PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WORK-FAMILY BALANCE AMONG DU COMMUNITY MEMBERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY – WINTER 2017

SECTION 4: SUPPORT
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This report was prepared by students from the Winter 2017 Cultural Anthropology class at the University of Denver, under the direction of Dr. Alejandro Cerón. Authors: Tess Alphas, Zoe Briggs, Monique Domme, Mayra Espinosa, Ashley Gerken, Kristen Hall (Graduate Teaching Assistant), Hanna Ko, J. P. Lawrence, Nicholas Lippman, Yvonne Maina, Gabriela Ortega, Traci Reese, Heidy Rios-Carmona, Erin Rissler, Eliza Rolfs, Julia Uchiyama, and Harry Wynn
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Introduction

Throughout the interviews we conducted, parents of the University of Denver’s community discussed a common theme—support. Support within their lives facilitated the proper balance of their work and home schedules, as well as helping assist in childcare. Every parent interviewed identified the other people and programs in their lives that make what they do possible. These parents are community members across DU’s campus including full-time students, both undergraduate or graduate, faculty members, and staff members.

Humans today live in a fast-paced world that is constantly evolving. Working parents have their own unique set of problems and challenges including balancing both their careers and home lives. These challenges have increased as more women are entering the workforce and needing outside support. Through our research, we have found that many support networks are needed when it comes to having a career and raising children. Support can come in many forms and from various aspects of a person’s life. Through our interviews, we found that family members, coworkers, friends, and early education facilities are significantly important in establishing support networks for parents. The idea that parents’ success in the home and in the workplace is attributed to support networks was a cohesive message across our interviews.

While support is a broad term encompassing many different structures and people, it is immensely important because of its ability to help assist parents and individuals. With proper support, individuals can successfully balance a home-life
and career. Through our interviews, we found that parents face a variety of tough decisions that force them to make sacrifices. Without the worry of who will take care of their children or if they will face negative repercussions in their careers for family emergencies, parents reported being able to operate with less stress and more efficiently. Coworkers and proper daycare systems can give parents the ability to complete everything they need to do. They can advance in their careers or education, ensure the proper care of their children, and complete their household responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning. Support allows parents to be their best selves, advancing within their careers and maintaining a healthy family life.

In contrast, the lack of support is just as substantial to parents. If one lacks support within their lives, it can manifest itself through many negative outcomes and feelings. Parents reported missing work and meetings, sacrificing their careers, if they did not have adequate support in taking care of their young children. Without childcare support, a person’s professional life, whether it be their career or furthering their education, could suffer. In addition, they frequently make sacrifices in their home lives, such as giving up quality time with their spouse and children. Furthermore, the uncertainty of proper support can lead to stress, frustration, and worry over one’s child and career. Long term, chronic stress has implications of its own if left unresolved. Lack of support can also increase tense relationships parents have with family members and coworkers. If parents feel like the people surrounding them do not understand their struggle or are not empathetic, it can cause strains, leading to feelings of isolation from the people crucial in their lives.
Overall, lack of support in a parent’s life can lead to stress in many aspects of their lives and increased challenges managing everything.

Support is an integral part of a person’s life and important in influencing one’s success. Parents from all walks of life at the University of Denver identified the types of support present or absent in their lives. In addition, they discussed what is currently working with their support systems in their personal lives and within the DU community. In addition, parents also identified many aspects that need to be improved. The theme of support has therefore been categorized into seven subthemes: the DU daycare system, frustration getting into Fisher, stress over DU daycare options, frustration with lack of daycare options in general, personal support, support from colleagues, and convenience. These subthemes further analyze the communal problems and amenities by many parents across the DU campus as well as illustrate priorities of parents.

**Personal Support**

Personal support is a broad term that offers several categories for the different ways individuals require support within their own lives. Some subcategories of these necessary supports are financial support, emotional support, and family support. A positive personal support system is crucial to creating a healthy work and life balance. Emotional support can involve anything from having empathetic colleagues at the workplace to family members being understanding if you miss a child’s school event or a spouse’s work party. Financial support can relate to having a spouse who also has a job that can add to the overall income and
contribute to the costs of living. These costs of living include: childcare, housing, food, and health costs. Financial support can also mean the ways in which the workplace provides benefits for you and your family, such as health benefits or parental leave benefits. Financial support is a crucial sub-category of personal support, because certain areas of childcare cannot be accomplished if the financial means to achieve them do not exist. Finally, family support can mean that you have a relative outside of the home who can come and watch your children, or something as simple as a spouse claiming responsibility for tasks such as cooking or driving the kids to school or daycare. Family support is also an important part of overall personal support because it hopefully will lead to a healthy family dynamic that can contribute to an individual's overall satisfaction with his/her life. Personal support is a vital part of a person's well-being and holds a lot of power in creating a balanced life.

Many quotes pulled from different student's interviews directly relate to the concept of personal support in different ways.

"Um, I mean I think that there should be health plans that are provided. Right now, they have this thing where you pay a thousand dollars a month and that's your health plan, but, like at MIT they pay for your health care, so that's like a big deal when you have kids. I don't know, there's a lot of stuff that DU can do to make families feel more welcome. Like at MIT they have different lists where kids can be involved in some level in activities at MIT, stuff like that makes you feel like families are encouraged or something. I don't know. None of this will change
overnight. DU is a bit behind the ball in some different things when it comes to supporting diversity, and they want to do something about it which I think is great but."

This quote shows that there are services that interviewees feel should be provided for workers and professors at DU to give them an upper hand in personal support. Having to pay for health insurance can be expensive and working to pay for such can take away from personal time. Employees for whom healthcare is not provided by DU may feel stressed due to the lack of personal support and financial support granted to those with better benefits.

Another interviewee discussed that personal support, noting, "He (referring to husband) is incredible and he is a lot of support, and he's like a feminist man so he understands that I have like a balance between my work." This quote highlights how spouses can provide personal support to one another, with the respondent and her husband having an open dialogue regarding the equitable division of shared responsibilities. Having an understanding and supportive spouse could foreseeably lead to a relationship with less emotional conflict between partners.

A third quote illustrates the support an employee receives from coworkers. "My colleagues have been tremendous on a personal level. So I feel like my department at language and literature everyone are really friendly, I get jokes from colleagues about when are they gonna babysit." This relates to the emotional aspect of personal support, as the individual has a strong sense of belonging in their workplace and feels as if other people around him/her are supportive even if they
cannot relate to the experience of having children. The individual also feels as though he/she has colleagues who are willing to help pitch and offer help and support.

Parental leave is an aspect of personal support mentioned by an interviewee, saying,

“One thing that I think is great about DU is that they have a parental leave policy so you get basically a quarter off, paid, when you have a child. And that is not typical, when I was on the job market that was the first thing I asked and DU had it, so I think that is a great perk. But in terms of childcare I think there is a lot more that could be done to accommodate the parents. Having more access to quality childcare, so in other words, if Fisher was a lot bigger and serviced a lot more faculty and staff that would be really useful."

This quote revolves around the benefits offered by DU. The respondent mentions how the quarter leave policy was a draw for them when considering a job at DU, since it was not common in the job market. Parents need time with their children, so it is important to them that their jobs have some programs and structures that benefit their family and personal life. The respondent is still seemingly dissatisfied, as she wishes there was more to benefit them. Some of the other interviews mentioned frustration with the support from DU, such as poor health insurance, “Right now they have this thing where you pay a thousand dollars a month and that's your health plan".
The final quote, “I have always felt very supported in the environment that I work in, very family oriented; prioritizing family, family comes first,” directly ties into the sub-category of emotional support because the interviewee talks about how he/she feels “very supported in the environment” he/she works in, which is a large factor in having quality personal support. If people in the workplace are understanding and helpful regarding an individual’s need to have more family time, it can make balancing family life and work life much easier.

All of these quotes directly show how important personal support is in an individual’s life and how much of a difference it can make. Without it, one’s home-life can be unbalanced leading to instability within a family.

**Support from Colleagues**

Many of our interviewers reported that there was a common theme and need for more support from their colleagues. Support from colleagues may encompass a certain level of support that a DU employee desired but is not currently present in his or her everyday life. There may be a lack of understanding regarding work-home balance and the issues that arise with that. For example, one gentlemen interviewed had an uneasy experience regarding the lack of understanding from coworkers. He brought his newborn to work and she ended up being a fairly big distraction to his colleagues and even to himself. While he never expressed during the interview that he wanted more understanding, he did realize that this was an awkward work-home balance and one he would never do again. From the interviews, it appears that there is a general concern for wanting and needing
colleagues to be more understanding. Respondents did, however, also comment on how nice and supportive co-workers have been when it comes to trying to balance family and work life.

Through analyzing the interviews, it has become apparent that support from colleagues varies based on such attributes as gender, age, rank, and type of job. For gender, there might be more support for women multitasking the job of mother taking care of her children and working. However, there is a quiet majority that believes the mother should be at home with her children instead of having a part time/full time job. Many men in the workplace feel that the support from colleagues is hindered due to societal pressures dictating that he should be at work while the mother takes care of children. The gentleman cited earlier in this section, however, was not the main provider for the family. He stated in his interview that his wife made much more money and that they prioritized her occupation so he would occasionally have to step out or bring the kids to work in emergencies. This is where rank and type of job comes into play. He was a head coach at DU and because of his rank, he felt he was able to bring his daughter to work without asking his boss for approval. Being a coach, his workplace is accordingly more casual and it was appropriate to leave early or, once in a blue moon, to bring his daughter into work. He still did not feel comfortable doing so, but he had the option in case of emergencies.

Even though some people felt a lack of support, others interviewed felt that their colleagues were in similar situations and were, therefore, very understanding. Many faculty members at DU have had kids or still have kids so they can understand it may be necessary to prioritize family over work sometimes. If a kid gets sick or a
scheduling problem comes up, people need to find a way to go take care of their family. There are times when there really is not that much of a choice and work obligations have to be sacrificed. Many colleagues have seemed to be respectful of these type of scheduling changes, especially if they understand firsthand what it's like to be in that position. This mostly includes one-time circumstances, though, because colleagues tend to be less supportive when having kids affects work performance on a regular basis.

When employees do not have the support from their colleagues, they may have awkward and stressful moments because they cannot just say that they are unavailable at a certain time because of their kids. They feel that they cannot just ask their colleagues to meet earlier or later because they have to pick up their children. However, when they do have the support from their colleagues, everything is different—they feel motivated and a lot more comfortable with their parenting needs. Usually when colleagues provide them with support, it is because they are parents too and they understand the struggles that comes with being a parent. They feel comfortable sharing more about their children and their life and they also feel good taking their kid to work whenever they have no other option because they do not feel judged. Also, it is easier for them on a personal and professional level because they do not feel the stigma of being a parent with colleague support. Colleague support may constitute sympathy or understanding, but it could also include them helping at work or changing their schedules around. It could even include childcare or transportation help in some situations.
The following quote demonstrates some of the support themes that were mentioned in interviews:

“My colleagues have been tremendous on a personal level. So I feel like my department at language and literature everyone is really friendly, I get jokes from colleagues about when are they gonna babysit. Which of course is strictly rhetorical. [both laugh] But um so in terms of person-to-person interaction people are really friendly. I brought my baby to my annual review and people were fine with that and I don't think anyone viewed me as less professional because of that.”

Another respondent expressed similar feelings when they explained; "I think I'm really lucky in this department because most history teachers have children as well and they're just supportive in general so I don't feel condemned or an outcast or that I'm not pulling my weight but I can imagine that if you didn't have colleagues in a similar situation then it would be a stigma."

These quotes speak to the colleagues that have been “tremendous” and have been supportive of work and family balance. There is a rising culture that is very accepting and embracing of this sort of balance. Throughout the course of our research, may interviewees quotes talked about how supportive their workplace has been when it comes to juggling kids and a two parent working family. In other ways, there are inequalities that promote stigmas and therefore, less support, as demonstrated in one respondent's view when she expressed:
“I was telling him how I get up at four in the morning to do research because if I stay up late at night, my kids stay up late. And he told me ‘you can’t do research like that. You can’t do physics like that.’ Right, and so I think that’s difficult. That sort of idea that men can have as much time as they want to do research but women have to balance that with their kids and stuff.”

This quote reinforces the idea that work culture has not entirely changed regarding work-home balance. There are still many people, especially women, that have an issue with colleagues and their workplace not being very supportive when they have to balance kids and a job. The woman in the quote is undertaking research but her co-worker is suggesting that she cannot do her work in “that” way. This is one example of a scenario where the people we interviewed suggested that they need more understanding and support from their colleagues.

There has been a plethora of positive quotes from people raving about the support they receive at the workplace, but there is still a gap in the support that is desired from colleagues and the culture the workplace. This discrepancy between the desired and actual support given to employees by their colleagues was a major commonality among respondents.

**Convenience**

In context with our interviews, convenience is what resources and strategies make work/student/parent life easier for the DU community. Convenience is a subcategory of support, with factors that include: daycare programs, transportation, family help, nannies, and friends, among others. Interviewees often cited sources of
childcare as a major aspect contributing to convenience in their lives. Overall, the term convenience in the context of work/life balance means the strategies and resources that parents use to manage and avoid stress when it comes to taking care of their children.

One of the most important sources of support when it comes to childcare is the support that parents receive from family members. For example, a respondent said, “I never had any of my kids in childcare or daycare. I don't know how that even works. It's also very expensive, so my family has always helped: my brothers, I have two brothers, my mom, my aunt, my husband, everybody who's available, even VIP students”. Another respondent mentioned, “It's mostly me and my partner, my husband, and then we have a family friend. She's 20, I used to babysit and she now moved out here to go to college and so she lives with us and she takes care of our kids, probably ten hours a week. Echoing the sentiment of the previous two quotes, a third interview noted, “I have my husband who is very much my primary helper and I also have my parents and friends. Whenever we can't reach our parents I'm happy with the support system we have through our friends”. Moreover, people mentioned how they also rely on their neighbors to help them watch their kids, as in the following quote:

“My husband's sister Sandy is living in town. She is nice and we are very close to our next-door neighbor, Diane Her little son is just a little older than John. Her daughter Kelly and our son Michael are in the same age. So, we have neighbor of children at the same age. If you need to run one of them to the doctor because they cut themselves, you
could call the neighbor. I don't see how people would do it if they were
new to the city and they don’t have that support network."

Another strategy that parents use is technology. As one respondent stated, "I
have like a family calendar that helps me coordinate kids’ schedules and then mine
work schedule, meetings, just different things that I need prioritize throughout the
day, and like every day and even months away." The family calendar aided the
respondent in organization and coordination, thereby making his or her life more
orderly, as well as bolstering convenience.

Respondents also mentioned how the support of colleagues and having a
flexible job schedule is convenient because it allows them to avoid stress. "I think
I’m really lucky in this department because most history teachers have children as
well and they’re just supportive in general, so I don’t feel condemned or an outcast
or that I’m not pulling my weight but I can imagine that if you didn’t have colleagues
in a similar situation, then it would be a stigma," said one respondent. In the same
way, one student mentioned how his professors are very supportive, noting, "I email
my professors when something happens, right away. If I miss class they are usually
pretty understanding since it is something that is completely out of my control."
Having a flexible job schedule can also facilitate child responsibilities. "In terms of
my job allowing me that flexibility in terms of my responsibilities to my child it’s
really good and especially compared to a lot of other occupations."

These quotes describe the strategies and resources that parents use when it
comes to childrearing. Many respondents talked about the help that they receive
from friends and family. They expressed gratitude and mentioned that it helps them save money, since nannies and daycare centers can be costly. Moreover, it is the support of people around parents that facilitates how parents balance family and work. Without a support network, taking care of children can be difficult and, at times, overwhelming. Based on the interviews, it seems like family is the most valuable resource that parents have. It is convenient that parents have someone available who can take care of the children when difficulties arise trying to balance their work schedule and family. Respondents reported that technology and family calendars aided in making their lives more convenient. In the same way, members of the DU community also mentioned flexibility of their jobs and professors for those students who are parents. From the interviews, it seems that it is helpful to have professors or jobs that are understanding of schedule changes and other obligations. This is convenient because it allows parents to have some room for child related events that take precedent over school or work. Working with a professor or a boss who understands the volatile demand of childcare can be a huge help. In conclusion, convenience is the support of people around parents, strategies and resources that parents use to help them balance family and work.

Daycare

The University of Denver is filled with parents with unique experiences—whether they are professors or students, married or single, or with one child or many. Regardless of their different situations, a shared struggle among their stories was the difficulty in finding childcare. As it becomes increasingly common for both
parents to work, the demand for childcare has grown but the options for childcare has not. Parents who were interviewed noted a reliance on family members and friends to care for their children while they are away at work. Yet for some, relatives are not an option and they have to look to other avenues. From the interviews, the class became aware that childcare is not as widely available as it may seem and this has caused stress for the parents. Excerpts from the class' interviews illustrate four causes of strain for parents regarding childcare: the costs of childcare, fear from lack of diversity, Fisher's lottery system, and the role that the University of Denver has taken in providing childcare.

The life of a working parent can be exceedingly stressful, and the difficulty of finding quality childcare is another form of stress that DU parents experienced. Being able to afford childcare is one of the major sources of stress for many parents as childcare becomes more expensive. Limited options coupled with high costs can leave many parents anxious about getting access to quality childcare. As one DU parent expressed, "It costs too much money and I am already having issues as it is. Because my mom, my sister and my dad all live together and sometimes my grandma comes and lives with us, so we are just trying to make sure all of the bills are paid and that we buy food and all of that stuff." This example illustrates the great amount of pressure childcare expenses places on families. The ability to afford care for your child while also worrying about other necessities is a clear form of stress for parents.

A less obvious stressor, however, is expressed by another DU parent who worries about the environment and inclusivity of the childcare center in which their
children are enrolled. "Besides, with the recent things like Trump winning, I'm afraid to send my son to daycare because we are Latino." For many parents, their ethnic background can be a stressor, especially given the current political climate in the country. This sort of stress often goes unacknowledged but diversity and inclusivity is a major source of concern for minorities.

Furthermore, several of the faculty, staff, and students at the University of Denver have also expressed concern with the inability to find childcare on campus. They argue that the Fisher Early Learning Center is the only childcare option available on campus but it is very difficult to get into because of their lottery system. “I think one of the biggest challenges that I'm having right now is that when I apply for the daycare (because they only have limited space available) there is a wait list they have to run a lottery process so it is very likely that you won't get in.” This example shared by a DU parent supports the idea that childcare is a major strain for working parents because of its exclusivity. The lottery process does not give parents an assured spot in a childcare center and the limited space in each classroom makes the situation even more stressful because there is a large chance that their child might not get into the childcare center. The lottery system creates uncertainty and anxiety among the DU parent community because it forces them to have to look to outside options for childcare.

The final common stressor noted throughout parents’ testimonies when discussing childcare was the lack of responsibility taken by the university. "And they [the University of Denver] do need a much better childcare system. There's no childcare here, Fisher I tried for maybe four years to get into Fisher and at the time it
was a lottery system and we just never, our name was never picked. So we just didn’t go to Fisher.” In this quote, the DU parent furthers the argument of the difficulty of accessing childcare by expressing how they have attempted to get their child into Fisher but could not because of the layout of the system. This excerpt illustrates the time and effort it takes to try and get access to good childcare, even when this may not result in any success. This parent goes even further, arguing that a better system needs to be put into place by the university. Again, this illustrates DU parents’ perceptions regarding their employer’s responsibility to provide better childcare opportunities for their workers and, in this case, students as well. Another DU parent reinforces this sentiment by stating, “We (Fisher) are the only childcare facility on campus. And, we are a lottery system to get into, and we are an early learning center, we are not daycare, so we have different standards and licensing and things like that, um, but as far as I know, there is not childcare provided for DU employees who do not get their children into Fisher.” This testimony is interesting because it comes from someone that works for the only childcare available from the university and he/she highlights the role that the employer has in providing childcare. This interview demonstrates that many parents at DU are challenged by the fact that convenient childcare is difficult to get access to and points to the perceived lack of action on DU’s behalf as being a major cause of this.

From excerpts like the those listed above, the class was able to identify the lack of childcare and availability of options as a common source of stress among parents. The concern and stress that these parents express clearly illustrates an environment where quality childcare outside of the family is something of a luxury
that few parents can find and afford. This struggle highlights uncertainty surrounding the role an employer should take in facilitating childcare for their employees. As can be seen by the examples, parents seem to think that the University of Denver does not offer enough options for parents and that the system needs to be tailored to fit the needs of the students, faculty, and staff as a whole.

**DU Daycare System**

With the recent increases in working parents, daycare is a necessity for many families. It is not uncommon for companies and large institutions to offer childcare options for their employees; however, daycare options at the University of Denver are narrow. Our group came to the understanding that the DU daycare system can be defined as the institutions near the university that faculty and staff rely on to take care of their children while they are working. The DU daycare system is very limited and consists of only the Fisher Early Learning Center, which is relatively small, expensive and difficult to get into. With this being the only option for DU community members who wish to enroll their children in a childcare facility, the interviews revealed that the DU daycare system has a general negative connotation to it. The negative connotation was derived from numerous frustrations voiced during the interviews with some of the DU community.

As previously explained, one of the major frustrations felt by DU community members is the lack of daycare options provided by the university. The only true daycare option is the Fisher Early Learning Center. One community member who works at the center said, “We (Fisher) are the only childcare facility on campus.
And, we (Fisher) are a lottery system to get into... as far as I know, there is not childcare provided for DU employees who do not get their children into Fisher." In addition to being the only option offered by the university, the facility also runs on a lottery system. The lottery system at Fisher consists of a long list of families wanting to take advantage of the only childcare system that the university offers. Considering that the wait list is very long and Fisher is small to begin with, the time consuming wait to get into Fisher contributes to the negative connotation of the DU daycare system as a whole. In addition to Fisher, there are other limited options for childcare. One example is P.A.S.S. camp, which is a seasonal children's day camp offered exclusively in the summer during which kids engage in supervised activities. One of the community members utilized this option, explaining, "So one of my daughters went to P.A.S.S. camp during the summer--kind of where you do sports and things for the summer--and that was nice having something for her to do, something close by here so I wasn't rushing so much before or after to pick her up. So I think that's helpful." Clearly, this daycare option was greatly appreciated and helpful to this particular interviewee. This type of program is only offered during the summer season, but additional childcare options similar to this would be appreciated and utilized by the community if offered at other times during the year. However, the fact that this type of childcare is only offered for a few select months throughout the year causes frustrations throughout the community.

Another one of the major frustrations felt by the DU community is Fisher itself, given the long wait list and high cost associated with it. One community member explains, "I know that they could not give me a place for (baby’s name) just because
I want it. But, if they could have a waiting list for DU employees then we could plan for that, otherwise waiting for this lottery every year that's uh that's pretty bad especially. One of the main reasons is not just convenience for (baby's name) to be at Fisher, but that's the best daycare we can afford. It's like top notch and really affordable for us." This particular example is interesting, because it demonstrates that cost is not an issue, as her family can easily afford the high costs of Fisher, yet, she is still frustrated with the waiting list. This frustration is illustrated throughout a majority of interviews. As demonstrated here, the likelihood of getting into Fisher in a timely manner is relatively small. This seems to be a universal issue, as another community member comments,

"Um, we hire a private nanny who comes to our house. Yeah, we couldn't get in the childcare here at DU. They have a lottery system which was really frustrating because that would be the perfect scenario for us to have her here. So that would be um. You know when I was first hired here I was told that DU offers childcare, so I was assuming ok there would be no problem. We got into the lottery last year and we were 22nd out of 22nd. So we had no chance to even use that as an alternative, so we are going to try again, but let's see it is difficult because we have to figure out other ways. She is gonna start childcare in April, but hopefully, well hopefully, that it will be in June here at Fisher otherwise we need to figure out something that is closer to home."
This quote explains the in-depth challenges of the lottery system and how it leaves community members in difficult situations. It specifically refers to the lottery system again, which seems to be a recurring theme in most of the interviews. Interviewees note the expense of the system, but from the tone of these interviews, it seems that the lottery system is the largest area of concern and frustration in the community.

In addition to the inconvenience of the Fisher lottery system, there are other troublesome factors that cause frustrations as well. One interviewee says, "While they did provide family leave, she explained that she had applied to send her children to the Fisher Early Learning Center without success. She ended up waiting 2 years and said it was probably for the best as the schedule was not designed for teachers and too expensive." This particular faculty member had a colleague who was on the wait list for years, and was still not able to enroll her children in Fisher. In addition to the lottery frustrations, this example brings up Fisher's difficult selection process that leaves many DU community members without daycare opportunities for their children. The quote also demonstrates that even though Fisher is the only option for daycare in close proximity to DU, it does not always fit the faculty member's schedule. Furthermore, this quote provides an example of financial frustrations, as Fisher is so expensive. Another respondent explains, "No, no. Um, there is the Fisher Early Learning Center over here on Evans and High. But it has a long wait list and a lot of the different, you know, faculty and staff. Everyone, a lot of people put their children over there, but there is no financial compensation or anything like that." This is another quote highlighting frustration with the lottery system at Fisher, in which the interviewee also mentions the lack of financial
compensation for daycare at DU. Overall, Fisher seems to be a source of stress and irritation for many community members, thereby contributing to the negative connotation of the DU daycare system as a whole.

With all of the frustrations that the DU daycare system is reported to cause, it is surprising that the university has not yet initiated a change. Many community members likely have ideas of how the system can be improved, with one interviewee in particular sharing, “So in terms of other support that DU could offer, kind of like sick childcare help. I don't even know how that would work but I'm sure it happens. And the evening things, of course are harder and there's not childcare of any kind for those receptions or visiting scholars or things that happen in the evening or on the weekends.” In addition to daytime childcare needs, working parents also need assistance in childcare for unexpected emergencies or events that occur during nontraditional work hours, such as in the evenings. DU does not offer any programs for this purpose. Much of the community would find it helpful for the university to provide some kind of last minute babysitting or childcare services for unplanned circumstances, such as a sick child or evening event, especially for DU sponsored nighttime events. However, the university does not currently provide any options similar to this, thus contributing to the negative connotation of the DU daycare system.

In conclusion, the DU daycare system, defined as the institutions near the university that faculty and staff rely on to take care of their children while they are working, is generally dismissed by most members of the DU community. Due to frustrations regarding the limited number of daycare options offered by the
university and the difficulties associated with those that are, our research found that the DU daycare system is viewed negatively by most DU community members with children.

**Frustration with Lack of Daycare Options**

For parents who are employed outside of the home, finding childcare is often one of the biggest challenges, particularly for children between the ages of 0 and 1. A parent at DU stated that “Childcare is a huge, huge issue for every parent on campus ... there's just not enough childcare options.” There are often waiting lists for daycare options; parents that sign up on waiting lists as soon as they know that they are pregnant may not even get off the waiting list after their child is born. Those who don’t have family members nearby that help take care of their children are often forced to either bring their children with them to work, pay an enormous amount for daycare or nannies, and/or even quit their jobs. For parents of young children on the DU campus, getting into the Fisher Early Learning Center can be nearly impossible because enrollment is based on a lottery system. Not only that, but Fisher may be more expensive than other local daycares, while not covering certain age groups. By also serving members outside of the DU faculty and staff, it reduces the availability of spots for the members it most designed to serve, which is the DU community.

One of the main frustrations that parents appeared to discuss was the lack of available spaces at Fisher Early Learning Center and the lottery-based enrollment system. For example, one parent said, “Yeah, we couldn’t get in the childcare here
at DU. They have a lottery system which was really frustrating because that would be the perfect scenario for us to have her here.” Another parent expressed concern with the enrollment system when they said, “I think one of the biggest challenges that I’m having right now is that when I apply for the daycare there is a wait list they have to run a lottery process so it is very likely that you won’t get in.” In an effort to provide equal opportunity for enrollment to parents, the lottery system can be extremely extensive as one parent described that they remained on the waitlist for Fisher for four years. One professor stated that Fisher is so difficult to get into because it also serves people that are not DU employees or students, saying, “Fisher doesn’t really serve DU employees because they also serve the community. So, either we need to have another like childcare facility that just serves DU employees or have Fisher only serve DU employees.” She suggests that one way to solve the issue of enrollment space would be to isolate Fisher as a service offered exclusively to DU employees. While benefiting one group of parents in the DU community, it completely disregards students with children who may benefit from having childcare close to the campus. This professor certainly does not mean to exclude students from Fisher, particularly as she herself was once a student at DU with a young child. As such, she understands the difficulties of being a full-time student while also being a mother.

Cost of childcare tends to be one of the most difficult challenges to overcome when raising young children. Parents at DU expressed that “it costs too much money and I am already having issues as it is” and that “paying people to take care of children is really, really expensive and hard to arrange...,” with both quotes
discussing the difficulty of covering the cost of childcare. For those parents who are lucky enough to secure a spot in the Fisher Early Learning Center, the cost of the program can be difficult to cover. For an infant at Fisher, the DU rate is over $1,400 for five days a week. The average cost of childcare in Denver is around $1,000 a month, making Fisher a much more expensive option for members of the DU community. One parent complains that “there is no financial compensation or anything like that.” While some parents manage to cover childcare by sharing responsibilities between spouses, it is not always possible and parents are often forced to spend a huge amount of money in order to send their children to daycare or hire a babysitter. For example, one father states that his wife tends to cover most of the childcare, but he mentions that “when she has to work we have a day care. Also, babysitters occasionally... we try not to do that though because of the price.” This same father also expresses hope that the burden of childcare will be eased a bit when their daughter enters preschool next year.

Many members of the DU community focused their frustration with the lack of institutional support from DU. Parents expressed that “there's nothing that is institutional support” and that “they [DU] do need a much better childcare system. There's no childcare here...” Another parent detailed their frustration with the retraction of services that DU used to offer. The parent said:

“This is the major complaint I have with DU, they took away a great benefit a few years ago, and um, some of us talked about protesting but we never were organized, we're too busy (laughs) to do it. We never had the time to protest. But they took away the benefit of dependent care, and so there was this system where
you could call a hotline, say if my kid starts getting sick one night and I know he can’t go to school the next day and I have a lecture the next day, and my husband is out of town, and I can’t get anyone to rely on. You could call this number and they would arrange to have a caregiver who is in this network of a lot of screened people to show up at your house. It was so helpful.”

It is possible that this service was removed in an attempt to reduce the overall budget of the university, which accordingly reduced the options for childcare for DU employees. While some parents felt that DU lacks wide institutional support, some parents have found members of their departments to be helpful while dealing with the problem of childcare. One parent said, “yeah, if it wasn’t for my superior, I think that I would be struggling a lot. DU doesn’t offer any resources for us parents and I think it should start.” It appears that many of the individuals interviewed for this project feel that DU needs to start providing more services specifically for those struggling with childcare for young children.

Other parents were able to come up with alternative options to paid childcare or institutional daycare systems, such as using a trustworthy network of friends, neighbors, and family members. This father stated, “my wife takes care of most of the childcare...” However, even spousal support is not always available. This same father stated that when his wife does have to work, they are forced to use a daycare center or babysitter, although they prefer not to do that because of the cost. While the most common and easiest option is for the spouse to step in, that may not always be possible due to conflicting work schedules or in households with single parents. In those cases, a larger outside network is required. Generally, the next preferred
option is to have family members participate in childcare. This parent described how their large family has been so fundamental to caring for their children that they've never had to use any sort of organized childcare facility: “I never had any of my kids in childcare or daycare... [M]y family has always helped: my brothers, I have two brothers, my mom, my aunt, my husband...”

Parents utilized a list of people that they know and trust to take care of their children. A parent explained that “I just I have like five people’s schedules to be able to pull the information from where they are, to help me coordinate taking care of my kids.” Although the parent didn't specify whether or not these people are paid, this shows that the parent must keep a list of specific people available to call when they need help caring for their children, which can possibly place a strain on the relationships between the adults. This may or may not be true in this particular case, but it's possible. One special case that came up during the interviews was that of one parent who has a live-in nanny of sorts. While the spouse most often helps in covering childcare, the nanny is often there to offer help when needed. The parent explained, “[w]e have a family friend. She’s 20 --I used to babysit her --and she moved out here to go to college and so she lives with us and she takes care of our kids probably ten hours a week." This shows how the parent was able to come up with a mutually beneficial relationship between themselves and caregiver. The caregiver is given a place to stay, assumedly rent-free, in exchange for providing childcare. This arrangement allows both parties to reduce their expenses.

Parents may also face issues covering childcare when a child falls ill. For example, one parent, who is a student here at DU, discusses how they may have to
miss class if their child falls ill because “[t]he daycare won’t let the baby stay there if he’s sick so I have to take him home and watch him.” They go on to say that she can only attend class if she is “lucky” enough to find someone to watch him.

Based on the trends of these quotes, the largest barriers to childcare for DU students and employees is the lack of available spaces at the Fisher Early Learning Center and the uncertainty of enrollment due to the lottery-based system. Cost seems to be the other main factor causing frustration with childcare options. Average cost of childcare hovers $1000 a month per child. Because of the high expense, parent may be forced to rely on neighbors, friends, or family members to supplement their childcare. Possible solutions to some of these problems would be either an institutional group or department specifically designed to offer resources and assistances with daycare options for DU staff, faculty, and students. University of Denver should work in conjunction with Fisher to offer larger discounts on childcare for DU employees and students. Fisher should focus on offering members of DU faculty or students priority enrollment, while also expanding their services to accommodate more children into the program. Finally, a member of the DU community captures the frustration that many parents feel at some point while trying to arrange childcare by stating, “so then, what do you do especially with younger children, if they can’t go to childcare and you have to [work]?”

**Frustrations Over Getting into Fisher**

Frustrations over getting into Fisher regards any frustrations respondents expressed over enrolling their children in Fisher Early Learning Center. Fisher is
the early learning center for children that is located on campus. It is a private institution that has a long wait list and uses a lottery system to select its students. Respondents often expressed frustration with this lottery system and the many applicants for whom enrollment is denied each year. Being denied places a burden on faculty and staff, as they are forced to look elsewhere for childcare with DU not offering any other childcare options. It is also expensive, with monthly tuition ranging between over $1,400 to $1,100 for a 5 day per week program, even with a DU employee discount. This high cost was found to be a burden by respondents and was another frustration with the center, but most complaints were centered around being denied enrollment by the lottery system.

Respondents often expressed frustration with the lottery system that Fisher uses to select students. This excerpt from one respondent highlights the issue: "And they do need a much better childcare system. There’s no childcare here, Fisher I tried for maybe four years to get into Fisher and at the time it was a lottery system and we just never, our name was never picked. So we just didn’t go to Fisher." As this excerpt shows, Fisher is the only childcare option through the University, and the lottery system leaves many individuals without a spot there for their children.

One respondent noted that the lottery system was one of the largest challenges when it came to securing daycare. "I think one of the biggest challenges that I’m having right now is that when I apply for the daycare (because they only have limited space available) there is a wait list they have to run a lottery process so it is very likely that you won’t get in." This respondent noted the challenge of getting into Fisher as a frustration, especially since success in the lottery is low. As the
lottery system created uncertainty, it could result in individuals placing a false sense of hope in it and not spending enough time looking into alternative options.

Another respondent explained their frustration with the uncertainty of the lottery system. Parents were unsure of whether they had received spots within Fisher and sometimes would be contacted after they had found other childcare options.

“I know that they could not give me a place for (baby’s name) just because I want it. But, if they could have a waiting list for DU employees then we could plan for that, otherwise waiting for this lottery every year that’s uh that’s pretty bad especially one of. The main reason is not just convenience for (baby’s name) to be at Fisher, but that’s the best daycare we can afford. It’s like top notch and really affordable for us.”

This quote also expressed the respondent’s frustration with the fact that Fisher is not exclusively available to DU employees, making it even harder to get into. Additionally, the quality of Fisher makes it desirable, compounding the demand for enrollment spots. The uncertainty of the whole process makes it very hard to plan for changes and unforeseen events. Even parents who can afford to use this resource are finding it hard to secure spots when they need them.

While not technically an official day care center, Fisher is one of the only close options for parents on campus to provide care for their children. Many who were unable to get a spot in Fisher did not have any other options available through the university and this causes frustration. This is showed in the following excerpt:
"Um I would just say, just because I've heard this from plenty of our parents that are here, um, and because my husband knows many parents that are also faculty members, we (Fisher) are the only childcare facility on campus. And, we are a lottery system to get into, so DU does not and we are an early learning center, we are not daycare, so we have different standards and licensing and things like that, um, but as far as I know, there is not childcare provided for DU employees who do not get their children into Fisher."

Some partners of those interviewed have taken up full time childcare because it is more convenient and less costly to send their children to Fisher or other options. This can be frustrating for families that depend on two income sources or parents who want to also be in the work force. The frustration was expressed during the interview through the following quote: "So yeah about 90% of the childcare has fallen on her recently just because she's been staying at home and also trying to find a new daycare facility for our daughter."

In some other cases, individuals had to turn to other expensive alternative options for childcare, as expressed in the following quote:

"Um, we hire a private nanny who comes to our house. Yeah, we couldn't get in the childcare here at DU. They have a lottery system which was really frustrating because that would be the perfect scenario for us to have her here. So that would be um. You know when I was first hired here I was told that DU offers childcare, so I was assuming ok
there would be no problem. We got into the lottery last year and we were 22nd out of 22nd. So we had no chance to even use that as an alternative, so we are going to try again, but let's see it is difficult because we have to figure out other ways. She is gonna start childcare in April, but hopefully, well hopefully, that it will be in June here at fisher otherwise we need to figure out something that is closer to home."

As this quote shows, prospective employees are not necessarily informed of the challenge in getting into Fisher, which can also cause frustration and lead respondents to have to take on the additional financial burden of other childcare options.

However, the financial burden of childcare is not eliminated if an individual is allowed to enroll at Fisher. As this respondent noted, there is no financial compensation to help with the cost of tuition. “No, no. Um, there is the Fisher Early Learning Center over here on Evans and High. But it has a long waitlist and a lot of the different, you know, faculty and staff. Everyone, a lot of people put their children over there, but there is no financial compensation or anything like that.” It should be noted though that DU faculty and staff do receive a small discount on Fisher’s tuition, but it is not perceived to be a significant amount.

These excerpts show than many respondents have experienced frustration with Fisher’s wait list and lottery system, something that has forced many respondents to look elsewhere for childcare. These quotes relate to the overall
theme because they all express the frustrations of individuals with the childcare, or lack thereof at Fisher Early Learning Center. In the case of the respondents who could not get into Fisher, this frustration manifested in the form of constantly applying, waiting, and being denied. Then, after being denied, having to look at alternative options that can be less convenient, of inferior quality, or significantly pricier. For instance, the respondent who hired a nanny after being denied admission through the lottery system claimed that he/she would definitely prefer to have their child at Fisher, and only have a nanny because his/her child got denied.

An additional frustration that respondents expressed that relates to the theme was with the cost of Fisher, and the fact that there is no financial compensation. One excerpt that was previously discussed highlighted the frustrations with the fact there is no financial compensation related to enrolling children at Fisher if you are not denied in the lottery. There is a small financial discount offered to university staff and faculty, but it is not significant enough to make Fisher cheap.

**Issues Common to Female Faculty at DU**

Faculty members oversee classes, plan lectures, write assignments and grade exams. But this schedule only considers their academic lives. Faculty members that are also parents have additional responsibilities tied to raising and caring for their children. Some responsibilities include overall maintenance of the home, caring for sick children, and transporting children to and from their respective daily activities such as school and daycare. Female faculty members experience issues that are unique to mothers in academia, varying from struggling with the flexibility of their
childcare, to arranging childcare, to feeling guilt over the effects of their schedules on their children’s development, and dividing childcare between spouses.

The hours of faculty members can be highly variable, particularly between quarters when class schedules change. While this highly variable schedule can create instability within a family due to trying to balance the responsibilities of the job as well as responsibilities to the family, many female faculty members saw the flexibility of their schedule to be a useful tool in maintaining a work-life balance. Many female faculty members of the Division of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Denver expressed that they felt “lucky” because the flexibility allowed them to work on the weekends or late at night to make up for hours missed due to childcare responsibilities. While many saw this flexibility to work late as a blessing, some expressed concerns that working “late into the night…can take a toll” on the overall health and wellbeing of an individual. Members of the Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics also praised the flexibility in their schedule. One professor states that “[t]here’s a lot of support to put my teaching schedule to be more convenient, especially last term which was great.” The flexibility in her schedule allowed her to more effectively cover childcare, by giving her the time she needed to drop her children off in the mornings and to be available to pick them up in the afternoons.

Professors also stated that while occasionally their childcare responsibilities interfered with their ability to attend mandatory departmental meetings, they never felt that their coworkers were inconvenienced. Coworkers were often times supportive and understanding; yet, this is not always the case. One problem that was
expressed by female faculty members, particularly in the Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, was a real lack of flexibility. One professor stated that due to the nature of her husband’s job, she was the only person available to pick up her children from their childcare facility. The daily pickups often forced her to miss mandatory departmental meetings. Not only do these meetings discuss topics important to her department regarding safety and new discoveries, they provide a chance at social interaction and community building within the department. She has attempted on many occasions to speak with her direct supervisor about varying the schedule of meetings so that she may attend them occasionally with little success. The lack of flexibility of the department has caused her to feel excluded from the community in her department.

Another issue that many female faculty members expressed was the difficulty of dividing childcare responsibilities between spouses. Many professors stated that childcare responsibilities were nearly divided equally between their spouses and themselves. One faculty member states that her husband “watches [their daughter] during the daytime when she isn’t in school, and I am with her in the evenings.” Equality in the division of childcare responsibilities may help to ease the burden on mothers, as women have traditionally been the primary caregivers. Even as more and more women enter the workforce, they are many times expected to come home and work what many refer to as “second shift” in the home through activities like childcare, cooking dinner, and cleaning. Splitting childcare responsibilities has been shown to encourage fathers to spend more quality time with their children as well.
While many women expressed that the division of labor was relatively equal between spouses, some mothers stated that they remained the primary caregivers in their household due to the demanding schedules of their spouses. For example, one faculty member explains how her role as the secondary income earner often caused all responsibilities relating to childcare fell on her shoulders: “I was not the primary income earner in my household… I couldn't count on my husband to be home to do a fair share of childcare at all. I'm still responsible for probably 90% of the childcare arrangements or at least arranging who's taking care of them.”

These problems are exacerbated for those women who work full-time and whose husbands do as well. One woman whose husband is a surgeon with 30-hour shifts every four nights explains how she has used single-parent resources in order to manage her husband’s busy schedule while working full-time and juggling her role as primary caregiver. Women whose spouses are graduate students also experience the same struggles.

Another major issue that female faculty members faced was managing the cost of childcare services, be that through nannies, babysitters, and childcare or daycare facilities. The average cost of childcare hovers near $1000 a month per child in Denver, and can be greater for children between the ages of zero and one-years old. This a costly monthly expense that many times is necessary for women who work even part-time outside of the home, particularly for those with multiple children. For some working couples, their combined income is not great enough to be able to afford the childcare they so desperately need in order to continue working. One faculty member states that she and her husband were unable to afford
outside care. Another explains: “Professors used to be much better paid from the normal salaries that used to be out there in the world so I think the idea of not being able to afford childcare has not really caught up with academia certainly the administration has not—we can't possibly pay for childcare on our salary.”

The cost of childcare has forced many to rely on extensive networks of family and friends in order to cover gaps in their schedule. Those who do not have family in the area are under even greater duress to arrange care for their children. It has been shown that many women that enter the workforce, once they have children, choose to leave it in order to avoid the expense of monthly childcare. The lack of a strong local network can also play a role in women’s decision to leave the workforce.

Coupled with frustrations with the price of childcare were often frustrations over the childcare options provided by the University of Denver, especially concerning the Fisher Early Learning Center. The location of Fisher makes it an ideal choice for DU employees, yet many expressed frustrations with the lack of available spaces. Enrollment to Fisher Early Learning Center is based on a lottery system. While this system makes an attempt at equal opportunity for enrollment, many that are on the list are never selected. The number of available spots for children of DU employees is actively decreased due to the fact that Fisher serves the Denver public as well. The general impression gathered from interviewers about the Fisher Early Learning Center can be easily summarized: “[I]t is very likely that you won’t get in.”
Some mothers have elected to not use outside daycare services, not only
because of their high cost, but also because of the guilt they feel having their
children raised by strangers. One faculty member explains that her parents are
often instrumental in watching her children while she is teaching “so [she doesn’t]
feel as guilty when [she’s] at work.” Guilt over who is watching the children can
extend just beyond relying on strangers to play a vital role in a child’s development
to the effect that parents’ schedules have on the lives of their children. One mother
spoke about the guilt she feels over her schedule because she is not only forced to
place her son in a daycare environment that he doesn’t enjoy, but also because her
schedule requires that he spends a great deal of time there:

“I have to get him to the school by 7 and he just has to sit there for two
hours. It’s not a very good program, and he doesn't really like it but he's
such a good kid, and he really doesn't complain, but it rips my heart out
because it’s hard on him and I don’t think he’s getting enough sleep and
we just don't have another option.”

Guilt over the amount of time available to spend with their children may be another
factor that contributes to the increasing number of women that are leaving the
workforce after the birth of their child.

Finally, a common theme between all interviews with female faculty members
is the support they receive from the University of Denver. Many complained that DU
offers very little in the way of institutional support for women who are raising
children while employed. One mother believes that “there is a lot more that could
be done to accommodate the parents. Having more access to quality childcare, so in other words, if Fisher was a lot bigger and serviced a lot more faculty and staff that would be really useful.” One faculty member that has been employed here for more than a decade spoke about one particular service that DU has discontinued:

“This is the major complaint I have with DU, they took away a great benefit a few years ago... they took away the benefit of dependent care, and so there was this system where you could call a hotline, say if my kid starts getting sick one night and I know he can’t go to school the next day and I have a lecture the next day, and my husband is out of town, and I can’t get anyone to rely on. You could call this number and they would arrange to have a caregiver who is in this network of a lot of screened people to show up at your house. It was so helpful."

By removing these services, parents may be forced to cancel class if they cannot find anyone to watch their children.

Many faculty members discussed the lack of institutional support when it comes to arranging childcare on snow days. One woman described one of DU’s policies regarding snow days: if your children’s school is closed for a snow-day, all non-essential employees may remain at home. This professor didn’t consider herself to be a non-essential employee and cancelled her class. The University disagreed with her decision and she received disciplinary action. Others say that DU is very supportive and that the introduction of a new snow day policy has been particularly helpful. One mother said that on days when DU remains open “but your child's
school system is closed, you can stay home without it being considered a sick or vacation day, which is great."

Another issue that women all over the country face is the issue of maternity leave. From the interviews performed with female faculty members of varying status at the University of Denver, it became clear that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. It appears that maternity leave is not a service offered to all DU employees; it appears that only tenured members of the faculty receive maternity leave. For those women that are tenured, DU's maternity leave policy is one of the best: "You get basically a quarter off, paid, when you have a child. And that is not typical." Despite maternity leave being an option for tenured women, it is not a fail-safe measure to prevent the possible loss of their positions. One woman recalled that she was often forced to come in during her maternity leave and that she feared that others in her department would "try to get rid of me. Which they did try..."

While the University of Denver may offer maternity leave to tenured professors, this places graduate students and faculty members on short term contracts at a severe disadvantage. One woman from the Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics discussed how her lack of maternity leave placed her health and her job at serious risk:

"I got sepsis. So, I was in the ICU for over a week and then I was on a PICC line for six weeks. So, yea, I was like doing IV antibiotics every morning before coming to work. That's another part of the whole parental leave thing. If I had had any type of leave associated with that I
could have like recovered a little sooner. And it’s not just a physical recovery too because I had post-partum depression.”

This faculty member has been attending classes and working for the University of Denver for nearly a decade and she received no maternity leave whatsoever. Sepsis is an incredibly dangerous bacterial infection that can result in death in up to 50% of cases. Not only was this woman battling a difficult physical condition, but also with post-partum depression, which can affect nearly 20% of new mothers.

When it comes to summarizing how female faculty members feel about the institutional support they receive from the University of Denver, it can be easily summarized with the quote: “[T]here’s a lot of stuff that DU can do to make families feel more welcome.”

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, our class research shows that while most individuals with children who are connected to the University of Denver are satisfied, there are also several areas that can be improved to better enhance people’s quality of life. An overall theme that came up often during interviews was the idea of general support. Many faculty members stated that they felt a strong sense of community between colleagues in their own department when it came to understanding the difficulties that come with having children, but almost everyone—faculty and students combined—agreed that there was a lack of institutional support when it came to child/daycare. This deficiency, in turn, affects the convenience and status of one’s job. It is essential that faculty and students with children feel supported here at the
University of Denver, because without that, people remain uncertain and frustrated about what they will do if an unexpected situation arises, like if a child were to be sick or injured.

There is an agreement amongst most members of the University of Denver community that the university could do a better job in assisting parents in finding childcare options, because the Fisher Early Learning Center is not enough. There is more demand for childcare than availability in nearby daycare centers, and this causes problems for many students and faculty. However, even with some of these issues, many individuals felt that the University of Denver is a more supportive environment than most other schools that people have attended or worked for. A few faculty members discussed how they are able to make connections with other colleagues and students in order to find someone to watch their child if daycare is not an option. This is one of the many positive aspects of support that faculty and students feel here at DU. So, while the University of Denver does have areas it could improve on relating to offering support for childcare, it does a good job overall at making students and faculty feel welcome and secure in their jobs every day.