to 20% per household, a supplement of \$302.40 per month would be provided for someone with an NSF GRFP fellowship, whereas the full \$869 would be provided for someone with no income. Assuming that 12% of graduate students are parents, the yearly budget would range from \$958,003.20 to \$2,752,992.00, as shown in the Table 1.

	NSF GRFP Fellowship <sup>4</sup>	No Income
Number of graduate student parents	264	264
Infant price at Vanderbilt per month	\$869.00	\$869.00
Income per month	\$2,833.00	\$0.00
20% of monthly income	\$566.60	\$0.00
Amount granted per month per family	\$302.40	\$869.00
Amount granted per year per family	\$3,628.80	\$10,428.00
Total cost per year	<b>\$958,003.20</b>	<b>\$2,752,992.00</b>

**Table 1 | Budget for Daycare Supplements for Vanderbilt Graduate Students.** Costs are shown for 12% of the approximate graduate student body of 2,200, as indicated by the average of two surveys. The price for an infant classroom was used in the yearly calculation and is based off of the price of tuition at the Vanderbilt daycare center.

However, when taking into account the full age range of preschool-age children (not solely infants) and the fact that it is unlikely for every family to have a lack of income, the top extreme would be a rare event. Also, since the children are different ages, they will age out of daycare and go into kindergarten at different times. This means that every family may not need aid from this grant for an entire 5-6 years, depending on how old their children are coming into the program and how long their graduate program lasts.

In summary, this grant would provide much needed assistance for graduate student families who are struggling financially because of increasing daycare costs. Both the university and the students will benefit from this. This allows the university to recruit ambitious and skilled students who wish to pursue a higher education but may not be able to afford the opportunity otherwise. The improved work-life balance and ties to a parent community within Vanderbilt will be a great help to the graduate students and enhance diversity and conversation within the university.

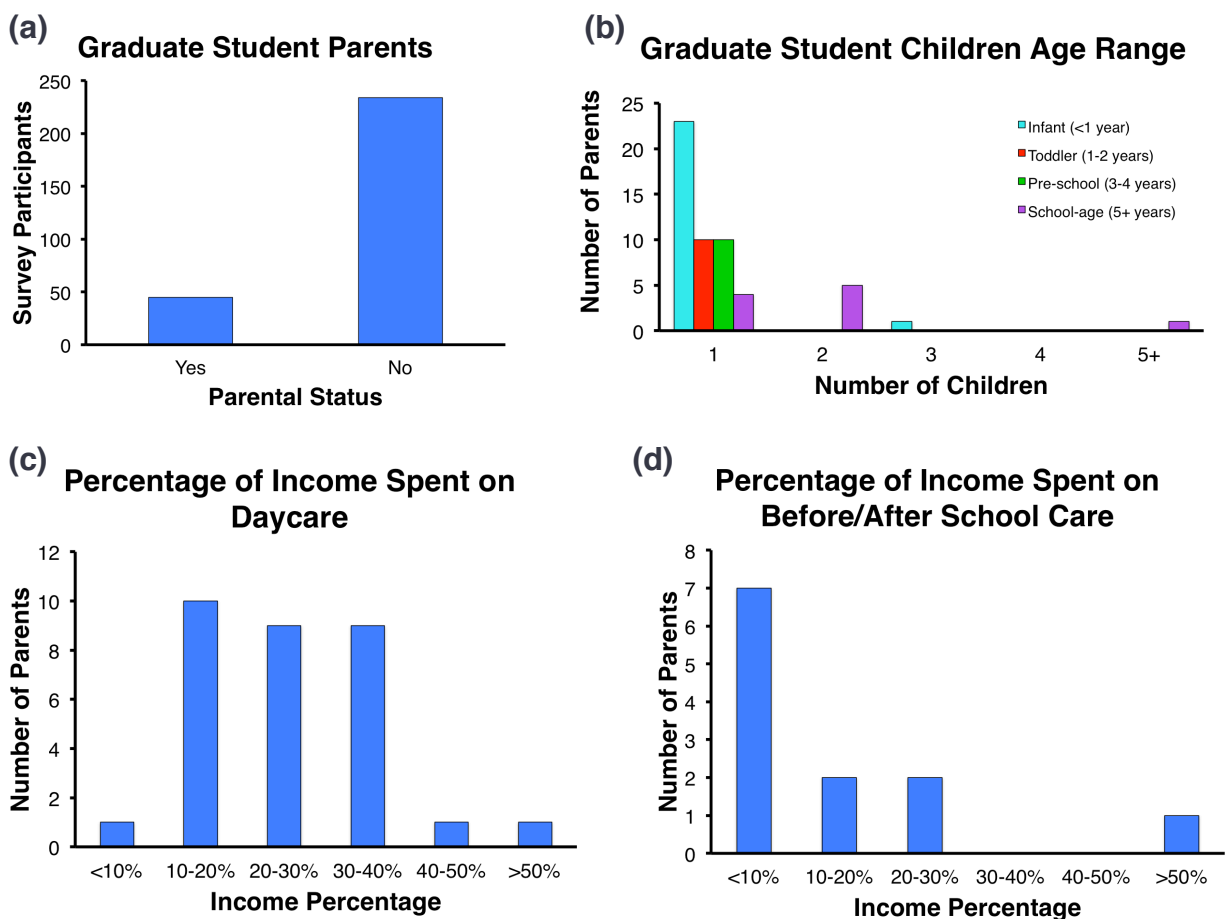
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## REFERENCES

1. Morath, E. (2016, July 1). “Soaring Child-Care Costs Squeeze Families,” *The Wall Street Journal*.
2. “Archived Consumer Price Index Supplemental Files.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov), 18 Jan 2017.
3. “A New Vision for Graduate Education at Vanderbilt.” *Vanderbilt University*, [www.vanderbilt.edu/strategicplan/action/GESGReport\\_final.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/strategicplan/action/GESGReport_final.pdf), 31 Jan 2017.
4. “NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) Program Solicitation.” *National Science Foundation*, [www.nsf.gov](http://www.nsf.gov), 18 Jan 2017.

## APPENDIX A

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) recently conducted a survey (February 3, 2017) to analyze the need for daycare supplements, with results shown in Figure 1. Figure 1a shows that 45 of the 279 participants (~16%) are graduate student parents. For reference, results from the Graduate Student Perspectives Survey sent out in Spring 2016 indicated that 40 out of 477 (~8%) had child dependents. This demonstrates that approximately the same number of graduate student parents is responding to each survey, potentially hoping that it will benefit them at some point. The number and age range of children (Figure 1b) reveals that the majority of graduate students have 1 child; however, 53% of the students' children are infants, or less than one year of age. Figure 1c shows the amount of household income



**Figure 1 | Graduate Student Parent Survey Results.** Vanderbilt graduate students responded to a survey conducted February 3, 2017 to assess the need for daycare supplements. (a) 45 out of 279 participants responded to having child dependents. (b) Students with children gave the number and age of their children: infant (cyan), toddler (red), pre-school (green), and school-age (purple). 53% of parents have an infant, which is the most expensive classroom at daycare facilities. (c) Students revealed the amount of income they spend on daycare expenses (for children younger than kindergarten). 65% of the parents spend greater than 20% of their income on daycare. (d) For students with children in kindergarten or older, 25% spend more than 20% of their income on before and after school care.

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devoted to daycare expenses for children younger than kindergarten-age. Shockingly, 65% of students pay greater than 20% of their income for daycare. For parents who have children in school, the majority spends less than 10% of their income on before and after care (Figure 1d). In addition to these responses, individuals communicated with the GSC following the survey expressing their personal stories, struggles, and support for such a grant.