

Anna Grimes, a senior at Endicott College, helps her 3-year-old daughter get ready for day care.



College, With Kids

As more student parents enroll, colleges find ways to help them succeed

By KELLY FIELD



M. SCOTT BRAUER FOR THE CHRONICLE

BEVERLY, MASS.

THE DINING hall at **Endicott College** is swarming with hungry students, but Audrey Hoelscher, 3, is too excited to eat. Swiping her mom's meal card at the front desk, she runs ahead, dodging students carrying trays and ducking into the hollows of the metal support beams.

Most days, Audrey will choose a table and wait while her mom, Anna Grimes, a senior, gets them food. But she's just back from two weeks with her dad in Illinois, and Audrey — or Elsa, as she insists on being called today — seems eager to reclaim her territory.

"She's too familiar with this campus," says Ms. Grimes, chasing after her daughter, who wears a blue-and-silver princess dress from the movie *Frozen*. "She gets a little too comfortable."

Indeed, Audrey has lived on the seaside campus more than half of her life, moving there in 2015, when her mom transferred to Endicott from a community college in Illinois. Ms. Grimes is part of a group of eight single moms and their kids in the college's Keys to Degrees program.



Nationwide, there are millions of students like Ms. Grimes — single parents juggling classwork, jobs, and child care — and their numbers are rising. From 2004 to 2012, the number of student parents in the United States climbed by 1.1 million, or 30 percent, to 4.8 million students, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Two million of them were single moms.

Yet few of these students get access to the kind of intensive services that Ms. Grimes has received at Endicott, where "Keys" students get subsidized child care, a \$25,000 scholarship, free parking, and two dorm bedrooms for the price of one. Kids eat free in the dining hall. Though student parents now make up a quarter of undergraduates nationwide, wraparound programs like Endicott's remain rare, with only a handful scattered across the country, most of them at former women's colleges and religiously affiliated institutions.

That's partly because residential parent programs can be complicated to administer and costly; Endicott spends about half a million dollars a year on its program. Colleges must be willing to sacrifice dorm space and to grapple with the liability issues that come with having kids on campus.

Richard E. Wylie, Endicott's president, says that when he speaks about the program at conferences, "people say, 'It's a great idea, but I don't think I can get it through my college.'"

But he argues that it's an investment worth making. Nationally just 17 percent of single parents who enrolled in four-year colleges in the 2003-4 academic year earned bachelor's degrees within six years, according to the women's-policy institute. At Endicott, where the six-year graduation rate is 72 percent for all students, 68 percent of students who entered Keys to Degrees between 2004 and 2010 earned degrees. The median completion time for Keys students who entered as freshmen was four years; for transfer students like Ms. Grimes, it was three.

"Too many college presidents sit back and ignore this population," Mr. Wylie says. "If we can afford to send our athletic teams to spring training, why can't we afford to help these women?"

IF COLLEGE presidents are, in fact, ignoring student parents, it may be because they have no idea how many of them they have in their classes. Few colleges ask applicants if they have children, and the federal government doesn't publish institution-level statistics.

The best estimates come from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, which asks applicants if they have dependents. But even the Fafsa provides an incomplete pic-

ture, since student parents don't always claim their dependents, some "dependents" are adults, and many students don't complete the form at all. And some financial-aid administrators won't even share the data with others on campus, citing privacy concerns.

In the absence of concrete numbers, the creation of student-parent programs has been haphazard — the product of inspired leadership, student advocacy, or random encounter.

Endicott's program grew out of an interaction Mr. Wylie had with a young mother more than two decades ago. As he tells it, the mother had brought her baby on a campus tour. When Mr. Wylie greeted her, her father grumbled, "This is a complete waste

The programs have been the product of inspired leadership, student advocacy, or random encounter.

of time. My daughter cannot go to college here; she's a mother and needs to take care of her baby."

The exchange got the college president thinking about what he'd want for his own daughter, if she became pregnant as a teenager, and Keys to Degrees was born.

Not everyone was thrilled with the idea at first. One trustee questioned why the college would reward "promiscuous" behavior, Mr. Wylie recalled. But he came around after Mr. Wylie sat him next to a charming young mother at a trustee dinner.

Wraparound programs like Endicott's aim to meet the basic needs of students — food, shelter, child care, transportation — to increase their chances of graduating. The programs tend to be small and intensive, providing individual counseling and academic support in addition to financial assistance. And they're not open to everyone — students have to apply to participate and must meet eligibility criteria, including, in some cases, age limits for parents or kids. At Endicott, students must be on track to graduate by age 28, and their children must be 10 or under at their target graduation date. In many of these programs, once admitted, students must keep up their grades and attend parenting classes and workshops.

That's in contrast to so-called open programs, which provide services and supports to all interested parents. Open programs,

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which are more common at large public institutions, may offer parent programming, and assistance applying for child-care subsidies and other public benefits. Roughly half of four-year public colleges and 44 percent of community colleges also offer on-campus child care, though the number of centers is shrinking.

Some 275 colleges offer single-family housing, mostly in apartments, according to an analysis by Endicott's National Center for Student Parent Programs.

Open programs are often paid for by student fees, while wraparound programs tend to depend on institutional spending, private donors, and foundation support.

Last year Endicott published the results of a survey of roughly 300 students and alumni from four wraparound and five open programs. It found that while nearly all the current students were highly stressed, participants in wraparound programs — who tended to be the youngest and most vulnerable student parents — were less stressed and more involved in campus life than students in open programs. They were also more likely to say they had secure sources of food and housing,

and had stable employment and child care.

But wraparound programs serve only a sliver of parents attending college in the United States, and they aren't particularly scalable, given their high costs.

Recognizing this, Endicott is trying to expand the pool of parent programs nationally. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foun-

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andation and the U.S. Department of Education, the college has replicated its model at three other institutions — Eastern Michigan, Ferris State, and Dillard Universities — since 2009, and helped two other colleges expand their parent programs. It's also created a "family-friendly campus tool kit" for

colleges interested in crafting or improving their own programs. The kit, which contains a variety of self-assessment and data-collection tools, is now being tested at eight two-year and four-year colleges.

Endicott has also expanded services to its Boston campus, which serves a poorer, more diverse commuter population. In the past couple of years, the college has hired a part-time liaison for student parents and has partnered with the Jeremiah Program, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit group, to provide biweekly life-skills classes, one-on-one coaching, and other support services to its Boston students.

At one recent session in Roxbury, Sendy Vaughn Suazo, one of the coaches, helped Kaisha Vanderhorst, a mother of two, develop a plan for a class project that was overwhelming her. While soothing, meditative music played in the background, they broke down the project into steps and deadlines, and Ms. Vanderhorst wrote them down on Post-it notes shaped like hearts and stars.

Afterward, Ms. Vanderhorst breathed a sigh of relief. "I feel like I have an action plan," she said. "I don't feel everywhere."

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A 'Microcollege' for Student Moms

HOLYOKE, MASS.

IN THE attic of a stately brick mansion here, nine young mothers are discussing *Frankenstein*. They're developing topics for their final papers and writing them on the whiteboard: Is the creature more masculine or feminine? How do Victor and the creature suffer for their pursuit of knowledge?

Mary Anne Myers, program director of Bard Microcollege Holyoke, helps them refine their ideas.

"Why is it OK for humans to have a companion, but not the creature?" she asks, reading aloud another question. "What is problematic about relationships?"

Angelique (Angie) Vera, who is wearing a baseball cap backward and a tank top that proclaims "I Need More Weekends," pipes up. "You could get screwed over. You could get pregnant — again!" she says, only half-joking.

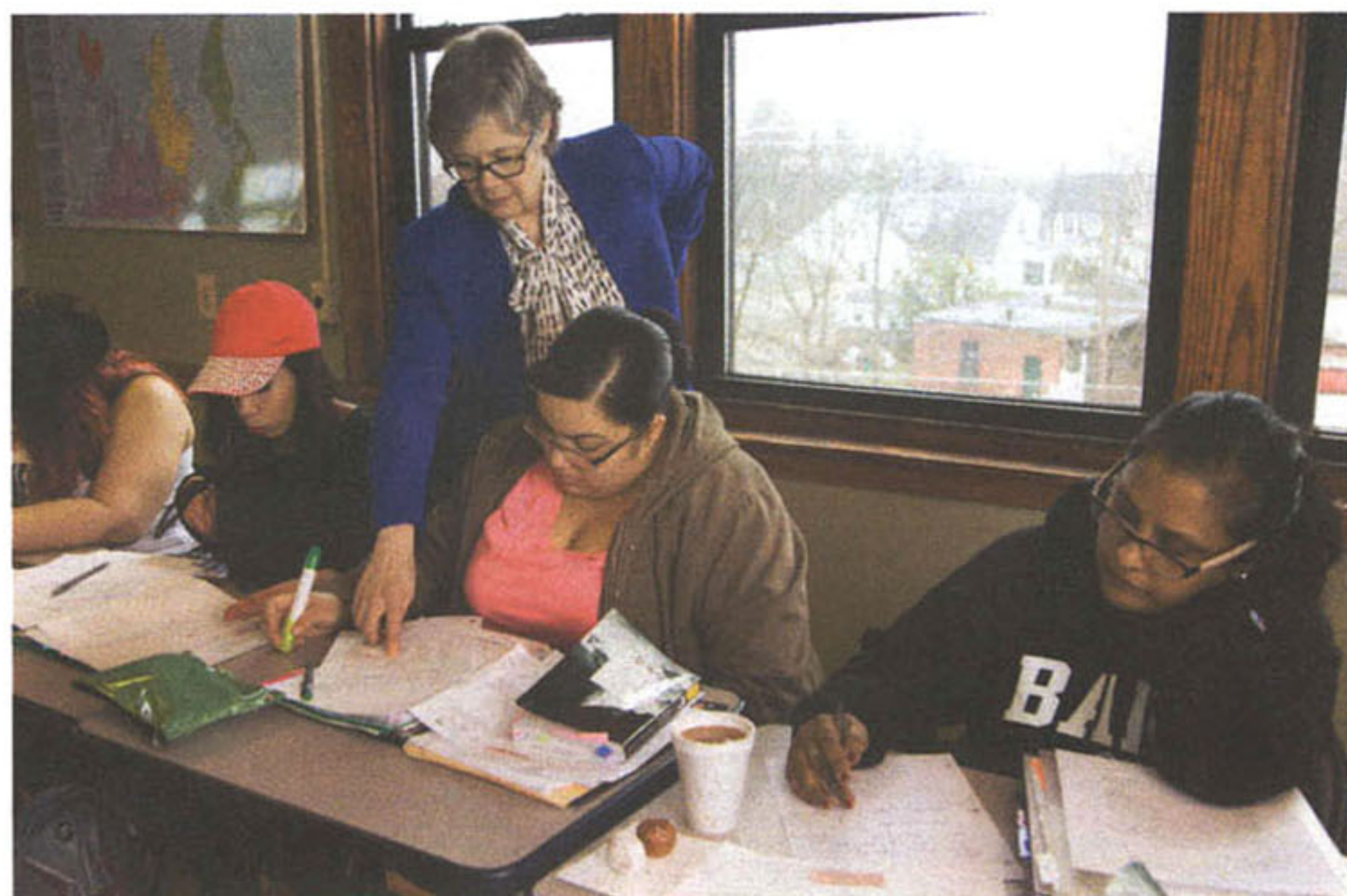
The nine students in this classroom know something of the perils of human relationships. All got pregnant young, in a city where the teen birthrate, at 40 percent, was four times the state average in 2015, and only 63 percent of young women graduated from high school on time last year. All the students are former dropouts themselves.

Yet here they are, debating classic literature in a seminar that is pretty much indistinguishable from a seminar at a selective liberal-arts college. And that's the idea behind this first-in-the-nation accredited "microcollege" for young mothers, its creators say.

"Too many of our elite colleges have an extremely narrow view of who a college student is meant to be," says Max Kenner, founder and executive director of the Bard Prison Initiative, the model for this program. "We've lost faith that ordinary Americans are capable of the work we value most."

"The prejudice that we weave into the work has to be destroyed," he says.

Like the renowned prison program, which enrolls nearly 300 incarcerated men and women in New York State, the Holyoke microcollege offers a tuition-free liberal-arts education to students who might never be expected to succeed in mainstream higher education. It holds its young mothers to the same rigorous standards as freshmen and sophomores on the main campus, giv-



COURTESY OF KAREN PEARSON, BARD COLLEGE

Mary Anne Myers (standing), program director of Bard Microcollege Holyoke and a scholar of British literature, talks with students about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

ing them a grounding in grammar, art, literature, the social sciences, and math.

But these mostly Latina students in western Massachusetts face many challenges that the typical Bard student does not, among them poverty, homelessness, domestic and gang violence, and day-care and transportation challenges. So the Care Center, a local nonprofit group that hosts the program in this turn-of-the-century Holyoke house, offers many supports that traditional colleges do not, including food, transportation to and from class, and on-site child care and health care.

"We clear the decks so students can be academics," says Anne Teschner, executive director of the Care Center.

The center, which has helped pregnant and parenting teens earn their GEDs since 1986, has offered a free six-credit course in the humanities through a partnership with Bard College for two decades. Over the years, 80 percent of the women who have completed the course and 75 percent of all Care Center clients have continued their college education.

But many of these women have struggled

outside the supportive cocoon of the center. When Ms. Teschner ran the numbers, five years ago, she found that 200 former students had attempted community college, but that only 25 had actually graduated.

"When they went to community college, all those supports fell away," she says.

She decided the solution was to "bring college into the support bubble," so she approached Bard about trying its successful prison program with a new population. The college, which had been looking to expand into new settings, agreed, and Bard Microcollege Holyoke at the Care Center, a 60-credit associate-of-arts degree, was born.

The microcollege, which plans to enroll 100 students, opened with 10 students last fall. A second cohort of 15 students started in January.

The walls of the Care Center are covered in student artwork. Along one stairway is a series of paintings of phoenixes rising from the ashes. In the art room, someone has created a colorful mural that reads "Keep Calm and Mommy On." In a downstairs bathroom, there's an inspirational quote, by the young poet Stephanie Bennett-Hen-

ry: "Life is Tough, my Darling, But so are You."

Life outside the center is indeed tough. Holyoke, population 40,000, is a poor city, with a per-capita income of just \$22,000 and a quarter of citizens living below the poverty line. Gang violence is common.

Students at the microcollege are resilient and motivated to succeed, but sometimes,

"We clear the decks so students can be academics."

says Ms. Myers, "life gets in the way." A child gets sick, or child care falls through, and they can't make it to class.

That happened last semester to Ms. Vera, who had to take time off to watch her 1-year-old after the other baby in the child-care arrangement got sick. Her professors let her do her work from home and even agreed to do advising over the phone. Within a week, they found her a spot in the center's own day-care program.

"If you're transparent about what you need, they'll find a way to remove the obstacles," she says.

Still, there are times when she feels as if she's "drowning" in schoolwork. The pace is "way more intense" than the community college she'd attempted a couple of years ago, and "the expectations are higher." When she starts feeling overwhelmed by an assignment, she grabs a cup of coffee and switches to another subject.

"You just have to breathe through every moment," she says. "You never know when your 1-year-old will stay up all night, or your 7-year-old will get sick. You don't have room to feel sorry for yourself."

With a little over a year remaining until her graduation, Ms. Vera, who hopes to become a nurse, says she's "stepping up to a level never expected of me."

"I'm really fighting for my education tooth and nail now," she says.

—KELLY FIELD



**IDEA LAB
STUDENTS**



PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. SCOTT BRAUER FOR THE CHRONICLE



At Endicott College, the Keys to Degrees program provides student parents like Anna Grimes (with Audrey, 3) with two-bedroom dormitory space, subsidized child care, and other specialized services.



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When she's not in class at Endicott Boston, Ms. Vanderhorst spends most of her time at the program's Dudley Square house, bringing her kids there after school and staying til bedtime, studying while they play.

"All my supports are here," she said, tearing up. "I don't have money to wash clothes, but here there are washing machines and soap. There's food — I can feed my kids. They take showers here. Everything is here for me."

BACK IN Beverly, on Boston's North Shore, Ms. Grimes is giving visitors a tour of the suite in the Bayview Residence Hall that she shares with her roommate, Sarah Schuyler, and her son, Asher, who is six months older than Audrey. There's a train table and mini-basketball hoop in the living room, and a little girl's vanity and green shag rug in Audrey's bedroom.

Down the hall, there's a converted lounge filled with toys, where the eight kids in the dorm can run around and dance when they get restless.

Ms. Grimes says she and Ms. Schuyler get along well and take turns watching each

other's kids while the other parent studies or attends extracurricular activities. Audrey considers Asher her brother and calls Ms. Schuyler's parents, who live 30 minutes away, her "Massachusetts grandparents."

Katherine Kough, assistant dean of students and Single Parent Scholars director at **Wilson College**, in Pennsylvania, says student parents have one key thing in common: "They know what it's like to write a 10-page paper when your kiddo is running a 102 fever."

"They're protective of each other and their kids," she says. "There's a 'got your back' mentality."

But it's not always smooth sailing, program directors and former students say. Different parents have different rules, and a 3-year-old may not understand why a roommate can stay up late and she can't.

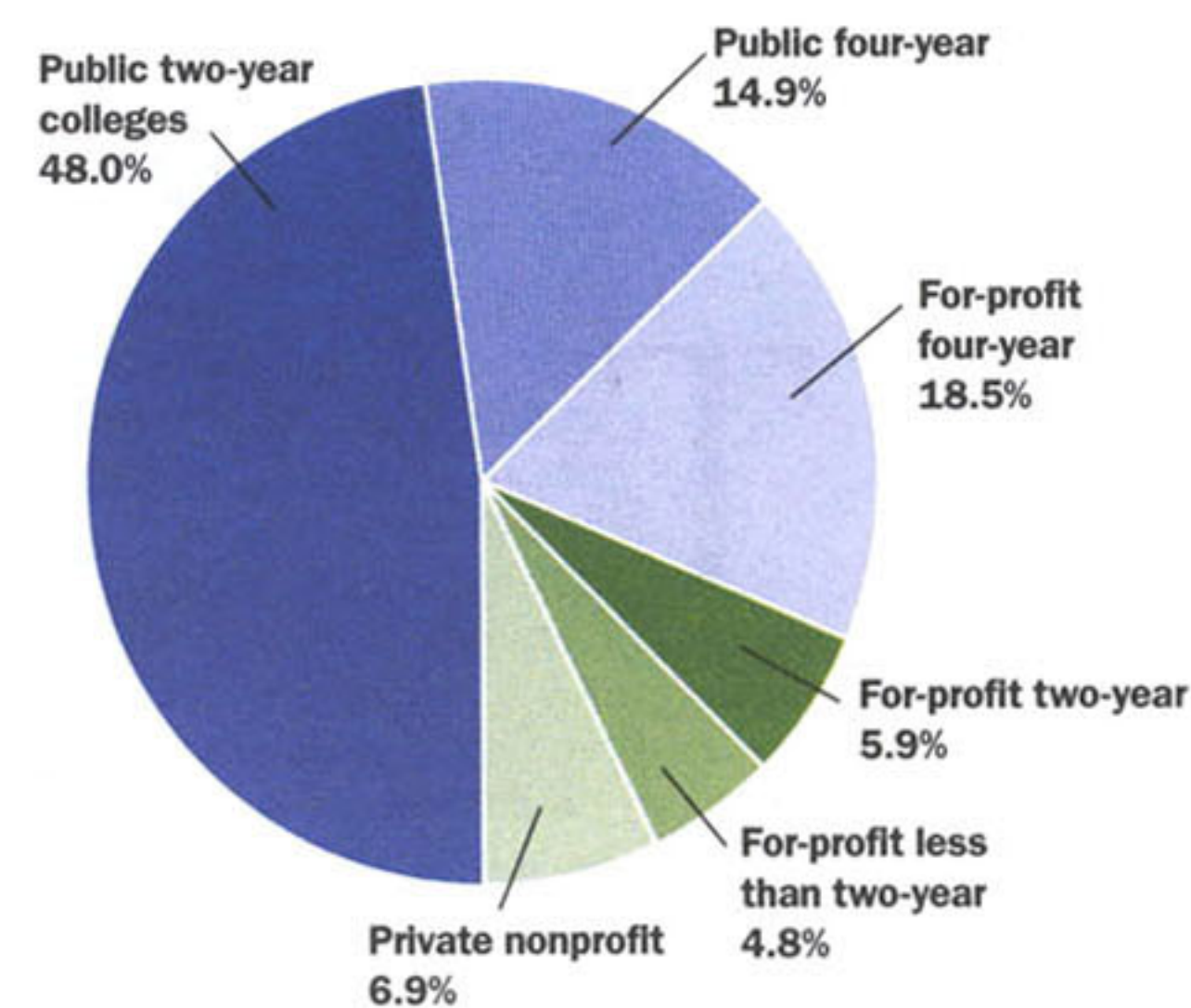
When parents share a suite, "the level of roommate conflicts can rise to a whole different level," says Tara Knudson Carl, vice president for student development at the **College of Saint Mary**. "There's more at stake."

To defuse tensions, Barbara Treadway, Saint Mary's director of single-parent suc-

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Student Parents by the Numbers

Where They Are Enrolled



- Over a quarter of all undergraduates — **4.8 million** — are raising dependent children.
- Women make up **71 percent** of all student parents.
- Almost **half of black female undergraduates have dependent children**, compared with 29 percent of white women and 32 percent of Hispanic women.

Sources: American Council on Education; Institute for Women's Policy Research. Data are from 2011-12, the latest year they are available. Because of rounding, numbers may not add up to 100 percent.



Our educators forge new inroads into diversity issues.

Rosemarie Allen Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education

Assistant Professor Allen uses her data and insights to change the future of education for students of color.

As a child, Rosemarie Allen was in the principal's office more often than not. Instinctively, she knew it wasn't because she was "bad," and that there had to be another reason. She wasn't alone. A 2016 study by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights showed that African-American preschool children are 3.6 times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as white preschool children.

Today, Allen works to prevent exclusionary discipline and help educators recognize their own biases in how they teach. She is the keynote speaker at the national 2017 Higher Education Diversity Summit (HEDS) centered on the issues of inclusive excellence, cultural competency, ethnicity, privilege, accessibility, gender and sexual identity, and immigration.

Located in the heart of urban Denver, MSU Denver is the leader in diverse enrollment among Colorado's four-year universities with 7,812 (39.5%) students of color, and Allen is just one example of how MSU Denver has been transforming lives for more than 50 years.



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cess, trains student parents to talk to one another about their expectations. She walks them through questions like, "How do you feel about my kids jumping on the couch?"

Having kids in the dorms brings a new level of liability, too. At **Baldwin Wallace University**, Julie Candela, director of the Sprout program, works with a child-safety company and local fire marshals to ensure that the buildings are safe.

But the biggest challenges most parenting programs face involve housing and money. Endicott had planned to double the size of its program by 2017, but a housing shortage has put those plans on hold. Sprout, which has been around for 25 years, has shrunk from a high of 14 students to two, partly because of a housing crunch. The program is now exploring off-campus housing options.

Dillard University, a historically black institution in New Orleans that copied Endicott's model in 2013, has struggled to keep its student parents on campus, partly be-

cause there are cheaper options available off-campus.

Other colleges have found it hard to sustain their parent programs. Eastern Michigan University, the first campus to replicate

"Retention and graduation rates are going to start to be affected by the student-parent population."

Endicott's model, in 2012, no longer provides housing or child-care assistance, because of a lack of funds (though it hopes to revive the program). Ferris State, the second replication site, moved away from the Endicott

model in 2015 to focus on its open program.

"These programs are very successful, but they're expensive," says Autumn Green, director of the National Center for Student Parent Programs, which Endicott College opened three years ago to serve as a national hub for single-parent programs.

But Ms. Green, who was a student parent herself, thinks colleges' reluctance to create programs for student parents isn't just about money. Though student parents now represent 15 percent of enrollment at public and private four-year institutions, some college leaders assume that their colleges don't serve them, she says. They're "clinging to this idea of the traditional student as their target."

"I think colleges and universities are in for a big wake-up call, where their retention and graduation rates are going to start to be affected by the student-parent population," Ms. Green says. "Demographics are changing, and they're going to have to start addressing it or seeing the consequences of not doing so." ■



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