

# Student parents learn to manage dual roles

By Linda McCarty

Sally ate four worms for "breakfast," Tommy ran over Frankie with his big wheel, because Frankie hid his sneakers. Now, Sally has a stomach-ache, Frankie needs stitches, and mom has a test tomorrow.

Mom is a student-parent. Along with the typical work-load of tests, papers, and assignments, many college students find difficult to keep up with, the student-parent also faces the joys of parenthood. Everyday joys include changing diapers, Cub Scouts, chicken pox, and temper-tantrums. Such things cannot be dealt with by "pulling an all-nighter" or "cramming at a more convenient time."

Mothers-who-go-to school and mothers-who-work face a similar problem, namely a dual-role forcing them to compromise time with their children. But this problem differs for the student-mother. If mom has to work for financial reasons, so her children must cope. It's okay. But does a student mother have to go to school?

"We face a problem with society," says Annette Cremona, a student-mother, and mother-to-be of a second. "Most can accept a mother leaving the home if she needs to work, but they think this is fun and recreation."

**"At times you can feel very guilty and torn..."**  
Eilee Mathias  
Grad Student

One need only stop and ask a Capitol Campus student-mother in the midst of finals with two sick kids, how much fun and recreation she is having.

"It's not easy....," says Kerrie Bgorkstedt, full time student and mother of three. "I sometimes wish I had a room someplace away from the house and kids, where I could shut the door, study and that would be it."

If it's not for fun and recreation, and its not easy-then why? Enrichment, maybe, but for many student-mothers it becomes a matter of necessity. With high-unemployment, a faltering economy and increasing numbers of households headed by single parents, many families with children to support, need mom's degree.

"I'm sure there's plenty of success stories flying around about how you can make it without a degree," says Jo Griffiths, student and single mother. "But you almost have to have some kind of training to get a good job."

The schedule of a college student appears ideal to a mother who doesn't want to spend a great deal of time away from her children. Yet this is deceiving to both mother and child. Children of student-parents aren't classified amongst 'Latch-key' children, left to tend to themselves until mom comes home from work. Yet, their mom as a student has a full-time job.

"If you're a working mother, you're off to work-gone," said Rie Gentzler, an instructor in social science at Capitol campus, "while taking a full-time course load you're only gone fifteen hours a week. It can be too much flexibility...With kids it's easy to forget studies."

"Sometimes I think working mothers have it made, said Jo Griffiths. "With a nine-to-five job, they come home and that's it. Of course there's things to do, but they still have time...My working day doesn't end at 1:30 when my classes are over. I face what they face plus my studies. It means a lot of nights with three-four hours sleep."

So, the schedule of a working-mother can vary greatly from that of a student-mother. The first is very tightly structured, while the latter is much more flexible. Many student mothers find early in their career, that dealing with this flexibility become one of their most important tasks.

"Budgeting your time is so important," says Eilee Mathias, graduate student, and mother of a seven-year-old. "At times you

can feel very guilty and torn. It means choosing between my son's fine-arts program at school and studying for an exam."

"Communication with your children is a must," said Mr. Bjoralski. "You have to let them know that mom has schoolwork, but that they can come to you, that you will take time out if they need you."

While this is a good approach for older children, with younger children it is a different story. You can't tell a toddler, "Mom is

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Social Science Instructor

reading a book for school, now you go play quietly until she's finished." Most likely it may be, "No, mom has a book, don't pull anymore out of the bookcase. No, you read books you don't eat them!" This hardly makes for an enterprising study environment. As a result, most parents of the very young must put off studies until the kiddies are in bed.

Exactly how many student-parents attend Capitol Campus is

unknown. Capitol Campus has no record of it. However, with a comparatively large proportion of returning women, the likelihood of student parents is far greater than that of a typical four-year-college.

Most parents questioned feel the majority of the faculty members are understanding about problems which may arise because of their situation. Some faculty members go as far as to allow student-parents to bring their children to school on days they have off and Mom doesn't.

Mom has no idea when Mary may come down with pneumonia, or Johnnie may fall out of his tree-house and break an arm. She has to be prepared. She can't put anything off 'till the last minute.

"My first term back was really tough," recalls Bjorkstedt. "It took a lot of adjustment for both me and my kids just to get through...When I was through with my last final it was such a relief. But I got my biggest reward when I came home, walked in the door to find that my children had baked me a cake, and all around were signs: 'Way to go Mom, we knew you could do it!'"

Sometimes children can be a parent's best support.

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