Book Review

Review of *Supporting Student Parents in the Academic Library: Designing Spaces, Policies, and Services*

Deborah Hathaway, *University of Dallas*

ABSTRACT

Review of the book *Supporting Student Parents in the Academic Library: Designing Spaces, Policies, and Services,* Kelsey Keyes, and Ellie Dworak. Association of College and Research Libraries. 312 pp. ISBN 978-8-89255-553-1 $82

KEYWORDS

Academic libraries, student parents, access services, management

Keyes and Dworak's research has brought the often-overlooked patron group of student parents to the forefront, which statistically comprises "More than one in five college students or nearly four million undergraduates" (Prologue xiv). *Supporting student parents in the academic library: Designing spaces, policies, and services,* is not just a theoretical exploration but a practical guide that aims to assist academic libraries in supporting and engaging student parents on campus. The book advocates for changes in policies and spaces to be inclusive, family-friendly areas and consider student parents' diverse needs. As the authors state in the introduction, this book, "Part toolkit, part treatise, and part call to action" (Introduction, xxi), provides practical steps for change.

The book is a comprehensive resource, divided into four parts: The Higher Education Landscape, The Role of Academic Libraries, Looking Outward, and Evaluating Needs and Measuring Success. These four parts encompass data sources, surveys, sample policy language, budgets, and a plethora of ideas on how to support student parents in libraries of all sizes. All thirteen chapters include an introduction, learning objectives, case studies to enhance understanding, discussion questions, and an extensive bibliography for those readers wishing to delve deeper into learning how to support student parents.

Part 1, The Higher Education Landscape, covers identifying potential data sources about postsecondary education relating to student parents, including government, higher education, and non-government data sources, and what to do with the data. Chapter 1 identifies various data sources and addresses the possible challenges of interpreting data tables and statistical analysis from multiple agencies, especially for those without a knowledge of statistics. Understanding the challenge, the authors suggest becoming familiar with PowerStats from the DataLab found on the National Center for Education Statistics website, and consulting with the campus institutional research office or math and education departments. Chapter 2 continues what Chapter 1 began but takes the data and demonstrates how to make an informed picture of enrolled student parents using demographics as it relates to academic success. The authors caution, however, that "Very few institutions of higher education nationwide collect any demographic information about the parenting status of their students" (Pieces of the Puzzle, p. 29). Rather than taking the broad view, the authors advocate that as all student parent experiences are different, identify the challenges faced and tailor library services to meet those needs. The authors highlight two successful campus library cases and the challenges faced to demonstrate the necessity to plan thoughtfully before committing. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the most common reasons student parents leave college without a degree, including finances, housing, food insecurity, institutional policies, and childcare. Keyes and Dworak remind readers that understanding why is critical when designing services, and they offer several alternatives to support student parents that do not require significant fiscal resource allocations.

Part 2, The Role of Academic Libraries, shifts from demographic and statistical analysis to examining academic library policies regarding student parents, suggested policy language,

and why allocating resources toward space for student parents is warranted. In Chapters 5 and 6, after reviewing eighty higher education policies for language regarding children or unaccompanied minors in the library, the authors conclude that half did not have accessible policies, and the majority were neutral in tone. Here, readers will find a University of Michigan case study on creating space and suggested policy language that addresses and supports student parents, as well as three options academic libraries can implement to help student parents ranked by terms of space, money, time, and staffing. Chapter 7, Building a Space for Student Parents, puts theory into practice by offering concrete examples of space allocation, including step-by-step procedures for planning, stocking, and opening child-friendly spaces in academic libraries. Those who find themselves in the role or situation of carving out family-friendly spaces that support academic student parent success could use this chapter as a reference source. According to Keyes and Dworak's research, graduate student parents comprise a significant part of the student body, and they affirm that a family-friendly culture is vital for supporting undergraduate and graduate student parents. In addition to campus-wide policy suggestions, they provide examples of establishing a family-friendly culture in academic libraries for both types of student parents. As their final thoughts in Part 2, the authors include a case study on repurposing space and equipment and addressing the impact of Title IX regulations.

Part 3, Looking Outward, explores what different groups, organizations, community colleges, higher education institutions, and for-profit institutions are doing to support student parents. The authors remind readers that "Failing to identify student parents and their experiences and needs will result in more unnecessary obstacles in gaining access to institutional supports and local, state, or federal services" (Takeaway, p.199). The provided detailed information on outside organizations, including Generation Hope, Sitters for Scholars, the Pregnant Scholar, and the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit, is an excellent resource for libraries to evaluate current practices and conceptualize concrete ways to support pregnant and parenting students through the assistance of outside organizations.

Part 4, Evaluating Needs and Measuring Success, summarizes Keyes 2020 and 2022 needs assessment surveys on parenting responsibilities at Boise State and compares the responses. While the authors recognize that their survey is specific to Boise State, they include the instrument and methodology in the appendices to adapt for other institutions. As needs vary among individuals and institutions, Keys and Dworak remind readers that gathering local data is only the first step in determining student parent needs. Obtaining data should lead to assessment and continual feedback on interacting with current library services or creating new ones. The appendices included are a wealth of information, from abbreviations and budgets to expenditures and surveys.

Supporting student parents in the academic library: Designing spaces, policies, and services contains a vast amount of information on an often-overlooked patron segment. The thoughtful discussion questions, numerous case studies, appendices, and extensive bibliography

will assist academic libraries in supporting and engaging student parents on campus. Keyes and Dworak are knowledgeable authors on this subject, and while the casual reader may feel overwhelmed by the statistical analysis discussed in Part 1, the remaining chapters offer insights, methods, and examples on how to minimize barriers, create space, and implement programs that support student parents on their campuses. Although library administrators are best positioned to act on policy and spacing recommendations, any reader, librarian, or organization can benefit from the information included. I recommend this title to any academic library interested in evaluating space and policies toward the goal of supporting student parents.