

Chapter 10

Kids in the Library: Enacting Joy in the Academic Workplace Through the Creation of a Family Study Space

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ABSTRACT

While children's services are traditionally associated with public libraries, the increase in students with dependent children means that academic libraries are increasingly being called to provide family-friendly spaces. Using the University of Maryland Libraries as a case study, the authors detail the process of developing, implementing, and overseeing family-friendly services, including a family study room and activity kits for children. They argue there is value in welcoming families into the academy and projects, such as a family study room, worthy not only for the contributions they make to the community but also for the opportunity to enact joy in our daily practice as academic librarians.

INTRODUCTION

While children's services are traditionally associated with public libraries, the increase in students with dependent children, along with the expense and the difficulties of arranging childcare means that academic libraries are increasingly being called to provide family-friendly spaces. Using the University of Maryland Libraries as a case study, we detail the process of developing, implementing, and overseeing family-friendly services, including a family study room and activity kits for children. We argue there is

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value in welcoming families into the academy and that projects, such as a family study room, are worthy not only for the contributions they make to the community, but also for the opportunity to enact joy in our daily practice as academic librarians. We share lessons learned, examine the ways that the family study space and related services are supporting the emotional well-being of our caregiving community, and explore how this project strengthened the emotional well-being of our library staff members.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Founded in 1856 as the Maryland Agricultural College, the University of Maryland (UMD) is the state's flagship university and one of the original land-grant institutions in the United States of America. UMD is home to more than 41,000 students (31,000 undergraduate and 10,000 graduate), 14,000 faculty and staff, and 250 academic programs. As a public research university, UMD has a strong commitment to research, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Due to its close proximity to Washington, D.C., the university has both a strong regional identity and also a national presence.

The UMD Libraries is an eight-library system housed at the flagship institution in College Park, Maryland. Given the institutional focus on faculty and graduate research and undergraduate education, the UMD Libraries has developed resources and services around these populations. For example, the UMD Libraries offers research data and scholarly communication workshops and services for graduate students and faculty and targets outreach events, such as social media campaigns and yoga breaks, at undergraduate students.

In line with overall trends in higher education (Espinosa et al., 2018), caregivers are a growing population within the UMD campus community. According to a 2017 campus survey, 15% of UMD graduate students reported caregiving responsibilities for children 16 and younger. Of those, nearly 70% identified themselves as the primary caregiver to children under the age of 10. In 2019, 1.7% of UMD undergraduates identified as parents or primary caregivers. That percentage is much higher for our undergraduates who are military veterans, of whom nearly a quarter (24%) self-report as primary caregiver to dependent children. These numbers parallel national studies from the past decade, which indicate that, on average, one in five (22%) undergraduate students are now raising children (IWPR, 2018).

POSITIONALITY STATEMENTS

We would like to begin this conversation by sharing our positionality to the work; which is the idea that a person's position, or relationship, with a topic or a community, is impacted by their social identities, values, and experiences. As professionals, we bring a positionality to our work, and as partners, mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends, we bring it to our lives. Our positionalities are why we care, why we strive, and why sometimes, we will fail; because as much as our experiences empower us, we are also limited by our perspectives. A positionality statement is a recognition of the inter-dependability of these two things and acknowledgment of the relationality inherent within our personal and professional identities.

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