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An Examination of Policies and Practices within Western Canadian Research-Intensive Universities that Support Students with Family Responsibilities

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An Examination of Policies and Practices within Western Canadian Research-Intensive Universities that Support Students with Family Responsibilities

by

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Abstract

Canadian universities have an obligation to provide accommodation based on family status; however, few have services and policies in place, and little direction is provided by provincial and federal human rights legislation. Although students with family responsibilities are an underserved population on university campuses, the global pandemic has helped thrust caregiving into the spotlight. The specific needs and experiences of post-secondary students with family responsibilities are a neglected area within the Canadian literature. Addressing the needs of this student group is an important leadership issue because it touches on many facets of institutional priorities, including student recruitment and retention; success strategies; equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization initiatives; and supports for specific populations. There are also implications for policies related to academic concessions or accommodations.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how research-intensive universities in western Canada are contemplating students with family responsibilities as a policy issue and as a priority population for services and programs. The research question was, how do research-intensive universities in western Canada support students with family responsibilities through their respective policies, services, and programs? Five secondary questions were related to (1) human rights legislation and accommodation; (2) formal policies, regulations, and governing documents; (3) student services and supports; (4) leaders' perception of their institutions' supports; and (5) promising practices.

Supporting the research design was the extant literature and policy theory. Four themes were identified from the literature: access and success, students with family responsibilities, human rights, and leadership, all of which served as conceptual lenses. Four policy dimensions:

normative, structural, constituentive, and technical (Cooper et al., 2004) served as the theoretical framework.

Using a qualitative research design, I investigated how five universities support students with family responsibilities. Data sources included publicly available institutional documents (*n*=267) and interviews with leaders (*n*=5) within student affairs.

The findings led to the proposal of the flower petal model of supporting students with family responsibilities, from which seven main findings contributed to 18 recommendations. Implications and promising practices in the areas of accommodation policies, student services, and programming are shared.

Keywords: student parents, student caregivers, family responsibilities, research-intensive, qualitative research, policy, student supports, COVID-19, post-secondary, higher education, university, Canada

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Brandy L. Usick under the supervision of Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton of the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education. The interviews reported in Chapters 5 were approved under ethics ID REB20-0322_REN1, by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) Board for the project "An examination of policies and practices within Canadian research-intensive universities that support students with family responsibilities", for which approval was issued on January 6, 2022.

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Dedication

To my son, Ambrose. You motivate me every day to be my best self. I am so proud to be your mom.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Background

Creating campuses that are family-friendly, particularly for students with family responsibilities, is a relatively recent phenomenon within Canada, with research articles first emerging in the early 2000s (Georgian College Institute of Applied Research and Innovation, 2005). However, researchers have been highlighting the needs of Canadian post-secondary caregivers since the 1990s (see Campbell, 1993; Home 1997; 1998). The notion of providing specialized services for students attending post-secondary institutions emerged to help increase retention rates and in response to a growing diverse student population and their unique needs (Dhillon et al., 2008; McGrath, 2010). Although the needs of students with family responsibilities have received little attention in the past, the focus within Canadian higher education is growing, albeit very slowly. There is a small body of literature looking at family responsibilities from the perspectives of different constituent groups, including faculty (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011); graduate students (Chesser, 2015; Pape, 2020); undergraduate students (van Rhijn, Lero et al., 2016; van Rhijn, Quosai et al., 2011; Voisin, 2016); and Indigenous students (Cox & Pidgeon, 2022). There is a handful of studies in which researchers directly or indirectly examined initiatives regarding family responsibilities funded by the federal government's Canadian Millennial Foundation, via the Millennium Research Program which is dedicated to researching access within post-secondary education. These studies included examining best practices to increase Indigenous enrolment (R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2002); exploring the state of post-secondary education for three populations, including student parents (Holmes, 2005); and compiling an inventory of current practices that support students with dependents (Georgian College Institute of Applied Research and Innovation, 2005). In addition

to federally funded research, at least three Canadian universities have struck institutional committees to explore the needs of student parents at their respective campuses and prepared reports with recommendations (University of Alberta, 2018; University of Manitoba, 2013; Whittington et al., 2004). Professional organizations have also issued policy recommendations, such as the Canadian Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, which called for better flexibility of the student aid program to support students with dependents (Piperni & Clayton, 2016). Further, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (2018), a national organization for student affairs practitioners in Canada, created a network for those who support students with family responsibilities and whose work has helped post-secondary institutions to share ideas, practices, and resources.

There is evidence of students with family responsibilities themselves calling for action and galvanizing support either within their specific academic programs (Mazze et al., 2017) or at their institutions (Cummings, 2018). Helping to highlight these efforts, the media, both locally and nationally, have reported on the experiences of students with family responsibilities (Bowness, 2018; Jakubiec, 2017). Across these sources, the specific needs of student parents include direct services such as child care, as well as policy considerations, such as family leaves, guidelines for nursing or expressing mothers, and flexible school arrangements that accommodate family responsibilities.

There is little written about family-friendly related issues within a Canadian post-secondary context. There is a larger body of literature on family-friendly campuses within the United States and, in particular, on the experiences of faculty who have family responsibilities (Anderson & Solomon, 2015; Lester & Sallee, 2009; Quinn et al., 2004; Sallee, 2014). The focus on post-secondary student parents has been bolstered by an American non-profit think tank, the

Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) (2018). This Institute created a *Student Parent Success Initiative,* a comprehensive project that supports research on and advocacy for student parents, along with offering practical resources for educators and decision makers. Since 2010, the project has generated over 50 publications on topics related to students with family responsibilities. The publications within this repository help with advocacy work. One report calls on lawmakers to prioritize the needs of student parents in COVID recovery efforts (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2020), while another provides guidance for colleges to explore the needs of student parents and to determine whether implementing collaboration with the federal program Head Start would be appropriate (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2022). Materials from presentations delivered to stakeholder groups (Reichlin Cruse, 2017; Reichlin Cruse, Karp et al., 2018) are also shared.

In addition to, beyond IWPR, there are other organizations focused on promoting the needs of student parents on higher education campuses across the United States. One is the *Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative* (Aspen Institute, n.d.), which works through its initiatives and partnerships to raise awareness and improve equity for student parents. *Generation Hope* (2022) has a similar mission, but it focuses exclusively on teen student parents. PERG Learning, in consultation with campus advocates and funded with a federal grant, developed a *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit* (Family Friendly Campus, 2023) that provides concrete strategies for universities and colleges to help promote a family-friendly campus.

Looking northward, there is a scarcity of Canadian empirical research that focuses on post-secondary students with family responsibilities (van Rhijn, Lero et al., 2016). Students with family responsibilities are also a missing demographic within the work/life scholarship (Sallee & Lester, 2017). Additionally, students with family responsibilities have not received attention

from the federal and provincial governments despite policies and initiatives to increase access to university and college by underrepresented student populations (Lero et al., 2007). Student parents are considered an underrepresented group, as they are less likely to pursue post-secondary education because of their circumstances, which include being older than the average post-secondary student and having a greater need to enroll on a part-time basis (van Rhijn, Quosai et al., 2011). Such factors can contribute to their ineligibility for programs created to promote post-secondary access, including government student aid and institutional scholarships (Lero et al., 2007; van Rhijn, Quosai et al., 2011). When they do attend post-secondary institutions, their needs are often not met, thus hindering persistence: "Student parents simply do not fit into the current models for program provision, student services, and also student finance" (van Rhijn, Quosai et al., 2011, p. 75).

Although similar literature within Canada is lean, the studies that are available help to provide some baseline information and identify areas for needed research. One research team, led by van Rhijn, contributed three important studies: one that provided data on participation rates of student parents (van Rhijn, Quosai et al., 2011), a second that examined student parents' motivations to pursue post-secondary education (van Rhijn, Lero et al., 2016), and a third that explored student parents' self-efficacy (van Rhijn & Lero, 2014). The latter two studies provided some insight into the role of student support services. In addition, a study commissioned by the Canadian Millennial Foundation (Holmes, 2005) provides a summary of participation rates, along with students' perspectives on the types and levels of support. Wilson and Rosen (1999) also contributed to this body of knowledge with findings from a longitudinal study at one urban campus that traced student parents' progress from when they arrived to when they left the

institution. These studies help to highlight the uniqueness of student parents as a population of learners worthy of attention from post-secondary institutions and higher education researchers.

Within the United States, a piece of legislation, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (2015), and as well as a pamphlet produced by the United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2013) entitled *Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students*, have helped drive the creation of policies, services, and programs within American post-secondary colleges and universities. In contrast, in Canada, although family status is one of the protected characteristics under the Canadian Human Rights Act (2018), each provincial and territorial government is responsible for its own legislation to protect against discrimination. Since 2018, there have been no additional federal or provincial acts introduced that are specific to the rights of people with family status, or to the responsibilities of organizations to provide accommodations. Moreover, Canadian case law on family status is "unsettled" (Jahanzadeh, 2012).

Within Canadian post-secondary institutions, family status is typically identified as a protected ground, but rarely are dedicated services and general supports in place. Additionally, there is limited case law and subsequent guidelines have focused on employment contexts. Presently, there is no specific guidance provided by provincial or federal human rights commissions for post-secondary environments, although The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2013) suggests caregiving is an area that workplaces and educational settings should pay attention to.

The literature on accessibility and accommodations is largely focused on persons with disabilities. Florey and Harrison (2000) distinguish between informal and formal accommodations within the American employment milieu. Informal accommodations involve

casual requests made by an employee to a supervisor. Formal accommodations involve requests that invoke the American with Disabilities (ADA) legislation. This differential between informal and formal accommodation applies to the higher education context with students with disabilities and is congruent with my knowledge and experience in this area as a student affairs practitioner and leader. Approaches to accommodations within Canadian universities can be summarized in the following three ways. First, is an informal accommodation which involves a student approaching the instructor or an administrator for flexibility through a casual process, for example through a conversation, and does not involve the student providing documentation and/or being registered with the institution's accessibility office. Second, is a formal accommodation which involves a student making a request adhering to the university's procedure which may involve registration with the accessibility office and providing appropriate documentation. The request may involve discussions between the student, faculty member, and the accessibility advisor. There is a third approach that encourages an approach that benefits all students, whether they are members of a protected characteristic or not. This may involve incorporating universal design into learning spaces and universal instructional design within curriculum and assessment.

Although most university policies related to accommodation require students with disabilities to become registered and present documentation, students with family status – those who are caregivers whether children, dependent adult (e.g., spouse or parent) – do not have this same well-worn process for seeking accommodations: There is not necessarily a clearly identified support services from which to receive assistance.

The literature also promotes the importance of creating family-friendly work and learning environments (Koppes & Wilson, 2015). Within Canada, a centralized support office to handle accommodations for family responsibilities is rare; however, the University of Saskatchewan provides such an example through the expanded the mandate of their Access and Equity Services that coordinates accommodations for students based on disability, religion, family status and gender identity (Makulowich, 2018).

Problem Statement

This study endeavoured to explore the degree to which universities are contemplating students with family responsibilities as a policy issue, particularly related to accommodations due to caregiving, or priority population related to the provision of services and programs. Students who care for dependents face "unique circumstances that can act to reduce their access" to university or college (van Rhijn, Quosai et al., 2011, p. 63). These barriers to pursuing post-secondary education include time and money (Holmes, 2005). Those who make it to post-secondary institutions are likely to perform well academically; however, they are also likely to progress slowly through their programs, interrupt their studies, or withdraw before completion (Holmes, 2005).

Addressing the needs of students with family responsibilities is an important leadership issue within Canadian higher education institutions. It touches on many facets of institutional priorities, including recruitment and retention efforts; student success strategies; equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives; and supports for key populations, including Indigenous students and international graduate students. There are also implications for institutional and faculty level policies and procedures related to supporting and accommodating students with family responsibilities. Canadian institutions are increasingly seeking to make their

environments and programs more accessible and inclusive to diverse learners, yet students who are caregivers are not typically considered in these initiatives. Although the prevalence of students with family responsibilities is growing, as evidenced by research in other countries (Pearson, 2019), this population remains under-researched within the Canadian literature. It is anticipated that attending to this special student population will continue to grow in importance within higher education (Lester & Sallee, 2009).

Research Questions

The primary research question was: How do research-intensive universities in western Canada support students with family responsibilities through their respective policies, services, and programs?

Secondary research questions were:

1. How do relevant provincial human rights legislation and family status as a protected characteristic under this law inform the type of policies, services, and programs that are available at Canadian research-intensive institutions?
2. How do formal policies, regulations, and other institutional governing documents refer to students with family responsibilities and their needs, either directly or indirectly?
3. How many of the inventory of practices are in place at the respective Canadian research-intensive institutions?
4. How do senior leaders responsible for student policies, services and programs perceive their institutions' response to supporting students with family responsibilities? How is this support for students with family responsibilities demonstrated?
5. What are the promising practices for Canadian research-intensive universities in creating campuses that support students with family responsibilities?

Assumptions

Students with family responsibilities continue to be an under-served population deserving of further research within the Canadian context. The limited literature does, however, provide some direction; accordingly, assumptions were made at the time of designing and carrying out the research. The first assumption was that universities included within this study had evidence of policies, services, and/or programs related to supporting students with family responsibilities; specifically, information would be readily available on their institutional websites. The second assumption was that participants – leaders within student affairs/services – recruited from each of the five universities had perspectives to share related to students with family responsibilities and would provide these perspectives freely and truthfully, even if it meant casting their respective institutions in a poor light.

Delimitations

Delimitations are "conditions or parameters that the research intentionally imposes in order to limit the scope of the study" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 12). Several decisions were made in the research design that narrowed the focus of the research. First, although family responsibilities impact all constituent groups at a university (faculty, staff, and students), this research focused specifically on students with family responsibilities, including those who provide care to children, dependents, and /or elders. As a former practitioner and now leader within student affairs, my primary focus is on students and their success. Second, I interviewed leaders not students with family responsibilities or student leaders. Through this research, my objective was to examine what universities are doing to support students, as perceived by those responsible for overseeing student services and as evidenced in the public documents on

websites including policies. Finally, this study looked exclusively at western Canadian research-intensive universities and specifically at those belonging to the U15.

Definition of Key Terms

The definitions for the terms used within this research were informed by the literature and legislation and helped delimit the scope of the examination.

Accommodation – The term accommodation refers to the obligations of employers and service providers to adjust rules, policies, or practices to enable full participation of persons with personal characteristics that are protected grounds under human rights legislation (e.g., disability, religion, gender, family status) (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2021).

Family – The definition of family for this study is intentionally broad and inclusive. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2014) provides this definition:

> [Family] includes family members who do not live in the same household, and relationships from bonds of blood or law, including common-law. It includes relationships between parents and children (including adoptive and foster children), and with spouses (marital and common law), siblings, in-laws, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, cousins, grandparents, and grandchildren. Families can also include relationships not defined by blood or legal bonds. This may include "chosen families," such as strong friendships and communities where unrelated persons provide care normally provided by nuclear family members. These relationships may be particularly important for Aboriginal people or people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. (p. 2)

Family-friendly – The term family-friendly captures policies and practices that facilitate caregivers to "balance and integrate the demands of the workplace with the demands of home or family life" (Center for the Education of Women, 2005, p. 2). Family-friendly is often used

interchangeably with work-family and work-life, although it is important to note that the latter is more inclusive than the former. Within the literature, work-family refers to the balance between one's job and family responsibilities (Sallee & Lester, 2017). Work-life extends the definition of work-family to consider the array of family forms (Barnett, 1999), as well as to include all commitments outside of work (Sallee & Lester, 2017).

Family responsibilities – The term family responsibilities refers to caregiving of those who are part of one's family, as defined above. The act of caregiving refers to care provided to family, which, as defined above, includes one's children, dependents and/or elders. The literature tends to focus on the caregiving of children; thus, within this study, reference to forms of caregiving - for example child care, dependents care, or elder care – will be referred to specifically. In some instances, students may have multiple caregiving demands; for example, they may be caring for children as well as parents, they are often referred to as a sandwich generation (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2006; Potter, 2016).

Student Affairs and/or Services – This is the name given to the cluster of units within post-secondary institutions that focus on student learning and development. There may be differences across institutions about the specific units that may be part of these divisions or departments, including, for example:

> [Indigenous] student success, academic advising, academic success, campus life, career development, counselling, disability services, international student success, faith and spirituality, financial advising, health care, health promotion and education, leadership development, recreation, recruitment and transition, registrarial services, strategic enrollment management, student housing, and a wide range of other roles that support student success and learning. (CACUSS, 2017, para 1)

Support – The term "support" is used within the research question to refer to a university's response to supporting students with caregiving needs. Supports capture those policies, services and programs developed to respond to the diverse and complex needs of students. To understand what is meant by support within the context of the study, it is important to consider the role of student affairs or services within Canadian post-secondary institutions. From the late 1800s to the 1930s, the institution served "*in loco parentis* ("in place of parents"), wherein campus personnel were expected to play an authoritative role in students' lives, with close monitoring and careful regulation" (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010, p. 8). This early model of student services evolved from strictly disciplinarian to roles that acknowledged the specialized work of attending to the needs of students. In these early years, a dean of students' role was often filled by an academic who was seen to have skills in creating trusting relationships with the student body (Sandeen, 2011). These positions created informal networks across other institutions so that they could learn and share with each other (Sandeen, 2011). Student services began to move towards professionalization with the massification of higher education after the Second World War in response to supporting veterans whose needs were distinctly different and more complex than those of the traditional student (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010); consequently, and issues of persistence and retention emerged (Dhillon et al., 2008). Today, the field of student affairs or student services (see definition above) provides a wide range of functions and specialized supports and programs within post-secondary institutions.

Policy – A policy is a "vehicle through which colleges, universities, and systems of higher education work to sustain and improve as they strive to enact their missions, goals and objectives" (Allan et al., 2009, p. 1). Approved by university-governing bodies (e.g., Senate, General Council, Board of Governors), policies accomplish the following:

- set out guiding principles for institutional activities
- establish responsibilities and requirements for various actors
- articulate or advance institutional missions or mandates
- seek to reduce institutional risks
- ensure compliance with applicable laws (Olding & Yip, 2014, p. 2)

Policies answer the *why* through identifying the vision, purpose, and/or goals. Procedures answer the *how* and operationalize the processes to be followed. The policies that are the focus of this research are those that inform decision making about or for students, specifically those students with family responsibilities. At Canadian universities, institutional policies and procedures are approved through the formal governance structure and are available within the university calendar, website, and/or student handbook.

Service – A service – specifically student service – "addresses students' fundamental and development needs" (Ching & Agbayani, 2019, p. 192). In the context of this research, this term refers to the services that are provided to students, which may be general in nature (that is, available to all students) or specifically targeted to students with caregiver responsibilities.

Program – A program is a set of activities, including services, that are delivered to a meet a particular need (e.g., to remove barriers to success) or objective (e.g., to encourage engagement in experiential learning) (Ching & Agbayani, 2019, p. 192). Within this research, a program refers to a general program that is available to all students, or to a program that was developed to specifically meet the needs of students with caregiving responsibilities.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter one, I provide background on the topic under examination: supporting students with family responsibilities within higher education. This chapter also includes a presentation of

the problem statement, purpose and introduction of the primary and secondary research questions, delimitations, assumptions, and a list of defined key terms that will be used throughout the document. In chapter two, I present the outcome of the literature review through the four emergent themes: access and succession, students with family responsibilities, human rights, and leadership. I conclude each subsection with key findings and identify research implications. The chapter ends with a presentation of the key elements and positioning of the research within the larger literature. In chapter three the methodology for the research is discussed and the epistemological approach is shared. The elements of the research design, including identification of research sites, population, data sources, data collection and analysis, are discussed. Trustworthiness and ethical matters are considered, and I share a reflection on my role as researcher and its influence on the study. The findings are presented across two chapters. In chapter four, document analysis of the policy and website documents is shared, and in chapter five, I present the main themes that emerged during the thematic analysis of the document and interview data. In chapter six I present and unpack the flower-petal model of supporting students with family responsibilities. As part of the discussion, I propose eighteen recommendations and conclude by sharing limitations and areas for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

Within this chapter, I situate my research within the broader literature and describe the steps I took to review relevant research articles and grey matter. To provide some orientation, historical context is provided, along with the impact of the global pandemic. The themes that emerged from the literature review itself were access and success, students with family responsibilities, human rights, and leadership. Each of these areas is reviewed below and I conclude with implications for the research. I end the section with a summary of the literature, and I revisit my research question.

Description of Process

The review of the literature was an iterative process, as the initial review informed the research questions with subsequent and ongoing reviews that helped to inform the conceptual framework. I began my search for scholarly material that included peer reviewed articles, books, and dissertations. I started with Google Scholar, then searched the ERIC, EBSCO, and Family and Society Studies Worldwide. Publication date was not used as a delimiting search, as the available literature on this topic is small. I had to expand my scope and the type of literature reviewed because, as Ravitch and Riggan (2012) explain, "while much of the work resides within academic journals and books, it may also be found in policy or government research, or in reports produced through foundations, not-for-profit, and advocacy organizations" (p. 11). To explore the legal component of the research problem, I consulted databases that included HEINonline, CanLII, CHRR Online, and LabourSource. I searched the Canadian and respective provincial human rights commissions' website to locate relevant statutes and reports. This

review of the literature will continue through all stages of the research to ensure that what is included is current and comprehensive. I turn now to provide background on the research topic.

Historical Context

For the past several decades, the increasing number of women in the workforce has brought the challenge of caregiving into view and with it, consideration of how to support workers who must balance home and work responsibilities. As a result, there is a now a body of literature examining the conflicts between work and family commitments, and role theory emerged as a prevailing framework (Sallee & Lester, 2017). From 1950 through to the early 1970s, a "separate spheres model" (Barnett, 1999, p. 146) was proposed, which saw work and family as very separate from each other, and the relationship between the two as one of conflict when there was no clear delineation of boundaries. In late 1970s to 2000s, an "overlapping spheres model" (Barnett, 1999, p. 150) emerged that saw work and family roles overlapping. Instead of a focus on role conflict, there was a shift to identifying the benefits of the integration of these roles. The rise in dual-income families introduced a "work-life integration model" (Barnett, 1999, p. 151), that emphasizes the need to consider the demands of both partners' work alongside family commitments.

Clark (2000), dissatisfied with the theories on work and family to date, developed a new theory – work/family border theory – that focuses on how individuals "manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance" (p. 751). Within this theory, work and family are separate spheres "likened to two different countries" (p. 751). Individuals are seen as border crossers who make daily commutes between the spheres. These border crossers may experience balance if there is minimal role conflict between work and family, influenced by the degree of difference between the two spheres and transition required to

function, not unlike visiting a country where the language, culture and customs are similar or different. Clark's (2000) theory can be used "descriptively...and prescriptively" (p. 767) to understand work family conflict and to identify ways to ameliorate sources of tension.

Work-life became a topic of investigation within higher education in the 1980s (Koppes et al., 2015). The focus on work-life and the push to create family-friendly campuses originally focused on women; however, the approach evolved to include parents of both genders (Lester & Sallee, 2009). In some instances, this focus has become more inclusive by considering the work-life balance needs of caregivers and non-caregivers, the latter seeking balance for non-work activities (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Most of the work-life studies within higher education have focused on faculty (Lester & Salle, 2009). There has been a particular concentration examining those working within research-intensive universities, in part because of the concern over improving the recruitment and retention of women (Koppes & Wilson, 2015).

Large-scale surveys in the United States, funded by private and federal government agencies and organizations, led to a heightened focus on policy and programs to support work-life balance (Sallee & Lester, 2017). Work-family scholarship in the US received critical financial support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (2023) through its creation of the *Workplace, Workforce, and Working Families Program*. In collaboration with the American Council on Education, Alfred P. Sloane Awards for Faculty Career Flexibility was created that provided financial support for institutions to create policies and programs to support faculty, in particular women, to pursue tenure. In a follow-up study by Thomas and McLaughlin (2009), institutions that applied for funding, as well as those five research-intensive institutions that received the award from round one, were contacted. The authors discovered that most of the institutions had policies that provided faculty with career flexibility, including teaching load

reduction for family care, tenure clock stoppage, paid leave during and after birth, the opportunity for part-time appointments, and phased retirement options. In addition to policies, other highlights included strategic awareness campaigns, flexible work arrangements, and strategies for tracking and assessment. However, Thomas and McLaughlin (2009) also identified challenges with implementation. Common roadblocks included obtaining buy-in from key senior leaders, getting initiatives prioritized within the budget process, creating an environment for sustainable change, managing the impact of legislation, and dealing with the complexities faced within some academic disciplines (Thomas & McLaughlin, 2009).

Canadian post-secondary institutions are behind the US in terms of creating comprehensive programs to support faculty, staff, and students with family responsibilities. The need is perhaps not as pronounced within Canada, given that we already enjoy fundamental rights and benefits as workers. Canadians are entitled to parental leave without fear of losing their job and are able to apply for employment insurance benefits to provide financial support during the leave. However, in Canada, as in the US, there is a stigma about the use of these policies (Koppes & Wilson, 2015). Childbearing and rearing often coincides with timeframes for tenure and promotion. Thus, although research institutions tend to have evidence of more family-friendly policies, there are also fewer women faculty members and fewer still with tenure or tenure-track appointments (Center for the Education of Women, 2005). There is a ripple effect when women are challenged to both pursue academic careers and raise a family. Faculty serve as role models, and decisions to opt out of tenure-track positions because of challenges with work and family or choosing not to have children at all can communicate that the academy is not welcoming to caregiving responsibilities (Springer et al., 2009).

Within the literature, there is the concept of the "ideal worker" (Chesser, 2015, p. 315), which is the worker who is wholly committed to their career. Equivalent to the ideal worker is the "ideal student" (Beeler, 2016, p. 69), who reflects those characteristics of a typical student in the era before the massification of post-secondary education. This ideal student, who is often referred to as the traditional student, is between 17 and 21, single, childless, studies full-time, and "is dedicated solely to the responsibilities of being a student" (Beeler, 2016, p. 69). Lynch (2010) has labeled these students as a "care-less" student, one who does not have caregiving responsibilities. Wilson and Rosen (1999) caution that "when universities or colleges overlook the family needs of their faculty and staff, they will inevitably ignore the dependent care needs of students" (p. 3). Even as institutions are focusing on EDI efforts and encouraging students from diverse background, caregiving needs are minimized or ignored (Lynch, 2022).

Although family flexibility was originally seen as a gendered issue, in today's environment, it is important that the perspective be inclusive of both (all) genders (Sallee & Lester, 2009). A move to a more family-friendly work and study environment benefits more than just women; it also supports men with caregiving responsibilities; single parents; those in same-sex relationships; those involved in other forms of caregiving, including dependent and eldercare; and "others whose lives do not reflect the traditional nuclear family" (Hollenshead et al., 2005, p. 4). Although the literature focuses more on faculty, there is increasing attention being paid to supports for staff and students within higher education (Lester & Sallee, 2009).

Current Context

The global pandemic that forced Canadian universities to pivot quickly to remote teaching and service provision in March 2020 has had a tremendous impact on the caregiving discourse within higher education and in society more generally. COVID-19 and the associated

health restrictions have greatly impacted parenting routines and paid work. With the closure of schools and child care centres, parents, particularly mothers, faced pressures such as “intensive work” and/or “intensive parenting”, which negatively impacted the well-being of parent and child (Calarco et al., 2020-a). Mothers were also to more likely to take leave or reduce their hours from paid work, or lose employment, those with less education were more severely impacted (Calarco et al., 2020-b). Within academia, the gendered division of labour at home was also pronounced and has had a deleterious impact on women’s academic productivity, as evidenced by a reduction in scholarship and publications (Flaherty, 2020; Smith-Carrier et al., 2021).

The pandemic also impacted student caregivers, and those from marginalized groups experienced more severe outcomes, such as closures of child care facilities and schools, role strain, loss or reduction of employment, increased family conflicts, and negative mental health (Lederer et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2021; Nikiforidou & Holmes, 2022). Students who were parenting children at home faced challenges in completing courses, given the level of distraction. Specifically, participating in synchronous lessons and writing online exams were particularly difficult (Arowoshola, 2020).

However, the pandemic also created opportunities for students with family responsibilities, as it afforded increased flexibility and accessibility. Authors have highlighted the importance to reflect on what lessons have been learned through remote learning and how to further improve teaching and learning environments (Andrewartha et al., 2022).

The present study focused specifically on students with family responsibilities, but with the recognition that caregiving needs and challenges are impacted by many constituent groups on Canadian university campuses. The remainder of this chapter provides an exploration of four

themes that arose through the review of the literature: access and success, students with family responsibilities, human rights, and leadership.

Theme 1: Access and Success Perspective

The first theme looks at the changing landscape of post-secondary institutions. Trow (1973) identified that within advanced societies, systems of higher education transition from elite to mass phases, and eventually to universal access. Across the world, policies have been introduced in part to provide increased access to higher education to help promote a healthy democracy, as well as meet the growing needs of the knowledge-based economy (Smith, 2011; Usher, 2016). Consequently, the student population has become more diverse regarding race, gender, and social class (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2011). There are three main objectives for this "equality agenda" (Brink, 2009, p. 3). First, access is a human right and social justice issue. Second, there may be a need for a "corrective action" (p. 4) within a particular country. And third, historically under-represented groups need to gain access.

Canada has some of the highest post-secondary participation rates in the world (OECD, 2021; Zeman & Frenette, 2021). However, taking a closer look at the data reveals that it is not a leader in university degree completion (Zeman & Frenette, 2021). The issue of access to post-secondary education remains an important policy consideration within Canada for two main reasons: first, is the maintenance of post-secondary education rates must be maintained to ensure that highly skilled workers can meet labour demand and second, the differential rates of participations within the population, must be addressed (Jones, 2014). Consequently, provinces have focused on access for underrepresented populations (Jones, 2014).

Promoting equity in education must include a focus on students with family responsibilities. In the US, the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2022) highlights the

linkages of race and ethnicity with participation rates of students with children. As a sample statistic, 47 percent of African American female undergraduates are parents of children (Institute for Women's Policy Research, n.d.). Within Canada, research sponsored by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation identified student parents as an underrepresented group within post-secondary institutions, particularly at universities (Holmes, 2005). The need for younger workers to support our economy will necessitate more family-friendly policies; "post-secondary education is a major reason for delaying parenthood, while at the same time early parenthood is a barrier to obtaining a post-secondary education" (Holmes, 2005, p. 57). Concurrently, institutions have had to increase their student enrolment outside of their domestic markets to make up the difference in the actual and predicted shortfall of student registrants, due to the demographic realities of a declining youth population.

Institutions have increasingly amped up recruitment efforts, while also turning to developing and implementing overall strategic enrolment management plans that align with the institution's strategic plan. Beyond recruitment, a critical component of strategic enrolment management plans is retention and strategic tactics to enhance student success (Gottheil & Smith, 2011).

Institutions are looking at how to improve student retention, persistence, and the graduation rates of student populations that have been historically underrepresented. These groups include, but are not limited to, students who are adult/older, first generation, Indigenous, and/or disabled (Holmes, 2005; Kirby, 2009). Included in these groups as well are students with caregiving responsibilities. For example, nearly one third of Indigenous students attending universities and about half of those enrolled in community colleges are student parents (Holmes, 2005)

There are strong societal and governmental expectations that students from traditionally underrepresented groups will have increased access to post-secondary education. To help increase access to post-secondary institutions for under-represented groups, governments and institutions must help students to overcome the barriers they face, which include financial resources, socio economic status, and family background (Wiggers & Arnold, 2011). Institutions, in their support of student accessibility, must consider how to do things differently and look at novel solutions; it is imperative to move away from "one-size-fits-all approaches" (p. 11), as these will not meet the needs of a diverse student population (Kirby, 2009). Additionally, "a specialized policy approach is necessary if institutions are to improve access for individuals facing unique circumstances and challenges" (Kirby, 2009, p 11-12).

Success means not only degree completion but also the consideration of positive individual impacts (employment, improved social determinants of health) and societal impacts (contribution to economy, informed and active citizens) (Wiggers & Arnold, 2011). The relationship between student supports and student success is complex. The expectation, however, is that universities and colleges provide needed academic and personal supports and offer flexibility in their programs to accommodate the needs of these diverse student populations.

Student access and success is the first theme to be reviewed within the literature. There is strong rationale for institutions to promote accessibility. The question to be explored through the proposed research is whether universities are demonstrating their commitment to the student subpopulation through institutional and academic policies. What initiatives are in place at Canadian research universities that support students with caregiving responsibilities?

I turn now to the second element, the student caregiver perspective, which includes identifying the prevalence rates, characteristics, and needs of students with family responsibilities.

Theme 2: Students with Family Responsibilities Perspective

In this section, the available literature is reviewed to gain a better understanding of students with family responsibilities as a unique subpopulation at universities and colleges.

Prevalence and Characteristics

The literature in the US on students with dependent responsibilities is considerable in comparison to what is available within Canada. The Institute for Women's Policy Research provides up to date statistics on and analysis of a variety of equity issues, in particular those related to student parents. A recent briefing paper by the Institute for Women's Policy Research revealed what is meant by the "independent" student (an alternative to the term "non-traditional"), and that these students are now considered to be in the majority on campuses (Reichlin Cruse, Eckerson et al., 2018, p. 1). To be considered an independent student, one of several possible criteria has to be met: being "at least 24 years old; married; a graduate or professional student; a veteran; an orphan, in foster care, or ward of the court; a member of the armed forces; an emancipated minor; someone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; or having legal dependents other than a spouse" (p. 1). This definition is tied to the federal funding available to potentially eligible students. One of the defining characteristics of "independent" students is caring for a dependent. In the US, 26 percent of the total undergraduate student body is student parents and, regionally, this statistic varies from 18 to 35 percent (Noll et al., 2017).

There is no equivalent to the Institute for Women's Policy Research within Canada. However, for a short time there was in the early 2000s, The Canadian Millennial Scholarship Foundation was formed through an act of Parliament that concluded in January 2010 (Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, n.d.). The Canadian Millennial Scholarship Foundation was a program set up by the federal government to distribute financial aid to students who experienced barriers to participating in higher education (Neill, 2007). There were several research papers generated because of this program, all of which helped to provide a snapshot of students within the timeframe of 2000-2010. Relevant studies funded by this program include one by Georgian College Institute of Applied Research and Innovation, which undertook an extensive review of policies and supports at Canadian institutions for student parents. The outcome of this study was the identification of ten key practices that helped to inform the inventory used for data collection discussed in chapter 3.

A research team led by van Rhijn has helped to fill in the gap with a series of studies focusing on student parents. One article of note, *A Profile of Undergraduate Student Parents in Canada (*van Rhijn, Quosai, et al., 2011), provides statistics on the prevalence of student parents. As well characteristics drawn from existing federal data sets from the period of 1976-2005. van Rhijn, Quosai, and Lero (2011) found among all post-secondary students, student parents accounted for between 11% and 16% of total enrollment between 1976 and 2004. There are regional differences, with the prairie provinces having student parents account for 21% of enrollment and Atlantic provinces for 16%. Overall, the authors found that participation rates of non-parent students outpace those of parent students.

Within this study, van Rhijn, Quosai et al., (2011) were also able to identify characteristics of student parents. They found that those with caregiving responsibilities were

more likely to study full-time and noted that full-time enrollment increased by 124% from 1976 to 2005. Student parents were more likely to be 30 to 44 years old, and thus generally older than non-parent students, who were predominantly in the 15 to 29-year-old age category. Student parents were also more likely to be female and partnered (married or common-law).

In terms of employment, van Rhijn, Quosai et al., found that student parents and non-parent students were similarly likely to work (over 80%), but that student parents were more likely to be in full-time employment year-round. Part-time student parents were more likely to be employed than non-parent students. However, full-time student parents were less likely to work than full-time non-parent students. The reasons, the authors proposed, are either because students have enough resources within the family not to work, or because if they must rely on financial aid the eligibility requirements restrict the number of hours of paid work.

The attempt to create a profile of undergraduate student parents led van Rhijn, Quosai et al., to conclude that student parents are a "diverse group made up of a number of different sub-populations" (p. 75). Student parents have demonstrably different "life situations and study patterns" (p. 75) and consequently they "simply do not fit into the current models for program provision, student services and also student finance" (p. 75).

Needs

As the demographic profiles of undergraduate students change, it is predicted that their demands for accommodations related to family responsibilities will grow (Sallee & Lester, 2009). Certainly, the diversity of student populations has had a considerable impact on the centralized administrative services that provide services directly to both students and faculty. In the past two decades, there has been tremendous growth in Canadian student affairs, with increased demand and complexity (McGrath, 2010). This growth includes the emergence of

specialized services and supports, including (but not limited to) accessibility services for students with disabilities, international student services, Indigenous student centres, human rights departments, advocacy, and dependent care.

Research carried out by the University of Toronto through surveys fielded between 2011-2016 provides insight into the challenges that students with family responsibilities face. These findings were shared as part of a presentation at the CACUSS conference by Francis et al., (2017). These main findings can be clustered under four main themes: academic, personal, emotional, and relational supports. Academic supports included managing time effectively, given competing commitments, as well as locating distraction-free study space. Students were also looking for advice on self-advocacy, particularly in relation to communicating with faculty and staff. Personal supports included assistance with locating reasonably priced child care, housing and transportation, as well as help accessing financial aid. Emotional support included learning better strategies to manage stress and feelings of guilt, as well as access to mental health supports and services. Relational support included help with maintaining relationships with partners and children and improving communication strategies. Students were also looking for help in building community with other students to address the isolation and loneliness felt by student caregivers.

These challenges align with what has been identified in the literature about corresponding supports and services. Georgian College Institute of Applied Research and Innovation (2005) reviewed how Canadian and American post-secondary institutions support students with dependents, and identified ten key services and practices: child care; counselling, family housing, groups and associations; food banks; health care; financial support; transportation; lactation and diaper-changing areas; and academic programming and scheduling. In 1993,

Campbell carried out a qualitative study inspired by the large number of mature students she worked with in an academic support centre she led. The students were typically women who were attending to university after marriage and children. When the students were asked for their recommendations on how university could improve, child care was on top of the list as well as counselling and a space dedicated to mature students to provide opportunities for peer-to-peer support.

In addition to specialized services, flexibility of program delivery and individual consideration for course requirements are needed. Not surprisingly, women with family responsibilities tend to be over-represented in online programs, which offer flexible delivery that allows for balancing school and family commitments (Lewington, 2018). Flexibility is high on the list of those students who care for dependents. A Canadian research study found that students with family responsibilities were able to manage their academic commitments if their respective programs understood their needs and provide accommodations (Wilson & Rosen, 1999). The authors found that an academic program's responsiveness ranged from empathetic to dismissive, and that this difference in response correlated with the gender representation of a particular program. Faculty and staff from more female-dominated programs were more sympathetic to extensions and absences due to family responsibilities than those from male dominated programs.

Undergraduate students typically can take time away from their studies if they are enrolled in a program that does not have a time-to-completion requirement. However, professional programs (for example law, medicine, engineering, etc.) and graduate programs have time-to-completion requirements as well as requirements for ongoing registration.

Consequently, policies such as parental leaves are vital to students who must step away from their studies due to pregnancy and caregiving.

The Canadian Federation of Medical Students prepared a report that explores the challenges of undergraduate learners with parental responsibilities, provides the existing medical school program policies on parental leave, and proposes three key recommendations (Mazze et al., 2017). The first recommendation is to increase and improve accessibility to undergraduate medical education for student parents through curricular flexibility, greater transparency, and improved facilities. The second recommendation is to foster a strong, supportive, and family-friendly environment for student parents through peer support and mentorship. The third recommendation is the provision of special considerations to medical students during clerkship, including when participating in residency interviews or completing elective placements at another university.

In the US, some research-intensive universities have extended policies that include paid leave to graduate students (Lester & Sallee, 2009, p. x). These paid leaves help to address the lack of recognition of the serious financial implications graduate students face when balancing pregnancy and childbirth with academic studies. This lack of recognition is explained in part by graduate students not having “employment status” (Sallee, Dawson et al., 2009). Whether or not graduate students are engaged in paid academic work at their institutions, graduate students with family responsibilities often have more in common with faculty than with traditional undergraduate students.

Looking globally for evidence of research focused on students with family responsibilities uncovered two relevant articles. A German team, Knopf et al., (2021) conducted a systematic review on research examining the experiences of university students caring for older

persons. The handful of studies included in the review identified as themes determinants for caregiving, conflicts between academic commitments and caregiving, benefits, and challenges of caregiving for students, and the role of student supports. A UK team, Runacres et al., (2021) completed a scoping review to identify themes in the literature focused on student carers in universities. The review identified several themes including negative impacts caregiving has on several aspects of life including (a) physical and mental health, (b) academic performance and social life, and (c) finances and employment opportunities.

Additionally academic commitments can adversely impact ability to provide care. Informal and formal supports were also identified and the need for flexibility from academic programs was highlighted. These two articles from global research community helped to underscore relevance of the present research.

In this section, the literature was reviewed to gain a better understanding of the prevalence, characteristics, and needs of students with family responsibilities. The literature, although not substantial, underscores that students with family responsibilities are not a homogenous group. There is some consensus on the types of supports that are needed to help students with family responsibilities be more successful. This unique student population still appears to be generally underserved on most Canadian campuses. More research is needed to help understand how Canadian universities are attending to students with family responsibilities. Do these institutions know how many students with family responsibilities are on their campuses? What services and supports are provided? What policies help with accessibility?

The third theme is one that can be best captured as human rights, as it involves looking at human rights legislation at both the federal and provincial levels, as well as policies introduced by universities.

Theme 3: Human Rights Perspective

Caregiving is very much a gendered issue (Sallee & Lester, 2017), although that is changing with more men (and those identifying as men) becoming involved in caregiving duties (Prentice & Pankratz, 2003). A binary consideration of gender belies the challenges faced by those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. In addition, persons who are racialized and/or Indigenous face unique problems related to caregiving (The Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2006).

The Canadian Human Rights Act (2018) protects persons in Canada from discrimination who are either employed by and/or who receive services from the federal government. Each province and territory have its own human rights laws (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.) that protect persons from discrimination in those areas where the province or territory has jurisdiction, which include work environments, as well as the provision of services, such as schools, housing, and businesses (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

Family status is one of thirteen protected characteristics under the Canadian Human Rights law (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014) and within each of the provincial and territorial human rights acts, except for New Brunswick (Poskitt & Wojda, 2015). However, that omission was remedied in 2017, with New Brunswick adding family status to their law (New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, 2017). As a result, discrimination in employment or the provision of services, which includes education, based on both marital and family status is prohibited in every Canadian jurisdiction. However, each province and territory may define family status differently (Poskitt & Wojda, 2015), as well as establish their own tests for responding to complaints filed on the grounds of family status (Akgungor & Zurbrigg, 2011). In addition to the variability in case law, the ground of family status is generally misunderstood.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2006) released a report which highlighted the challenges of accommodating for family status. They explain that family status is the least understood grounds under the code and that there is a lack of awareness about the protections afforded.

"The Canadian Human Rights Act has driven progressive social change because individuals came forward to insist on its application" (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 3). Seeking redress through a human rights complaint is one such important application. The test that is used to respond to human rights complaints will depend on the legislation and the corresponding case law. The test to evaluate discrimination based on one of the thirteen protected characteristics originated within an employment context; it is applicable to other contexts, and to education in particular.

Within Canada, the jurisdiction of leaves is shared across many players: workplaces, provinces and territories, and the federal government. The provincial or territorial government's employment standards determine the length of a maternity leave and parental leave. These provisions provide the right for a mother to take leave at the end of, or immediately following, a pregnancy; and parental leave is provided for mothers and fathers to care for the child after birth or adoption. Governments, such the Government of Manitoba, have standards that allow for employees to take a leave and be assured of returning to a position when the leave is over (Government of Manitoba, 2018). The federal government, through employment insurance, provides the paid benefit for those who are eligible. The Government of Canada (2018) provides for maternity and parental employment insurance benefits. Mothers who cannot work because they are pregnant or have recently given birth are eligible for maternity benefits. Parents caring for a newborn or newly adopted child or children are eligible for parental benefits. The minimum

an employer must provide is outlined by the employment standards, which allow for maternity and parental leaves. There is no requirement to pay employees while on leave. However, many employers offer their own benefits that exceed the amount that an employee may be eligible for under the federal program. Typically, university leave policies provide salary top ups for maternity and parental leaves for faculty and staff (Prentice & Pankratz, 2003).

Employment leaves of absence and employment insurance benefits typically do not extend to the academic context when considering the role of the student, at least not in Canada. In the US, there are some institutions that provide paid leave benefits to graduate students who are already receiving paid support (Springer et al., 2009). There are some protections regarding leaves. Students may be eligible for a leave within their program. Normally, there are maternity and parental leaves for students enrolled in professional undergraduate programs or graduate programs. Students enrolled in undergraduate programs that do not have time restrictions for degree completion typically do not need to seek a formal leave.

Although there are protections in place to accommodate pregnant women and new parents, a murky area exists once that leave ends and employees return to work or students return to school. These caregiving responsibilities continue but supportive policies may not be in place. Additionally, caregiving extends beyond children, it applies to others who are considered part of one's family.

Canadian jurisprudence has been shaped by two cases that propose conflicting approaches to accommodations within the workplace based on family status (Poskitt & Wojda, 2015; Jahanzadeh, 2012). First is the *British Columbia, Campbell River and North Island Transition Society* (2004). This case involved a woman with four children. The woman's employer made changes to her work schedule that interfered with her ability to provide ongoing

care for one of her children with severe special needs. She requested an accommodation from her employer but was refused. Subsequently, she filed a human rights complaint. The judicial review of this adjudicator's decision resulted in the development of a prima facie test of discrimination based on family status (Poskitt & Wojda, 2015, Jahanzadeh, 2012). When applying the Campbell River test, the prima facie case of discrimination is met "when a change in a term or condition of employment imposed by an employer result in a serious interference with a substantial parental or other family duty or obligation of the employee" (*British Columbia, Campbell River and North Island Transition Society*, 2004, para 39).

Campbell River has received much criticism, as it presented a threshold for proving that discrimination based on family status is higher and stricter than the thresholds that exist for other protected characteristics (Poskitt & Wojda, 2015). The decision within *Canada (Attorney-General) v Johnstone* 2014 FCA 110 rejected the Campbell River test and instead introduced another approach. The Johnstone case involves the Canadian Border Services Agency and their refusal to accommodate an employee's request for a compressed work week to help balance parental caregiving responsibilities. The employee's husband was also employed by same agency and the nature of their work made child care challenging. (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013). As a result of the decision within the *Johnstone* case, a new test to prove prima facie discrimination was introduced wherein an applicant must demonstrate that:

a. the child is under his or her care and supervision;
b. the child care obligation at issue engages the individual's legal responsibility for that child, as opposed to personal choice;

c. the individual has made reasonable efforts to meet those child care obligations through reasonable alternative solutions, and that no such alternative solution is reasonably accessible; and
d. the impugned workplace rule interferes in a manner that is more than trivial or insubstantial with the fulfillment of the child care obligation. (Gaucher, 2016, para. 7)

The *Johnstone* test makes clear that that there is "no level of 'acceptable' discrimination a person must first endure before requesting accommodation" (Jahanzadeh, 2012, p. 7). Another feature within the *Johnstone* case is the understanding that the direction of the conflict is not one way. Within the Campbell River test, conflict arises when an employer changes the terms or conditions of employment and does not seem to contemplate the reverse. Within *Johnstone*, it is acknowledged that the duty to accommodate may be triggered if there is a change with employee's family situation (Jahanzadeh, 2012; Poskitt & Wojda, 2015).

Across Canadian jurisdictions, these conflicting tests to determine prima facie discrimination based on family status have resulted in inconsistent decisions (Akgungor & Zurbrigg, 2011) in part because of how "highly fact-specific" these cases are (Poskitt & Wojda, 2015, p. 91). The challenge is striking a balance between applying a test that too strict in its definition of family status discrimination, as in the case of Campbell, or one that is too broad, as in the case of Johnstone (Jahanzadeh, 2012). Different jurisdictions have selected one test over the other or have landed somewhere between the two (Poskitt & Wojda, 2015).

Another case of note is Misetich v. Value Village Stores Inc. (2016), which looked at elder care. In this case, the allegation was that the accommodation the woman's employer was proposing to accommodate her temporary medical disability discriminated against her based on eldercare responsibilities. The employee indicated that as caregiver for her elderly mother she

prepared her dinner. In this case, the arbitrator did not apply the Johnstone test after identifying several challenges with the test, including a concern that the existing tests "have conflated the test for discrimination and accommodation" (Misetich v. Value Village Stores Inc., 2016, para. 48). To illustrate, complainants, to establish discrimination, would need to demonstrate that they were unable to accommodate themselves (Gaucher, 2016). In essence, those bringing forward grounds on family status should not be treated any differently. This case underscores that context matters. To reach the threshold, a complainant must go beyond "simply establish[ing] a negative impact on a family need. The negative impact must result in a real disadvantage to the parent/child relationship and the responsibilities that flow from that relationship, and/or to the employee's work" (Misetich v. Value Village Stores Inc., 2016, para. 54). Within this case law, additional considerations were raised. Complainants must actively be searching themselves for a remedy to their situation and exhausting all networks, including seeking assistance from other family members and exploring other supports and resources. Once discrimination is established, the employer and the employee must work together to identify an accommodation and be open to considering alternatives.

There are four principles emerging from the case law that serve as guidelines for both employers and employees (Akgungor & Zurbrigg, 2011). First, there is the focus on need versus preference. For example, it is not discrimination if a parent is citing challenges locating child care but is limiting available options out of choice, not necessity. Second is the need for self-accommodation, which means taking steps to exhaust all available options. Third, the employer must be open to and consider fair alternatives suggested by the employee to meet work commitments. An employer must not refuse a requested accommodation from the employee unless the employer can demonstrate that a threshold of undue hardship has been met; for

example, the requested accommodation may place excessive demands and/or require substantial resources that the employer cannot meet. Fourth, cases involving caregiving for a child with a severe medical condition or significant behavioural issues, increases the requirement for the employer to accommodate the employee. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2014), in its document entitled *A Guide to Balancing Work and Caregiving Obligations: Collaborative Approaches for a Supportive and Well-Performing Workplace,* highlights the expectation for employers and employees to work together to find solutions.

The above discussion of family status focuses specifically on discrimination based on family status within the employment milieu and associated accommodations for the employee. What are the implications, if any, for the educational context? Although clearly Canadian human rights law applies to the academic environment as well, cases related to accommodating family status within post-secondary institutions are lean; only a couple of cases were located. No cases were found that related to accommodating students based on family status. However, in 2018, an Indigenous student parent filed a human rights complaint against St. Thomas University in New Brunswick. The mother wished to start her program, but the child was too young for child care. Nevertheless, the social work program she was registered in prohibited her from bringing her infant to class (Moore, 2018).

Although there does not appear to be a case law or influential cases involving students within post-secondary institutions who are seeking accommodations based on family status, it does not mean that universities should be complacent. Cautions from the Human Rights Commission (2013) suggest that caregiving accommodations is an area that will receive increased attention. It is important to respond to emerging legal matters in a strategic way that includes undertaking an environmental scan, being aware of issues in related arenas, and

identifying options (Janosik, 2008). Paying attention to the needs of students with caregiving responsibilities is one way to be proactive rather than reactive. The literature suggests that in addition to minimizing risks and exposure to legal proceedings, post-secondary institutions ought to offer support to help their members with their work-life commitments, not because they are obligated to provide accommodations under legislation, but because they wish to cultivate a family-friendly work and learning environment (Koppes & Wilson, 2015).

In this section, the human rights perspective was reviewed and, in particular family status as a protected characteristic under human rights law within Canada and across provincial jurisdictions. Relevant case law was reviewed, and its implications for higher education was considered. The reviewed literature points to a clear gap: The rights of students with family responsibilities in a higher education context is not well understood. The degree to which universities are contemplating this unique student population as a policy issue or as a priority area is unknown, thus creating a gap that informs the present study's research questions.

A policy framework is an important element when considering the support of students with family responsibilities; however, policies alone are not enough to encourage change within a post-secondary institution (Salle & Lester, 2017). Leadership is needed to help prioritize the work/life responsibilities of students, faculty, and staff and to champion change within the institution (Gerten, 2011). Leadership is the focus of the fourth and final theme explored within the literature.

Theme 4: Leadership Perspective

Leadership is the focus of this next section, and the discussion will focus on two main areas. The first area is the governance of Canadian universities and the decision-making authority within a bicameral system, and implications for policies to support students with family

responsibilities. The second area will include an examination of leadership models within university environments that are needed to support family-friendly initiatives.

Governance

Within Canada, most universities utilize a shared bicameral governance model (Jones et al., 2002). One part of this system is the academic governance body, which may be referred to as the senate or general faculties council. There is variability across institutions about specific powers of senate (or equivalent), but they typically include admission standards, academic program requirements, and academic policies and regulations (Lougheed & Pidgeon, 2016). Institutional policies and faculty-specific policies that support, for example, access and success of students with family responsibilities will be considered by the governance decision-making bodies such as senate at universities. How the topic of students with family responsibilities is worthy of discussion at governance bodies like Senate likely depends on the institution and its own context. One pathway to being discussed at this level may be the lobbying efforts of students.

Student Governance

The impact of students on institutional policy and priorities should not be minimized. In its review of practices at Canadian and American post-secondary institutions, Georgian College Institute of Applied Research and Innovation (2005) examined the drivers of change for some of these initiatives. Students, student organizations, including governance and advocacy groups, were all identified as important change agents. Student governance showing leadership in supporting students with family responsibilities has been demonstrated at both the national and local levels. At the national level, for example, the Canadian Federation of Medical Learners (Mazze et al., 2017) prepared a report and passed a motion to support the needs of undergraduate

medical learners with dependent caregiving responsibilities. This report calls on medical programs across Canada to do more to support students with family responsibilities and includes specific recommendations related to policies that improve learning environments. At the local level, students can spearhead change at their university or college campuses. For example, Concordia Student Union identified student parents as an advocacy priority (Mazumder, 2018). These efforts identified what the institution needs to do differently (e.g., policy implications and increased resources), as well as what the student union itself can do. In this case, it was able to make events more inclusive to students with family responsibilities by providing child care.

Leadership Models

Leaders and policy makers should understand that the "rise of the post-traditional" student (Soares, 2013, p. 1) is one of the key drivers transforming higher education. The descriptors post-traditional, non-traditional, or independent all refer to students whose characteristics are significantly changing student populations. This diversity includes students with caregiving responsibilities. "Administrators who may not respond to requests for family-support policies and procedures may respond if retention rates decline. Despite strong motivation, academic success, and confidence in the perceived benefits of a postsecondary degree, retention rates for adult students are low" (Wilson & Rosen, 1999, p. 3).

In addition to what has been discussed in the three themes explored in the above sections; how else might universities respond to the diversity of their student demographic? "Researchers and observers of higher education have argued that powerful learning, and ultimately student success, is achieved best under conditions of community" (Stange & Hardy-Cox, 2016, p. 216). Relationships are a vital aspect of student success, and part of that recognition is that it takes a community and, within that community, demonstrated leadership across the institution. It is

important for leaders within post-secondary institutions to understand the complexities of responding to issues related to diversity, whether that be through recruitment and retention activities, policy considerations, or providing support services and accommodations (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2016). To respond effectively to diversity issues, university leaders would be wise to become more sensitive to the challenges facing students (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2016). Caregiving responsibilities are not the domain of a single group on campus; this is an institutional issue that requires support across campus (Salle & Lester, 2009).

Working collaboratively across the institution and involving academic and administrative units is paramount for leading family-friendly initiatives; thus, taking a closer look at a distributed leadership approach is essential. Distributed leadership "embraces all institutional employees, engaged both in direct academic roles of teaching and learning and research or in indirect roles of designing new environments for learning and teaching, supporting students and providing the specialist and professional activities that underpin contemporary universities" (Jones et al., 2012, p. 68).

The terms distributed leadership and shared leadership are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) defined distributed leadership as leadership that is "dispersed across multiple organizational levels or even organizational boundaries" (p. 6). Spillane (2005) explains that one of the features of distributed leadership is that the focus is on the practice of leadership rather than on the leaders themselves, and that the practice is the interaction between leaders, followers, and the situation.

Distributed leadership is inclusive of those who hold a leadership role as well as those who may have knowledge and expertise but do not hold a leadership position within the organization. Distributed leadership "promotes concerted action by combination and interaction

of individual interests and capacities to produce outcomes beyond those that could be achieved by individuals alone" (Davison et al., 2014, p. 100). Distributed leadership can help with change. Jones et al., (2012) highlight that a "participative and collaborative approach to leadership is needed that acknowledges the individual autonomy that underpins creative and innovative thinking" (p. 68). Shared leadership leads to positive outcomes and team effectiveness (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). This type of approach creates an environment that is supportive of collaborations, including those between academic and student affairs (e.g., Whitt et al., 2008). In particular, those institutions that bring together both academic and administrative staff with expertise are more successful (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Shared leadership can help bring together individuals to champion initiatives and/or respond to complex problems. Responding to the caregiving needs of community members is one such problem. Creating a cross-functional team to bring together stakeholders across the institution is congruent with advice found in the literature on family-friendly practices (Karp et al., 2017; Moreau & Kerner, 2012). Team members should be a cross-disciplinary group of individuals (faculty, staff and students) who have knowledge and expertise that can help in addressing the problem. This group should include leaders as well as those who, despite not having a leadership position, still have much to contribute. Although the goal is to have a team working together, the vertical leaders (that is, senior leadership) must create structures and delegate authority. Additionally, the team must feel empowered and be encouraged to be creative in their approaches. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) explain that support structures include a variety of aspects, including defining roles, clarifying communication channels, explaining accountability measures, and offering professional development and training. The authors also

explain the importance of vertical leaders stepping in and out as necessary; providing support while also ensuring the team can work autonomously is a balancing act.

In a similar vein, Kezar (2012), in her discussion of a convergent leadership approach (bringing together administrators with grassroots leaders), identified the importance of locating "translators" or "boundary-spanners" who can work effectively between the two levels (p. 164). Although the literature often focuses on senior leadership, leadership can be impactful at other levels (for example, heads of academic departments or directors of student service units).

In this section, governance structures and leadership models were reviewed in the context of students with family responsibilities. The literature underscored the importance of taking an inclusive approach when leading diversity initiatives on campus.

Summary

Figure 2-1.

Key Themes from the Literature Review

The review of the literature led to the identification of four key themes representing perspectives that shape a particular university's response to students with family responsibilities. These perspectives began with a review of the literature regarding the accessibility and persistence of these students. This review was followed by an exploration of the characteristics of students with family responsibilities, including what makes them unique compared to other student populations. The human rights perspective encapsulated both human rights legislation and the governance structures that exist within research-intensive universities throughout Canada. The final theme was the role of leadership and its influences on equity, diversity and inclusion practices, such as family-friendly initiatives within post-secondary institutions. How a given university responds is the question under examination. How do western Canadian research-intensive institutions support students with family responsibilities through their respective policies, services, and programs?

Positioning of the Study

The literature review led to the identification of four key themes: access and success, student with family responsibilities, human rights, and leadership. In each of these four areas, the existing literature was examined, and gaps were identified that correspond to the purpose of the research. The present study will help add more evidence to the need to pay more attention to students with family responsibilities. In the next section, the research design is presented.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

In this chapter, details of the methodology, along with rationale for the decisions that were made about the research design, are presented. Utilizing a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), documents (policy and website documents) were collected from five research-intensive universities within western Canada and interviews were held with participants from each of the selected institutions. Both document and thematic forms of analysis were used. An alignment map identifying the theoretical framework and conceptual lens that informed the data, sources, collection, and analysis is presented. Ethical considerations are discussed and trustworthiness of the findings, including a reflection on my role as a researcher, is shared.

Interpretivist Paradigm

An important exercise in creating a research design is to determine the appropriate paradigmatic approach. A research paradigm is made up of four philosophical assumptions about ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Creswell, 2013). These assumptions guide a researcher to determine a study's design, data collection, and analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As a starting point, researchers need to determine their prevailing epistemology and where they fall on a continuum between the two positions of objectivism and subjectivism (Daly, 2007). Social constructionism is in the middle of this continuum, as it "accepts the presence of an external reality that is subjectively perceived and understood from the perspective of the observer" (Daly, 2007, p. 31). I align with the interpretivist perspective, as my preference is to examine "things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). I see inquiry as an interpretive process focused on "*making* rather than *discovering* meaning" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. 18). Social constructionism is concerned with understanding how people interpret and

construct reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Constructionists "study the multiple realities constructed by different groups of people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (Patton, 2015, p. 121). Within social constructionism, "reality is that which is created in the liminal zone between a perceived external reality and subjective meaning-making process" (Daly 2007, p. 31).

As a practitioner scholar, I believe that the constructionist paradigm is congruent with my approach to my practice, and my leadership in working with others to co-construct meaning, as well as to develop and implement solutions (Guido et al., 2010). Ascribing to a social constructionist ontology, I was interested in co-creating knowledge with participants and developing a shared understanding of a phenomenon – support for students with family responsibilities – within the context of research-intensive-universities. Qualitative research within a social constructionist frame typically emphasizes ways to understand how participants "construct the meaning of their own everyday realities" (Daly, 2007, p. 32).

My choice in methodological design was a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which is compatible with the paradigmatic approach of social constructionism. There are five qualities that are core to a basic qualitive study (Merriam, 2009) which I share here along with identifying how these four qualities appear in my research. First, the purpose of the research is to "understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). I examined how the universities included in the study support family responsibilities through policies, services, and programs. The examination was conducted through policy and website documents and interviews with student affairs/services leaders. Second, the project employs purposeful sampling strategies. The choices for research site – western Canadian research-intensive universities – and research participants were identified

through purposeful sampling. Third, the data collection includes some form of naturalistic methods. My research involved both document collection (policy and website) and interviews. Fourth, the data analysis is inductive in nature. The analysis of the document and interview data was conducted through a constant comparison method with some categories initially identified a priori through the conceptual lens and theoretical framework and validated or removed throughout analysis process. Fifth, the "findings are richly descriptive and presented as themes/categories" (Merriam, 2009, p. 38). The findings are shared in chapters 4 and 5 and presented in a proposed model in chapter 6. These five qualities of basic qualitative research reflect the design of the present study and are further unpacked in the remainder of this chapter. I start first with presenting an alignment map that helped to guide decisions about the research data collection methods, data sources, and analysis.

Alignment Map

An alignment map can be used to visually demonstrate the intentional relationship between core elements of the research design (see Enders, 2021). In Table 3.1, I present an alignment map for the present study and provide details about each element below.

Table 3-A.

Alignment Map

<table>
<tr><th>Primary and secondary research questions</th><th>Conceptual lens

Main themes from the literature</th><th>Theoretical framework

Four dimensions of policy theory (Cooper et al., 2004)</th><th>Data sources</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">How do western Canadian research-intensive universities support students with family responsibilities through their respective policies, services, and programs?

• formal policies, regulations, and other institutional governing documents
• inventory of practices
• human rights legislation
• senior leaders' perspectives
• promising practices</td><td>Leadership</td><td>Normative
"beliefs, values and ideologies"</td><td rowspan="4">Policy documents

Website documents

Interviews
- Case studies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Human rights</td><td>Structural
"government arrangements, institutional structure, systems, and processes"</td></tr>
<tr><td>Students with family responsibilities</td><td>Constituentive
"theories of the networks, elites, masses, interest groups, ethnic/gender groups, providers and end users"</td></tr>
<tr><td>Student access and success</td><td>Technical
"educational planning, practice, implementation, and evaluation" "nuts and bolts of policy making"</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Social Constructionism</td></tr>
</table>

The first column or element provides the primary research question and lists what was explored in the five secondary research questions. The second column brings forward the four main themes of the literature explored in chapter two: access and success, students with family responsibilities, human rights, and leadership. These themes served as conceptual lenses that provided an organizing function and contextualized the findings. The third is the theoretical framework, the four dimensions of education policy proposed by Cooper, Fusarelli, and Randal (2004). This particular policy theory has been used as a framework in other studies exploring policy-related research within higher education (see, for example, Owen, 2014). For this study, the theory was used to facilitate a holistic approach to the research whereby each of the four policy dimensions "exposes a different set of issues and concerns, allowing us to understand education policymaking process in a different light" (Cooper et al., 2004, p. 304). Each of these four dimensions is described in turn below.

Normative dimensions "include beliefs, values, and ideologies that drive societies to seek improvement and change" (p. 43). Structural dimensions are the "governmental arrangements, institutional structure, systems, and processes that promulgate and support policies in education" (p. 43). Constituentive dimensions are "theories of the networks, elites, masses, interest groups, ethnic/gender groups, providers and 'end users', and beneficiaries who influence, participate in, and benefit from the policymaking process" (p. 43). And finally, technical dimensions involve "educational planning, practice, implementation, and evaluation- the nuts and bolts of policy making" (p. 44). At the heart of the Cooper et al., (2004) framework are considerations of ethics and social justice, "primary core values around which all educational policies should be developed" (p. 8). Further, the authors suggest that "to a large extent, the line between policy research and advocacy in education is nonexistent" As will be shared later in this chapter, my

own advocacy and policy work within post-secondary institutions is congruent with this perspective. The conceptual lens and the theoretical framework informed not only the data collection process, but the analysis as well.

The fourth column or element identifies the three main sources of data, which were policy documents, website documents, and interviews. The fifth element is my epistemological approach, social constructionism, which provided foundational support to the research design. In the following sections, I describe the research design. I start with an explanation of why I am specifically focused on western Canada's research-intensive universities.

Rationale for Selection of the Research Sites

There were several reasons why I focused specifically on research-intensive universities within western Canada. In part, the rationale is related to my being a member of and a leader at one such university. I have both a personal and professional interest in improving my institution's support of students with family responsibilities. As a student affairs practitioner and leader working in and studying higher education in Canada, I understand that there are common characteristics and constraints across institutional types and that the applicability of another institution's policy, program, or service is determined, in part, on the institutional type.

Hirt (2006) investigated the impact of institutional type on the professional practice of student affairs administrators working within US colleges and universities. In her comprehensive examination, there emerged prevailing characteristics of the different types of institutions. Research universities, in particular, were seen to be "large, complex, decentralized organizations that value power, prestige, and the generation of knowledge over the transmission of knowledge" (Hirt 2006, p. 195). Research institutions are noted for their inherent complexity; consequently, they are difficult to comprehend and navigate, both physically and psychologically (Hirt, 2006).

These collective attributes influence identities of student affairs professionals at research institutions who describe themselves as “specialists” (Hirt, 2006).

Although there are differences between Canadian and US institutions, the literature has supported comparing research institutions across the two countries. In their study, Alperin et al., (2019) compared American doctoral research, or R type, with Canadian doctoral universities by using the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) for US-based institutions and Maclean’s (2018) rankings for Canadian-based institutions. The use of Maclean’s rankings highlights the fact that there is no national organizing body for Canadian post-secondary institutions, perhaps in part because post-secondary education is the jurisdiction of provinces and territories. Universities receive their governance powers through provincial acts or charters (Jones et al., 2001). A member organization for Canadian universities called Universities Canada serves as a site to centralize information about its 96 member institutions and helps amplify to the federal government issues that are important to Canadian universities (Universities Canada, n.d.). There is not a national accrediting organization within Canada, although this role is sometimes mistakenly attributed to Universities Canada (Landon, 2017). This association also does not categorize member institutions.

The U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities or U15, is a collective of the fifteen research-intensive universities within Canada. The U15 originated in the 1980s, when the Ontario universities initially came together. Over the years, the network has become national in its membership, and in 2012 the U15 was created (U15, n.d.-a). The following are the members of the U15 (n.d.-b): University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, Dalhousie University, Université Laval, University of Manitoba, McGill University, McMaster University, Université de Montréal, University of Ottawa, Queen’s University,

University of Saskatchewan, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, and Western University. As a formally organized group, the U15's mandate is to "foster the development and delivery of long-term, sustainable higher education and research policy, in Canada and around the world" (BHER n.d., para. 2). I limited my focus to five research-intensive universities, all of which are U15 members within western Canada. The four most western provinces are seen collectively as a unique region within Canada, as evidenced by organizing bodies such as the federal government's Western Economic Diversification Canada (Government of Canada, 2018) and Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies (n.d.).

The literature in the US suggests that research-intensive institutions are ahead in their development of family-friendly policies (Center for the Education of Women, 2005; Thomas & McLaughlin, 2009). Within the US, the Sloan Foundation and the American Council on Education collaboration on the Faculty Career Flexibility initiative directed funds initially to research-intensive institutions. The decision to prioritize funding in this way was made because of the hypothesis that such institutions would be more likely to have family-friendly policies in place (Thomas & McLaughlin, 2009); in fact, this was the finding in a subsequent study carried out by the Centre for the Education of Women (2005).

The decision to look at research-intensive institutions is supported by the literature on US universities and colleges, which indicates the stronger likelihood of having evidence of family-friendly policies than other types of higher education institutions in part because of their larger operating budgets (Hollenshead et al., 2005) and their focus on recruitment and retention of faculty (Koppes & Wilson, 2015). The unifying characteristic of the institutional members of the U15 is the priority placed on research. Collectively, they not only receive most of the research

funding awarded within the country, but also as hold the highest number of technology licenses and patents (U15, n.d.-c).

Research population

Five U15 institutions, specifically from western Canada, formed the research population. For the interviews, I used purposeful sampling to identify not only the research sites but also participants from within these institutions. Purposeful sampling is a core strategy within qualitative research to determine "from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96) and the sample provides "information-rich data-gathering and analysis possibilities" (Patton, 2015, p. 283). This approach is purposeful sampling, and in particular homogeneous sampling, because the institutions share sets of characteristics like those of research-intensive institutions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The two most common types of data for research focusing on policy are documents and interviews with people (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). Accordingly, data collection for this study included documents and interviews that yielded three sources of data: policy documents, website documents, and interviews. The rationale for collecting these three data sources is discussed in the following sections.

Policy Documents

A policy is a "vehicle through which colleges, universities, and systems of higher education work to sustain and improve as they strive to enact their missions, goals and objectives" (Allan et al., 2009, p. 1). Accordingly, it is important to look at educational policies through multiple lenses (Cooper et al., 2004). Educational policy is a "political process where needs, goals, and intentions are translated into a set of objectives, laws, policies, and programs,

which in turn affect resource allocations, actions, and outputs, which are the basis for evaluation, reforms and new policies" (Cooper et al., 2004, p. 3).

The process of policy development and implementation within higher education institutions is complex, and involves stakeholders at different levels, and can be impacted by external factors. The following excerpt captures a typical situation within a university context:

> In higher education, policies are vetted through varied governance bodies, including executives, such as provosts, deans, vice-presidents, and presidents; shared governance bodies, such as the faculty and unionized staff; and student government. In addition to these formal policy-making institutions, policies within the academy are influenced strongly by external forces such as state legislative bodies, organizations that accredit and rank institutions of higher education, governing boards, state and federal reporting requirements, and the needs of future students. (Brown & Shelley, 2017, p. 76)

This complex interplay of stakeholders and decision makers within higher education highlights the **"**economic, social, political and cultural contexts [that] shape both the content and the language of policy documents" (Taylor, 2006, p. 28). The qualitative nature of this study allowed for an exploration of values that include access, equity, and fairness within the selected universities' services, programs, and policies (Pasque & Lechuga, 2017). The documentation collected in the study reflected the complex environment of each university and drew from sources across the institutions.

In this study, policies are an important data source. I heeded Ozga's (1999) advice "to extend the category of policy text to include documentary or other materials that can be read as significant within the discursive parameters of an investigation" (p. 95), and related documents including procedures, regulations, forms, guidelines, etc., were included.

Policy information is typically housed in certain locations on an institutional website. First is the academic calendar, wherein the included policies, regulations, and program requirements serve as a contractual document between the student and the institution (Smith & Usick, 2016). Second is the central location on the institution's website that provides access to governing documents, this may be the university secretariat, governing council or equivalent. Third are policy documents, that may exist on centralized webpages, for example, human rights or equity services office webpages. Fourth are policy documents that identify accommodation information. Although the focus for the study is on institutional policies, I was attentive to any exemplars of excellence among family-friendly policies at the faculty or departmental level.

Website Documents

Documents which are an appropriate source of data within qualitative research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), were a primary data source for the present study. Documents that were targeted were policy and website documents. Website documents are those that are located on university websites and include content contained on individual webpages that are retrievable through unique URLs as well as content that is located within hyperlinked or downloadable PDFs.

Shaw et al., (2004) have articulated seven reasons why documents provide valuable data source for qualitative research. First because there may not be existing data, documents may be the only sources of information when the policy area being studied is new or emerging. Second, policies, if they exist, are typically publicly accessible and inexpensive to collect. Third, policies and other documents are "easier and quicker to compare than the structures, processes and outputs of organizations themselves" (p. 260). Fourth, there are fewer ethical issues in collecting publicly available documents, as confidentiality and privacy concerns are minimized. Fifth, the

researcher has minimal impact on the documents themselves, as they were pre-existing and prepared for purposes other than the research. Sixth, documents can help contextualize other collected data. Finally, documents may inform other aspects of the research process, such as interviews.

The literature suggested there are three different strategies for document selection: proportionate selection, targeted selection and "anything you can lay your hands on" (Linders, 2007, p. 476). A targeted sampling approach was used for the study, which meant collecting "documents pertaining to the emergence, persistence, and/or evolution of a particular social construction" (p. 475). The alignment map (Table 3-1) helped lead to "analytically defined and contained" (p. 476) selection of documents. I gathered three types of publicly available documents across the five university websites: (1) leadership, (2) inventory, and (3) general. Each of these are described below.

Leadership Documents

Leadership documents were gathered to reveal how students with family responsibilities may be prioritized by the institution. For this research, leadership documents refer to institutional strategic plans or other related documents. Additionally, given the focus on leaders who oversee the student affairs/services portfolio webpages of the vice-provost students or similar webpages were also included.

Inventory Documents

Information about services and supports from institutional websites required a structured data collection approach. Reasons for a "little or a lot of prior instrumentation" when developing an instrumentation tool are provided by Miles et al., (2014, p. 19). In this second category are documents collected through a targeted search for evidence of 16 specific types of

services/supports that are identified in the literature as supportive for students with family responsibilities.

General Documents

The documents under this third category were those gathered through a general search using the institution's search tool bar. This search was carried out to ensure that I was not missing any critical information that would help in answering the research question (Hayes-Smith & Hayes-Smith, 2009).

Interviews

It is important not to overly rely on a singular data source within qualitative research. Moreover, one data source can help locate other sources of data, as Bardach & Parashnik (2016) point out that "people lead to documents as well as to other people, and documents lead to people as well as to other documents" (p. 87). In the case of the study, although documents are a primary data source, interviews help to explore the content of what was gathered. "Documents are most useful when combined with in depth interviews that allow you to discuss with their creators what they contain and how they were prepared" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 27).

Policy can encourage action through leadership. Pal (2010) explained that "policy, to put it simply, comes from those who have the legitimate authority to impose normative guidelines for action" (p. 6). Action can take the shape of programs and/or through legislation (Pal, 2010). Including those who were involved with the development of policy can provide valuable background or historical information, including how the issue became problematized and any relevant political dimensions (Patton & Sawicki, 1986, p. 49). As well, interviews were important to explore and identify other activities that may be underway at the institution but may not be captured or shared through publicly available documents on websites.

Semi-structured Interview

Given both the social constructionist paradigm within which my study resides and given the constructionist approach, the interview was seen as a "social encounter…[and] productive site of reportable knowledge" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 3) in which the participant and I co-created knowledge. Consequently, a less structured format for the interview was deemed appropriate (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). A semi-structured interview protocol was developed, and the participants who agreed to participate were emailed the consent form (Appendix C) ahead of the interview. Because the recruited participants were in different provinces than I, the interviews were conducted through Zoom. Zoom and other similar video-conferencing software are seen as a viable alternative to in-person interviews; their benefits include low cost, ease of use, data management and security (Archibald et al., 2019). Conducting interviews a year into the global pandemic meant that the participants had become comfortable with the technology. Apart from the occasional poor network connection, there were no challenges.

The interview questions were developed to explore key areas tied to the research questions. The semi-structured interview approach allowed for flexibility in the order of questions asked, and the use of prompts both to explore the responses and ask additional questions that were relevant to what the participant was sharing. See Appendix D for the interview questions, including the demographic information collected and the case studies. See Table E-1 in Appendix E to see how the interview questions align with the conceptual lens and the theoretical framework.

Participants and recruitment

Individuals selected for interviews were key informants, or what Patton (2015) calls "key knowledgeables" (p. 284); included were those who provided expertise, particularly on

specialized issues being examined. For the study, I invited the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) at each institution to participate in an interview. SSAOs at Canadian institutions typically include the positions of vice presidents (students), vice-provosts (students), or deans of students. These individuals, by virtue of their roles, are seen to be knowledgeable about issues pertaining to student enrolment, as well as student support and success strategies. The SSAOs were expected to speak to the degree to which their university has thought of the needs of students with family responsibilities. Identification of the SSAO was through the institutional websites and Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) membership directory. If an interview with the vice-provost was not secured, I asked the vice-provost and/or their assistant was asked to forward the information about the study to a colleague who might be an appropriate leader to interview. Profiles of the participants are presented in chapter 4. See Appendix B for the recruitment email.

Case Scenario or Vignette.

Vignette is a technique wherein the researcher provides a scenario that is "fictional or fictionalized" and "the respondent is then invited to imagine, drawing on his or her own experience, how the central character in the scenario will behave" (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 184). As part of the interview, participants were asked to respond to two case scenarios that were crafted to explore the nuances about how they would handle common issues faced by student with family responsibilities (see Appendix D). The scenarios were composites of complex situations I am aware of through my experience as a student affairs practitioner and leader. One scenario focused on a student parent bringing her baby to class. Other students in the course feel the infant is disruptive to the learning environment and consequently creates a situation wherein there are competing rights. The second scenario focused on a student providing elder care to a

parent. The student performs poorly and is seeking a form of academic forgiveness, retroactively. With both scenarios, the participants were encouraged to explain how these cases would be handled at their university and what role they would play in responding to the matter.

Transcription.

All five interviews were conducted using Zoom and each one was audio recorded. The file that was automatically generated by Zoom software, the mp4 recording file, was uploaded to the Rev.com. For each of the five transcripts, the automated transcription option was purchased. According to the Rev's website, the automated transcription means that files are "transcribed by machine; no humans are involved." Once the transcript was available, the file was downloaded and saved as a Word document. I edited the transcript for clarity. Listening to recordings as I cleaned up the transcript, was helpful, particularly when there was a word that was not transcribed properly. During this time, I kept in mind that I was "organizing and refining rather than beginning data analysis" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 197).

Timelines of Data Collection

The collection of the data sources took place between February 2021 and October 2021. The document-gathering took place in the winter 2021 term, and the interviews were conducted in the summer 2021 term. I initially gathered documents from all five universities between the dates of February and April 2021. Participant recruitment for the interviews took place between April and June 2021. The five interviews were held between May and July 2021. The participants made mention of the upcoming academic term, fall 2021, within their respective responses; consequently, in October of 2021, I repeated the searches across the document categories to capture any new relevant policy, service, or program that was new. Any new,

relevant document was added to the appropriate table and saved into the corresponding folder (process described in sections above) so that the content was included in the analysis.

Methods of Data Analysis

There were two types of analysis used in this study: document and thematic. The initial analysis of the documents involved a systematic process of extraction, curation, and organization. This process-organizing function to determine the inclusion of the given documents in the study and organization into categories related to the conceptual lenses and theoretical framework (Bowen, 2009). The initial analysis of the documents is described in detail in chapter 4. The thematic analysis of the documents and interview transcripts is explained below.

Document analysis

Document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Such a procedures include "finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesizing data contained in documents" (p. 28). I adapted procedures that are used in systematic review to inform the structured process required to extract, review, and evaluate the large number of documents from each of the five universities. Other post-secondary studies looking at policies have incorporated similar approaches (e.g., Stoesz & Eaton, 2020).

Taylor et al., (2021), in their summary of good practice guidelines for data extraction, highlighted four key recommendations related to duplication, anticipation, organization, and documentation. These guidelines were heeded but modified to apply to the present study involving a sole researcher collecting and analyzing data. Duplication was achieved through replicating search more than once to ensure that documents were not missed the first time. Possible challenges and remedies were anticipated at the outset such as counting documents

more than once or being inconsistent in the extraction process and implementing steps to minimize, such as, checking for duplicate data and following the documented process. Organization was achieved, for example, through the creation of spreadsheet templates in which to capture to information about the collected documents. Documentation was observed through careful notes taken throughout the process.

Below, I explain the detailed and systematic process I undertook to extract, organize, and curate the documents for the study. I started my document-gathering with one university, which served as my test site, to ensure that the steps I identified in my systematic process would yield the documents required to explore the research questions. To aid in the collection and organization of the documents, I created an Excel spreadsheet. Within the spreadsheet, I created four tabs: (a) policy documents; (b) leadership documents; (c) inventory documents, and (d) general documents. The need to create a fifth category of documents was dependent on whether any documents were shared by the interviewee that are not publicly available, such as draft policy documents. I also created folders on my desktop to store collected documents within folders that corresponded with the four tabs created within the spreadsheet. I began my data collection with specific searches, then moved to a general search strategy. The first three types of documents (policy, leadership, and inventory) can be categorized as specific searches. The following provides more detail about the document-gathering and organizing process undertaken for the present study.

Policy documents

I began gathering documents related to policy, regulations, or other institutional-governing documents. I started first with specific sections of the institution's website. Within the spreadsheet, I added the following categories to help organize the document gathering:

- University or Academic Calendar, including leaves of absence;
- Governance – for the centralized site that houses university-wide policies. This is typically a university secretariat, or governance document pages;
- Human rights – referring to the institutions' human rights office, which is typically responsible for overseeing policies and procedures informed by the province's human rights legislation;
- Accommodation – referring to the existence of pages containing information about accommodation based on human rights-protected characteristics.

I then reviewed these pages to locate any relevant documents. To aid in my search, I also used search functions and specific list of search terms to help locate relevant documents. For example, I would open the pdf version of the university calendar and use the search function to locate within the document sections that were relevant. Sometimes, the website itself would have a site-specific search function, such as, filters or a search box. Common sets of search terms were used to search for policy, leadership and general documents: family-friendly, family care, family responsibilities, child care/childcare, caregiver, eldercare, student parent(s) and family status. If few documents were located with these terms, search terms were simplified to expand the search using words like "family" or "parent", for example. Within the spreadsheet, I captured information about the identified document. I also saved the document into the appropriate desktop folder. I then conducted a search using the search term. When there was a match, I added the information into the spreadsheet and saved the document in the folder.

Leadership documents

Once I gathered policy-related documents for a particular institution, I moved to leadership-type documents and followed the same process outlined above. The two sections of the university website I focused on were the following:

1. Institutional strategic plan – typically located within the university's 'about' section.
2. Vice-provost students – the webpage that provides information about the senior executive leader responsible for student services and programs.

I captured information on the spreadsheet from any relevant document and saved the document in the folder. I then used search terms - with the aid of filters or a search engine – to locate documents using the common set of search terms. On the spreadsheet, I identified whether there was a match with the search term, added information about the document, and saved a copy to the folder.

Inventory documents

The third category includes documents collected through a targeted search for evidence of 16 specific types of services/supports identified in the literature as supportive for students with family responsibilities: child care, eldercare, family housing, counselling/mental health supports, health care, financial aid, food banks, lactation/breastfeeding rooms, change tables, international student services, Indigenous student services, student groups/peer supports , dedicated spaces (e.g., study areas, student group spaces), dedicated central services (e.g., Family Centre), academic accommodations (flexibility, individual considerations, formal accommodations), and data (e.g., self-identification).

This inventory was informed by three sources: Georgian College's study (2005), Karp et al., (2017), and work done by the Students with Family Responsibilities CACUSS Network

(Francis et al., 2017). Using the navigation functions of the university website (e.g., dropdown menus) and the search engine, I searched for evidence of each university having in place one or more of the sixteen items in the inventory. In a spreadsheet I noted whether a university had the service or program. After reviewing the webpage or document, I indicated on the spreadsheet whether the service or program was targeted specifically for students with family responsibilities. For example, there may have been financial aid and awards office, but were there scholarships and bursaries specifically for students who are caregivers. Another example was existence of a campus primary health care but were students' dependents also able to access health services? Within this spreadsheet, I would also capture any relevant notes, notes the URL, and save digital copies of webpages or documents that specifically mentioned supports or services for students with family responsibilities.

General Documents

The documents under the fourth category, general documents, are those gathered through casting a wide net and using the institution's search tool bar to identify any documents that may have been missed through the targeted searches.

It was very important to develop a systematic approach that would ensure consistency while also helping make the process efficient. The first two universities with which I began the collection were used to help refine the process. I again used a spreadsheet to collect information, in this case, I recorded information for every webpage that was identified through the search. For the first institution, I captured information about all the pages that were shown for each search term, this process was very time-intensive, as it often yielded a large number of hits. Through this process, it was clear that very few pages were relevant to the study. As a result, I created

inclusionary and exclusionary criteria that I could use when collecting documents for the remainder of the collection process.

The inclusionary criteria were connected to the research questions, conceptual lenses, and theoretical framework. An example of an inclusion criterion was audience and whether the documents pertained directly or indirectly to students with family responsibilities or those who are involved with students with family responsibilities (e.g., instructors, administrators, etc.,). Another criterion was relevance to the present study, for example, did the document provide insight into how universities support students family responsibilities? Exclusionary criteria included information that pertained to audiences outside of the scope of the project, including information directed to faculty and staff, such as documents produced by the institutions' Human Resources department or those that were developed for a non-university audience. I also removed duplicate documents that had been identified in earlier search.

In gathering documents for the subsequent universities, I applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria while reviewing the pages. I modified my approach to enter onto the spreadsheet only those documents that met the inclusion criteria. I preferred to err on the side of caution by capturing a document if I was not immediately sure.

I discovered through trial and error that Boolean operators did not always work for searches using institutional search engines. Quotation marks, however, were critical, as many of the terms were two-word phrases. For example, searching for family friendly (without quotation marks) would yield 4657 results, while "family friendly" yielded a much more manageable 71 hits.

The spreadsheet was set up to facilitate collecting the information necessary to help with the screening process. This information included the search term, number of hits, relevance, date

accessed, audience, date published, main page, subpage, type of document, and URL. On the spreadsheet, I also included a notes column, where I noted some of my initial thoughts about a particular document to help with future analysis or to flag when analyzing. As with the other categories of documents, I saved the webpages as a PDF or a word document so that I could later analyze the content on the pages. Across the five universities, the search terms yielded a total of 6,603 hits (webpages or documents). The average number of hits across the search terms was 242.

Documents shared by interviewee

The documents referred to in the above sections were all publicly available on each university's website. There was a fifth category of documents which are those shared by the interviewee during the interview or immediately after. Only University A shared documents and these will be discussed later.

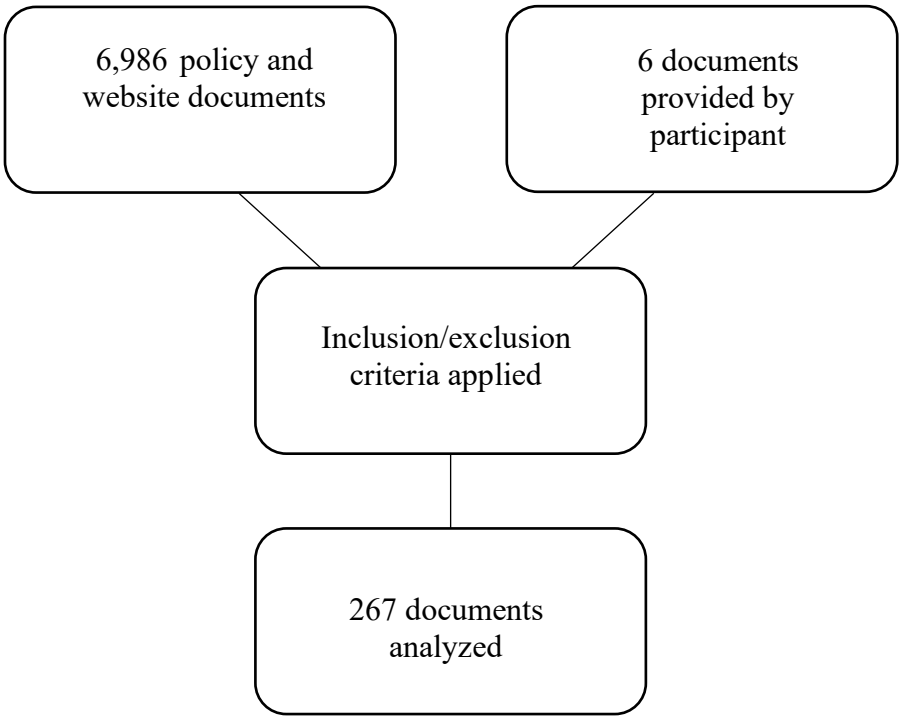
In addition to the data-gathering process described above for each category, I continued to review and curate the documents. In October 2021, I repeated the search steps to ascertain if there were additional documents that should have been included as part of the study. This system also provided an opportunity to ensure that I did not miss any relevant documents in my initial collection. I also reviewed those documents had been screened to double check if they should be included as part of the study. As part of this review, I also cross-referenced all the screened documents identified in the tables with the documents saved in the respective university subfolders. In preparation for that thematic analysis, I uploaded all the screened documents into NVIVO and preserved the organizational structure through the use of folders and subfolders.

Figure 3.1 summarizes the data collection process. Across the five universities, 6,986 documents (policy and website documents) were gathered. An additional six documents were

provided by an interview participant. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied against all documents resulting in 267 documents that were included in the thematic analysis.

Figure 3.1

Summary of Data Collection February 2021 – October 2021



Thematic analysis of documents and interview transcripts

Both deductive and inductive methods were used to analyze the collected sources of data (Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The complexity of data analysis is revealed in the process of going "back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 202). Although the literature suggests that themes and patterns emerge from the data, in reality, the researcher plays an active role in identifying, sorting and selecting themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006), The researcher applies a reflexive process to the analysis process (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). This reflexive process is "driven by what the inquirer wants to know and how the inquirer interprets what the data are telling" (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 77).

Thematic analysis requires the researchers to take a "closer look at the selected data and perform(ing) coding and category construction, based on the data's characteristics, to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Thematic analysis was applied to both the documents (once curated) and to the interview transcripts. NVivo was used to both organize the data and manually code the documents. I started with open coding, as "assigning codes to pieces of data is how you begin to construct categories" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). Throughout the process, I kept notes to record decision making and track the progress as I went through the process. While coding, I was continually revising and tweaking the codes and categories, collapsing or expanding with each document and interview transcript enabling me to further refine my codebook, which was created in NVivo. I continued to review the coding and ensure that it reflected the analysis. Throughout this process, I reminded myself that my goal was to determine how the data would help to answer the primary and secondary research questions while also being open to unexpected discoveries. At one point in the process, I had a total of 328 codes, some of which were not categorized. I identified themes through both inductive and deductive processes, as some categories were identified a priori based on my study's conceptual lenses and theoretical framework. Some categories emerged inductively through the analysis. I continued to review and collapse and expand the categories until I reached a point where I was satisfied that the rich and complex data from the documents and interviews could be described under the seven main themes that emerged (presented in chapter 5).

One should be mindful of the inherent tensions that may arise through the data collection and analysis of the policy documents (Yanow, 2000). One tension is what a researcher "expects to find" and what they "actually experience" (p. 8) through their inquiry. Stated another way, challenges arise when "we ourselves view the world through the same lens as the document

producers and hence might be less inclined to interrogate the process whereby what strikes us as a sensible as opposed to a less sensible construction of meaning was accomplished." (Linders, 2007, p. 479).

The second tension is the difference between "policy meanings as intended by policymakers – "authored" texts – and the possibly variant and even incommensurable meanings – "constructed" texts – made of them by other policy-relevant groups" (Yanow, 2000, p. 8). This latter tension may arise and/or be explored through the interview process. I had anticipated the challenge of managing the sheer amount of information collected (Patton, 2015), resulting in "reducing the volume of raw information, sifting the trivial from the significant identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating essence of what the data reveal" (Patton, 2015, p. 65). Consequently, it was vital to develop a system to assess the quality (Patton et al., 2013, p. 49) and to evaluate the documents collected to determine their value in relation to the goals of the study (Bowen, 2009). A codebook was created to help to identify criteria for inclusion and exclusion of data (Vaughter et al., 2016). Initial codes or a priori codes within this codebook were based on the conceptual lens and theoretical framework, (see the Table 3.1) for the alignment map. Additional codes were generated inductively.

To aid in the organization and analysis of the data, I used Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), and specifically NVivo 12. Attending to issues of rigor throughout the research (the topic of the next section) is vital. Although the sections of this chapter suggest there is discreteness associated with the issues discussed in each section, research quality or trustworthiness must be seen as a holistic consideration during the entire research study (Morrow, 2005).

Trustworthiness

As a starting point in consideration of quality issues within qualitative research, a "researcher will need to locate discussions of validity within the research paradigm that is being used" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 134). For the present research, my selected epistemological paradigm and conceptual framework influenced the types of trustworthiness or rigour criteria that were used.

In 1985, Lincoln and Guba introduced criteria to use when working within the naturalistic paradigm. They explain that trustworthiness refers to the ways in which a researcher may "persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (p. 290). They introduced four main criteria that were a counter-response to criteria within the positivistic paradigm: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The field of qualitative research has grown considerably since 1985, and within the literature, quality criteria have been further expanded and refined. For example, there is now an acceptance "that quality of qualitative research was something that should be achieved during the process of inquiry, rather than something that was awarded after completion" (Morse, 2018, p. 803). Presently, there is a focus on establishing criteria that are individualized to the research project and which looks at the research in its entirety (Morse, 2018) such as the eight criteria for excellent qualitative research recommended by Tracy (2010). For my study, I explain below how I addressed issues of the traditional trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and I conclude with the holistic criteria of reflexivity.

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truthfulness of the qualitative research (Connelly, 2016; Tracy, 2010; Lewis, 2009). It attends to the issue of "providing assurances of

the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of same" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). There are several strategies that can be used to strengthen credibility; and following are the ones that I selected for the study: triangulation, peer debriefing, negative evidence, and member checking, each of which are defined and discussed below.

One type of triangulation within qualitative research is triangulation of data sources (Patton, 2015). I collected three distinct data sources: policy documents, website content, and interviews. This type of triangulation allows for testing the consistency of the different sources used within the same study (Patton, 2015). Triangulation of sources is congruent with the theoretical approach of social constructionism that seeks to "capture and report multiple perspectives rather than seek a singular truth" (Patton, 2015, p. 684).

Peer debriefing involves identifying a peer with whom one can be vulnerable in sharing thoughts, questions, concerns, and fears about the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is someone whom Lincoln and Guba (1986) refer to as a "disinterested professional" (p. 308). I had a peer, a doctoral student in another academic program, who served in this role. She participated in a mock interview that allowed me to test out the interview questions and provided inter-rater reliability of the analysis. She was also provided with an interview transcription (with identifiers removed) to analyze and code.

Negative evidence refers to "looking for negative evidence" a process that "involves actively seeking *dis*confirmation" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 304) of the analysis of the findings. By nature, although it is easier to readily see evidence that confirms our perspectives, it is more challenging to see the evidence that calls our explanation into question. Actively looking for

negative evidence as part of my reflexive process and led me to seek a critical eye to review my analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

Member checking was carried out as part of the trustworthiness strategies. A more inclusive term than member checking was proposed by Tracy (2010), who wanted to move away from verification and towards "*collaboration* and reflexive *elaboration*" (p. 844). I provided each participant with a copy of their transcript and invited them to provide additional information or points of clarification, both of which were reflected in the finalized interview transcripts.

Confirmability and dependability are the second and third traditional trustworthiness criteria to be discussed. Confirmability "is based on the perspective that the integrity of findings lies in the data and that the researcher must adequately tie together the data, analytic processes, and findings in such a way that the reader is able to confirm the adequacy of the findings" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). Dependability as a form of trustworthiness is concerned with the inquiry process and whether it is "logical, traceable, and documented" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). Confirmability and dependability are discussed together as the prevailing technique to address an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Conducting an audit trail involves documenting emerging aspects of the research and tracking chronologically all activities and processes. The iterative process of the data collection and analysis, including the various stages of coding and identification of themes, was captured throughout the research. The audit trail addresses dependability, as it provides an examination of the process and addresses confirmability through its focus on the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). What was done through documenting within a reflexive journal (see the next section) as well as by establishing communications with the participants. Other strategies were also documented within the audit trail, including recording dates and notes from peer debriefings, as well as,

keeping what Connelly (2016) refers to “process logs” (p. 435) or process notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which included my notes on the activities that took place and the justifications for the decisions that I made.

The fourth traditional criterion to be reviewed is transferability. Transferability is the quality that “emerges through a study’s potential to be valuable across a variety of contexts or situations” (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). Researchers, through “gathering direct testimony, providing rich description, and writing accessibly and invitationally” (Tracy, 2010, p. 845), help readers of the research determine its resonance and applicability. Using these forms of thick descriptions has been identified as a strategy to encourage transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986) that is apparent in the presentation of the thematic analysis in chapter 5.

Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity, a cornerstone to rigor within qualitative research, is the way in which the researcher demonstrates “honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). Reflective practices are an important thread throughout the research process, from contemplation of research design to data collection and analysis (Tracy, 2010). The “instrument of inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 47) in qualitative research is the researcher. Thus, it is important for me to engage in a process of reflexivity to reflect critically on my perspectives and bias (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Lincoln et al., 2017; Patton, 2015). As Clemens and Tierney (2017) point out, “researcher and research are inextricable” (p 51).

I had four main areas of motivation and inspiration for this research: (1) the leadership positions I have within student affairs at a large university in western Canada; (2) my background as a student advocate, which involved working with students and their unique cases, educating the campus community on issues of student fairness, and promoting equity and

inclusion; (3) individual cases of students whom I have assisted and whose stories have touched me deeply (including the case of a member of my extended family), and finally, (4) my strong desire to help create change at post-secondary institutions across Canada. Focusing, specifically on those institutions that I know best: research universities.

Reflection of self is an important component to examine how one's own view of the world is shaped by "historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts" (Taylor, 2006, p. 25). I brought an emic view to this research given my role and focus on research-intensive institutions, that share a common set of characteristics. As a practitioner-scholar, I combined "understandings from professional practice, higher education practice, and the researcher's individual reflexive project" (Drake & Heath, 2011, p. 2). It is through a filter of one's own biases and experiences that one comes to know (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

This persistent reflexivity helps to promote trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). As Tracy (2010) observes, "one way to deal with the ambiguity of "how much self-reflexivity," is to *show* rather than *tell* self-reflexivity by weaving one's reactions or reflexive considerations of self-as-instrument throughout the research report" (p. 843). A reflexive journal aided me in making my process more transparent. By having an outlet through which to share my reflections, I was able to "make the messiness of the research process visible" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 704).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were guided by applying the four domains of ethics "procedural ethics, situational ethics, ethical relations, and ethical issues" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). These four domains have also been referred to, respectively, as the "approval processes", "the research context", "dynamics between the researcher and participants" and "completion and disseminating findings" (Reid et al., 2018, p. 70). These four domains can act as a guide for a

researcher who "recognizes the ongoing, unanticipated challenges which might arise beyond gaining approval for the study and which require a high degree of researcher 'reflexivity' in responding ethically" (Reid et al., 2018, p. 70). Likewise, researchers' demonstrations of "self-reflexivity and multivocality, are also part and parcel of ethical research" (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). Next, each of these four domains will be explored in relation to the present research.

Procedural Ethics

Procedural ethics (Tracy, 2010) refers to the formal process as necessitated by the relevant research ethics boards. To carry out interviews with recruited participants, I submitted an ethics application to the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) at the University of Calgary. After undergoing minor revisions, the project received approval.

I did require ethics approval to gather documents because of the exception identified within the conjoint ethics. To qualify for an exemption from REB review, it must be demonstrated that "(a) the information is legally accessible to the public and protected by law; or (b) the information is publicly accessible and there is no reasonable expectation of privacy" (University of Calgary, 2015, p. 2). I met these two requirements as the documents collected were publicly available on institutional websites.

Situational Ethics

Situational ethics are those issues that are contextual and require an approach that "assumes each circumstance is different and that researchers must repeatedly reflect on, critique, and question their ethical decisions" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). Situational ethics may involve having to respond to "unanticipated ethical questions [that] may arise due to the specific nature of the research setting" (Reid et al., 2018, p. 70). During the research, there were no issues that needed to be attended to.

Relational Ethics

The third domain, relational ethics, calls for an "ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on others" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). Being a practitioner-scholar, I have the potential to take on another hyphenated role: that of an insider-researcher, a role requiring contemplation (Drake & Heath, 2011). First, because the institution where I am employed is one part of the U15, it is one of the research sites. In my role as chair of the child care and family-friendly working group, I am seen as a champion of child care and support students with family responsibilities. Interviewing those leaders from my own institution would require me to pay attention to "managing power dynamics, role conflict and role boundaries in relationships" (Reid et al., 2018, p. 72). Conflicts of interest were identified for the collection of data at two of the institutions, subsequently, alternative individuals were recruited.

Exiting Ethics

The fourth and final domain involves attending to those issues that may arise at the post-research dissemination stage. Although we cannot control how our research will be "read, be understood, and used" (p. 847), we can attempt to be proactive and "consider how best to present the research so as to avoid unjust or unintended consequences" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847).

Conclusion

The research design was presented in this chapter, along with the rationale for the decisions that were made. Critical in the design was the alignment between the research questions, conceptual lens (four key themes from the literature), theoretical framework (Cooper et al., 2004 four policy dimensions), and paradigmatic orientation, social constructionism. Data sources were documents (policy and website documents) and interviews. Trustworthiness,

reflexivity, and ethical considerations were discussed. The findings resulting from the document analysis and thematic analysis are presented in chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

Chapter 4 – Document Analysis: Policy and Website Documents

In this chapter I present the document analysis of the policy and website documents. These areas of focus guided the collection and curation of documents, shaped the interview questions, and provided initial a priori codes that were used in the analysis of the data. In the next two chapters I present the findings of my study. In this chapter, I provide a profile of the five universities and the participants interviewed. Timelines and details of the data-gathering process are shared and followed by an analysis of the documents collected at each of the five universities.

University Profiles

Below, each of five research-intensive western Canadian universities are profiled with comparisons on key metrics including student demographics and institutional figures. Appendix F provides a description of how information was collected for the profiles. Table 4-1 provides student demographics, specifically the number of undergraduate and graduate students, along with the combined total. Information about the number of international students was readily available within all five U15 profiles and on their respective institutional pages. Although information regarding the number or proportion of Indigenous students was not as readily available, I was able to locate numbers for each of the five universities with some effort. It is important to note that the numbers for Indigenous students were based on a self-declared process collected by the individual institutions. Also, not consistently made available by institutions were the proportion of full-time and part-time students. This information, if available, is shared within the summary paragraphs for each of the universities listed below.

Table 4-1.

Summary of Student Demographics, 2020-2021

University	Subtotal of undergraduate (U) and graduate (G) registered students		Combined Total of registered students	Number of International students	Number of Indigenous students
University A	U	20,696	25,102	3,125	3,482
	G	4,406			
University B	U	26,521	30,316	6,511	2,570
	G	3,795			
University C	U	29,271	36,109	4,976	1,106
	G	6,838			
University D	U	33,110	41,312	7,200	1,500
	G	8,202			
University E	U	56,781	68,498	17,918	2,021
	G	11,717			

Information about the number of campuses, faculties, and employees is summarized in Table 4-2 This information helps to provide a sense of the size of each institution, in addition to its total student population.

Table 4-2.

Summary of University Information, 2021-2021

University	Number of campuses	Number of faculties	Number of employees
University A	2	18	4,550
University B	2	15	9,808
University C	5	14	6,127
University D	5	18	14,438
University E	2	35	17,778

In the subsequent paragraphs, more information about each of the five universities is provided to augment the information is provided in Tables 4-1 and 4-2.

University A

University A was the smallest of the five universities. With two campuses, its overall student population was 25,102 and the number of international students was the lowest across the five universities, at 3,100 or 12%. However, it had highest number of self-identified Indigenous students (3,482 or 14%). University A also had the smallest number of employees at 4,550.

University B

University B was the second smallest institution, with a total of 30,316 students. and two campuses, University B had the second highest proportion of international students, at 21% and the second highest number of self-declared Indigenous students at 2,570 or 8%. Those completing their programs on a part-time basis made up 17% of undergraduate and 16% of graduate student enrolments. University B had the second smallest number of employees, 9,808.

University C

University C had a student population of 36,109 and 5 campuses. There were 5,099 or 14% international students and 1,113 or 3% Indigenous students. University C had the second-largest proportion of graduate students, at 19% of the total enrolment. The proportion of part-time students was higher for graduate students, at 10%, versus 6% for undergraduate students. University C had 6,127 employees, the third smallest number of all five universities.

University D

University D is the second largest university with 41,312 students and 5 campuses. It also had the highest proportion of graduate students, at 20% of their total enrolment. There were 7,200, or 17%, international students and 1,500, or 3.6%, Indigenous students. These numbers are based on information provided on the student admission pages, versus information available

through institutional reports. University D had the second largest number of employees at 14,438.

University E

University E was the largest university, with 69,498 students, the combined total from two campuses. The institution had the highest number of international students (17,918), who made up the largest proportion of total enrolment (26%) across the five universities. University E had the lowest number of self-declared Indigenous students at 2,021 or 3%. However, there were differences between the two campuses: one campus reported 6.2% of its students self-declaring Indigeneity and informed about the second campus could not be located. University E had the largest number of employees, at 17,778.

Interview Participant Profiles

I recruited one university leader to interview at each of the five universities. I intended to interview the most senior leader responsible for student services, typically a vice-president or vice-provost of students. However, I was open to interviewing a leader who could best speak to the institutional efforts, if any, to support students with family responsibilities. Table 4-3 provides information about each of the five participants interviewed. The scope and portfolios of those interviewed ranged from a unit-level director to a (retired) vice-provost student affairs.

Table 4-3.

Profile of Interview participants

University	Title	Portfolio
University A	Director, Access and Equity	Access and Equity
University B	Vice-Provost (Students) retired	Student Support; Student Engagement and Success; Registrar's office, and Enrolment Services

University	Title	Portfolio
University C	Senior Director, Student Wellness, Access and Support	Medical clinic; mental health, sexual violence, health promotion, faith and spirituality, women's resources student accessibility
University D	Assistant Dean, Student Life	Career center and experiential learning; students conduct and accountability; access team; health and wellness; health promotion; student group event risk management
	Assistant Dean, Health and Wellness	Health and wellness university health center; medical clinic and sexual assault center; counseling clinical services (full range of mental health, psychological support as well as psychiatric programming).
University E	Associate Vice President	Indigenous student support; health and wellness; sexual violence; student development and advising; recreation; athletics

In the next section, I describe the process of data gathering and curation that resulted in final number of documents analyzed. Detail about the types of documents collected under the five categories at each university (policy, leadership, inventory, general, and those shared during the interview) are provided. The respective documents collected at each university are discussed.

Document Gathering

I started my document gathering with one university, which served as my test site to ensure that the steps I identified in my systematic process would yield the documents required to explore the research questions. I began my data collection with specific searches (policy, leadership, and inventory) and then moved to a general search strategy. I followed a systematic process in collecting documents for each category type. In chapter 3, I provided a description of the document gathering, organizing, and curation for each document type across the five universities. Tables 4-4 and 4-5 provide a summary of the collection process for policy and leadership documents, including the initial webpages searched, the numbers of documents that

were located and those documents that contained relevant information and would be included in the analysis.

Table 4-4.

Summary of Collected Policy Documents

University	Number of webpages searched	Identified documents	Relevant documents
University A	4	7	5
University B	5	14	10
University C	4	55	8
University D	5	12	7
University E	7	14	10
Total	**25**	**102**	**40**

Table 4-5 provides a summary of the collection process for leadership related documents.

Table 4-5.

Summary of Collected Leadership Documents

University	Number of webpages searched	Identified documents	Relevant documents
University A	2	2	0
University B	4	7	4
University C	2	7	5
University D	3	2	1
University E	3	3	1
Total	**14**	**21**	**11**

Table 4-6 provides a summary of how each university measured up against the total number of items within the inventory, how many were targeted or promoted to students with family responsibilities, and the number of relevant documents that were located and subsequently analyzed.

Table 4-6.

Summary of Collected Inventory Documents

University	Number of inventory practices identified out of 16	Number promoted/targeted for students with family responsibilities	Relevant documents
University A	14	13	11
University B	12	5	10
University C	12	5	8
University D	12	5	11
University E	13	14	16
Total	**63**	**42**	**56**

Table 4-7 provides a summary of the general documents gathered and curated for each of the five universities. Across the five universities, the search terms yielded a total of 6,803 hits (webpages or documents). Columns three and four reflect the application and result of the screening process (inclusion and exclusion criteria).

Table 4-7.

Summary of Collected General Documents

University	Total number of hits across search terms	Total number after initial screening	Relevant documents
University A	161	114	17
University B	403	269	37
University C	1218	19	16
University D	998	60	32
University E	4023	81	52
Total	**6803**	**543**	**154**

The documents referred to in the above sections were all publicly available on the respective university websites. There is a fifth category of documents, which are those that were shared by the participants during the interview or immediately after. Only one participant shared documents, from University A, which are discussed later in the chapter.

Table 4-8 provides an overview of the total number of documents that were analyzed in each of the five categories of documents for each institution, as well as the total across the five universities.

Table 4-8.

Total Analyzed Documents by Category and Institution

University	Policy	Leadership	Inventory	General	Shared by interviewee	Document total by university
University A	5	0	11	17	6	39
University B	10	4	10	37	0	61
University C	8	5	8	16	0	37
University D	7	1	11	32	0	51
University E	10	1	16	52	0	79
Document total by category	**40**	**11**	**56**	**154**	**6**	**267**

Analysis of the documents

In the section below, I describe the documents that were collected at each university. The documents are presented under the four main categories that guided the collection: policy, leadership, inventory, and general. Findings of the document analysis are shared after information provided about each university and at the end of the chapter.

University A

In this section, I will discuss the types of documents that were collected at University A.

Policy Documents.

University Calendar.

A searching of University A's calendar, there was not a specific section that provided an overview of university-wide policies applying to all academic programs. The university calendar provided the regulations specific to each academic program offered by the faculties. A statement

on each college section that all college policies were subject to the university council regulations. I did a target sample of three faculties (arts and science, medicine, and graduate and post-doctoral) to explore information that might be available at the program level. I chose these specifically to capture a small but broad cross-section at a research-intensive university. These searches did not yield any relevant documentation. On each program page, there was the same reference to university council regulations which was hyperlinked to the university's governance website, the second site of my policy review.

Governance Site.

The University A has one overarching policy titled "Academic course policy on class delivery, examinations, and assessment of student learning". This document, which was reviewed for relevant information, contained a section on "Special accommodation for disability, pregnancy, religious, and other reasons". This document makes clear that the institution's duty is to provide "special accommodation related to the academic obligations of a class to students who are pregnant, and students whose spouses or partners may be pregnant". The other governing document that was reviewed was the policy entitled Discrimination and Harassment Prevention, which references the provincial human rights legislation and identifies family status as a protected area.

Human Rights.

Locating the human rights unit at University A led to information about discrimination and harassment, including a statement about discrimination and harassment based on protective grounds, which include family status. The information on this page was a subsection of a larger site developed to provide wellness information for faculty and staff. Although the page was not seemingly prepared for a student audience, there is a referral to the Student Affairs and Outreach

office for students who have questions about respectful conduct and/or who have experienced discrimination or harassing behaviour. There was no centralized human rights office with University A staff responsible for handling complaints and providing education and training. University A outsources human rights complaints and investigations to an external company.

Accommodations.

The Access and Equity Services unit's webpage came up through the policy document search under both governance and accommodation. Access and Equity Services or AES is a centralized student services unit that was formerly called Disability Services for Students. The top of their webpage states that the AES "is guided by X' Human Rights legislation and the duty to accommodate individuals requiring accommodations based on disability, religion, family status, and gender identity." A review the landing page of the unit, under the registration process, yielded further references to family status, specifically registration requirements: "For other accommodations (protected grounds, religion, gender identity, or family status) supporting documents vary on a case-to-case basis. Our staff will advise you." Further down the page provides direction is provided on how to contact the office when seeking accommodation based on family status.

Leaves of Absence.

In the absence of a formal policy framework to support students with family responsibilities, leaves of absence for maternal or parental grounds are likely to be available. At University A, a search of leave of absence regulations led to the post-doctoral studies policies and procedures manual, which contained information about "maternity, adopting, parenting leaves". The document also stated benefits of the leave, including time on leave not counting

towards time-to-completion and waiver of tuition fees. This document also identified the implications, including suspension of supervisory and financial supports.

Leadership Documents.

I was unable to locate any documents through the targeted search strategies of looking at institutional strategic plans or on the vice-provost webpage.

Inventory Documents.

A review of the University A website identified evidence that the university met 14 of the 16 items on the inventory. See Table 4-9 below for a summary.

Table 4-9.

Summary of University A's Inventory Documents, General and Specific Audience

Inventory item	General	Specific
Child care	Y	Y
Eldercare	N	N
Family housing	Y	Y
Counselling	Y	N
Health care	Y	Y
Financial aid	Y	Y
Food bank	Y	Y
Lactation/breastfeeding	Y	Y
Change tables	Y	Y
International student services	Y	Y
Indigenous student services	Y	Y
Student groups/peer supports	Y	Y
Dedicated spaces	Y	Y
Dedicated central service	N	N
Academic accommodations	Y	Y
Data (e.g., self-identification)	Y	Y

The two items I was not able to locate were eldercare support and a family care centre. Although there is no family care centre, there is a centralized student service that helps to coordinate academic accommodations as well, a comfort room that the parent group uses as a

place to gather. Through the search process, 11 individual webpages or documents were identified that provided information about the existing services, programs, or practices from the inventory. Of these 14, 11 are accessible and/or promoted specifically to students with family responsibilities and each of 11 are discussed below.

As part of a collection of pages for students regarding the "Essentials", there was a page providing information about "Housing and Childcare". University A has three child care centres with a combined total of 200 spots that include some infant care (6 months and up), but mostly spaces for toddlers and pre-school children (aged 2-6). Children of students are given priority at the two centres overseen by the students' union and can access the other care centre as well. There is also a link to help families locate off-campus child care. In terms of housing, there is one on-campus residence building that has two-bedroom units available for students with children. There are two scholarships and two bursaries that have been created by donors who wish to support students with dependents. Out of the four, three specifically targeted Indigenous students. The students' union operates a foodbank, however there was no evidence that food and other household items were available to students' families. On this same "Housing and Child care" page, there is subsection titled "Parent Resources", with a preamble that states:

> Day-to-day life on campus can often be stressful enough whether it's due to midterms, assignments, and challenging labs as a student or due to deadlines and grading as staff. If on top of it all, you also have one or more children at home or one on the way, things can be even more hectic.

Within this subsection, information is provided about a comfort room and dedicated breastfeeding areas. The webpage identifies the comfort room as the "first of its kind on a Canadian campus". This space is open to all parents and caregivers, and is described as

providing “a safe, clean space for parents and their children to use for breastfeeding, changing, feeding, relaxing, finding community, and more”. In addition to comfort rooms, six designated areas for breastfeeding that are located across the campus. There is a campus map available to show the locations. University A’s second campus also has a comfort room. Curiously, change tables are not specifically referenced as an amenity in these breastfeeding spaces but reference is made to their availability in the comfort room.

On this same page, the “Parents on Campus” student group is mentioned and links to their webpage, email and social media accounts are provided. The group is described as “a community where parents on campus can meet, share stories and information Monthly information sessions from local speakers on parenting issues (car seat safety, quick nutritious family meals, etc.)”. The Facebook link mentions that the group is affiliated with Student Health Services and that it is open to all parents, whether student, staff, or faculty. The last piece of content on the Parents on Campus page references the “Aboriginal Student Centre Parent Circle” which delivers programming for Indigenous students and their “Aboriginal student parents and families offers fun programming such as MEND [which stands for Mind, Nutrition, Exercise, and Do it], family literacy, and making healthy snacks while sharing a meal and having the opportunity to meet other parents on campus.” Contact information, including email and social media, is also provided.

The Parents on Campus page refers student-parents and pregnant students to the Access and Equity Services to get assistance with seeking accommodations. Information is shared about the comfort room, which also serves as a dedicated space for members of the student group to gather and support student parents. Amenities including a fridge, microwave furniture, toys, diapers, etc., are listed along with encouragement to use space to spend time with their own

children and visit with other families. On this page, information about the self-declaration and what the process is given, along with visuals to assist students in the self-declaration process, which is part of the CRM (client relationship management) system used by University A.

Other items on the inventory include direct services such as those offered through the Student Wellness Center. At University A, services such as primary health care are available to dependents of students; however, psychological (individual and group counselling) and psychiatric services are not available.

The student group, Parents on Campus, also provides information about those items on the inventory, including health and child care off-campus, support groups and services on campus. The University A has specialized student services both for international students, and Indigenous students and there is some (albeit limited) information on each of the pages targeting students with family responsibilities. The international student centre's page provides information about immigration for family members and those living in Canada, including links to child care. The Indigenous student centre references the Parent Circle mentioned above and activities that are provided for children while parents meet. The centre identifies transition support, which includes assistance with locating child care. The university provides accommodation and/or flexibility for students with family responsibilities is through Access and Equity Services, a centralized student service that is described above.

Finally, there was no evidence that the university had dedicated study spaces that were family friendly; however, the libraries did promote inclusive washrooms that allowed parents to enter with their children regardless of the gender of the parent or child.

General Documents

The 17 documents curated under this document category were further clustered by the originator of the content: institutional communications, specifically university news articles; college (faculty) communications; centralized unit (student services, teaching and learning, libraries) information; and student governance/group.

There were 11 university news articles, and six of which pertained to the creation of a new child care centre, which documented fundraising efforts and construction efforts over a six-year period (2011-2016). One article referenced the pandemic and highlighted university instructors attempts to support students during remote learning, and family responsibilities were also mentioned as an important factor to consider. In another pre-COVID article, there were suggestions to help students to connect to find their campus community. A Parents on Campus group was mentioned, including its study groups, comfort room, and social media account. The GSA Commons was mentioned for graduate students.

One article from 2018 specifically highlighted how the university "nurtures support for student parents" and provided background on how the Parents on Campus group started. The Parent Circle, which is run through the Aboriginal Student Centre, was also featured. Another article mentioned the change of Disability Services for Students evolving to the Access and Equity Services and with it the change in mandate to better accommodate students "based on disability, religion, family status (including pregnancy) and gender identity". Another article from 2021 profiled a First Nations scholarship recipient who was a student parent her successes in and outside of the classroom.

Two news articles were found on two academic program pages. One was an academic program promoting a newly created mature student award and featured the inaugural recipient

who was a student with family responsibilities. The other promoted the publication of an article written by a student who wrote about the college's Aboriginal Student Achievement Program, which was created to help address barriers to student success such as family responsibilities.

The centralized unit created documents that were included on the Parents on Campus page, a page that was located on the Student Health Services page. In addition to the information identified in the inventory section above, this page also provided a list of family-friendly ideas and activities. The page had two additional sections, one providing information about time management and self-care, and the other providing budgeting strategies.

The page found on the libraries' webpage is evidence of a consultation process with "parents who study and work on campus" that included two in-person sessions and an opportunity for written feedback. It appears that this written feedback was collected by the Parents on Campus group. Suggestions ranged from having drop-in casual child care available at the library to providing change tables in the washroom and a breastfeeding/pumping space within one of the libraries. There was a strong call for a dedicated child/family-friendly area where parents would feel comfortable studying or meeting up with other parents, along with their children.

The teaching and learning webpage contains a document that provides advice to instructors about using a feature in the LMS called "Know your class" that can "be useful to you in designing your class and lessons". Of note, this page includes a reminder that some students have responsibilities beyond their course work.

Participant Shared Documents

University A was the only institution wherein the participant shared documents with me as part of the interview process; these documents that were not otherwise publicly available

through their university's website. In this case, a total of six documents were provided by Participant A. One was a link to a news article that highlighted the accomplishments of a student parent who had recently graduated and who acknowledged the supports she had received from the university, in particular the Access and Success Services and talked about how this support had directly impacted on her ability to succeed in her studies.

During the interview, the interviewee sent me two documents that were prepared by the Access and Equity Services about family status and accommodations. There were two versions of the same document: a long and a short one. The longer version was set up in a frequently asked question format that covered definitions and descriptions related to the family status as a protected status under human rights legislation. The shorter version was prepared specifically for the Parents on Campus group to provide to students who had questions about how the unit could be of assistance.

The final three documents were sent to me as a follow-up email. The content of the email itself became a document to be analyzed, as it provided some context about the two draft policy documents. The policy documents were draft versions that the AES unit had prepared. This unit was actively working with the university to ensure that there was a formal procedure for accessing accommodations for protected grounds, including family status. One document was for academic accommodations, and the other addressed both academic and clinical accommodations.

University B

The summary below contains highlights of the document collection at University B.

Policy Documents.

Within the university calendar, instances of the key words were identified in different sections, including faculty-specific leaves of absence (faculty of graduate studies and post-

baccalaureate education), and on-campus child care. Reference was made to the university's and province's human rights policy and legislation, but it was within the Faculty of Arts section, not in the general section of the calendar.

Within the Governance page, final exam procedures and deferred exam procedures identify what to do if a student "receives word of a family emergency during the course of an examination and is unable to continue". Parental leave for graduate students is referenced on the Registrar's website.

Leadership Documents.

The university's strategic plan – document, mid-term report and final report – all referenced child care. In the plan, one of the priorities, "building community that created an outstanding learning and working environment", identified as a strategy the goal to increase satisfaction within constituent groups to pursue "best practices for provision of child care and healthy living options for students, staff, and faculty". The Vice-Provost (Students) webpage references a Child Care Initiative, including links to a webpage that contains several associated reports prepared by a working group and consultant.

Inventory Documents.

The University B website revealed evidence of 12 of the 16 items of the inventory located on the institutional website; see Table 4-10 for a summary. Those items missing were family housing, eldercare, central services, and data collection.

Table 4-10.

Summary of University B's Inventory Documents, General and Specific Audience

Inventory item	**University B**	
	General	**Specific**
Child care	Y	Y
Eldercare	N	N
Family housing	Y	N
Counselling	Y	N
Health care	Y	N
Financial aid	Y	Y
Food bank	Y	N
Lactation/breastfeeding	Y	Y
Change tables	Y	Y
International student services	Y	N
Indigenous student services	Y	N
Student groups/peer supports	Y	N
Dedicated spaces	Y	N
Dedicated central service	N	N
Academic accommodations	Y	Y
Data (e.g., self-identification)	N	N

In a review of the services and supports that are in place, only five are targeted specifically to students with family responsibilities. A centralized webpage that is called "child care" houses information about specific supports and services for students with caregiving responsibilities. There is an archived page that was still active as well as an updated site, giving the impression that the institution was refreshing its web-content-management system. The "child care" webpage has as its audience student, staff, and faculty who are parents. This same webpage is where several inventory items were located: child care, financial aid, breastfeeding-friendly areas, and a list of washrooms with change tables. The site also has a section called academic policies, which provides information for students about academic policies they should be aware of should family responsibilities interfere with academic commitments. This section

also indicated that “if you are experiencing challenges meeting your academic requirements due to family responsibilities the policies and procedures below may be applicable. If you encounter difficulty with these policies, please contact Student Advocacy and Case Management”. The policies referenced focused on incompletes (extensions) for term work, deferred exams, authorized withdrawals, and leaves of absence.

General Documents.

The document-gathering led to are review of 37 curated documents, the majority of which mentioned family responsibilities or family-friendly as key terms. Of these documents, 11 were institutional news articles that had been published since 2016 on a range of topics from creating child care spots to organizing family-friendly events such as graduation powwows, as well as recent articles on family responsibilities during the pandemic. One such article featured two students who shared their experiences of completing their university courses while caring for their children, who were at home because they were not school-age, or because there were school closures due to health restrictions due to COVID-19.

Documents that originated from faculties were the second-largest category (n=7) located on the institutional website. Four of these documents related to family responsibilities as grounds for absences or extended time given for term work, as well as a reason for part-time status. Other documents mentioned family responsibilities as part of curriculum review. The following was referenced in a section of the subcommittee accreditation report under the heading of student wellness: “student fatigue and family responsibilities need to be acknowledged and not negatively weighted in evaluation”. One faculty included an item in a post-graduate survey that explored whether family responsibilities has prevented a recent graduate from acquiring full-time employment. Finally, another faculty anticipated care needs related to practicum preparation by

asking students to identify the number of hours they devoted to family responsibilities each week.

The centralized child care site contained five documents that provided information about child care and other supports, including pertinent academic policies for student parents. The webpage also provided information about the institutional child care initiative. A total of four reports or infographics prepared by a working group and as a consultant were located. Three documents were related to events for students with family responsibilities. Other documents mentioned child care in senate and board of governing documents (*n*=3), student recruitment material (*n*=1), and the student health and dental plan (*n*=1).

University C

Documents gathered from the University C website are summarized in the section below.

Policy Documents.

Eight policy-related documents were identified. The university calendar had four relevant sections: two that provided information about child care services on campus and two that referred to alternative arrangements for timed assessments and final exams in online and blended course when students were unable to write due to caregiving responsibilities. The graduate calendar references leave of absence policy for caregiving responsibilities and for maternity. The medical school also has a leave of absence for maternity and paternity, as well as for instances where a student has to provide care for immediate family members. Within the governance page at this university (the site that contains university policies and procedures), two documents that were related to accommodation of students identified family status as protected grounds under the provincial human rights legislation.

Leadership Documents.

The page that housed the institutional strategic plan identified additional strategic documents and of these, four contained a search term. Across the comprehensive, academic, and research plans, the statement of "improving quality of life for families caring for aging parents" was identified. A document presenting the Indigenous strategy for the University highlighted challenges faced by Indigenous students: "relocating to an urban centre can result in further complications, such as inadequate access to child care, affordable housing, food and transportation" and "the general lack of finances for basic needs such as child care, counselling and food."

Inventory Documents.

Reviewing the web documents of the 16 inventory practices, University C has 12 in place and the four that are missing are eldercare supports, a dedicated/centralized unit, change table locator, and data sources. See Table 4-11 for a summary.

Table 4-11.

Summary of University C's Inventory Documents, General and Specific Audience

Inventory Item	**University C**	
	General	**Specific**
Child care	Y	Y
Eldercare	N	N
Family housing	Y	Y
Counselling	Y	N
Health care	Y	Y
Financial aid	Y	N
Food bank	Y	N
Lactation/breastfeeding	Y	Y
Change tables	N	N
International student services	Y	Y
Indigenous student services	Y	N
Student groups/peer supports	Y	N
Dedicated spaces	Y	N

Dedicated central service	N	N
Academic accommodations	Y	N
Data (e.g., self-identification)	N	N

Of the12 practices in place, five are offered to students with family responsibilities. There is family housing available and residence-life programming that is available to students with families. There is on-campus child care, and the main campus prioritizes care for children of students. The Wellness unit provides medical services for students and their dependents. Services for international students include information that considers the needs of families; there is also a program that helps bring families together to explore the city. The women's center promotes their space – a "safe haven room" for breastfeeding, pumping, or nursing.

General Documents.

As a final count, there were 16 documents that were included in the final review under the category of general documents. There are two news articles, one focusing on the profile of a student who is a parent and another focusing on international students, including those with families. Specifically, there is a Global Families Program, which is a family-friendly program for international students that offers fun activities ranging from laser tag and trampoline parties to Minds in Motion science labs for children. The staff have child care training, so parents can socialize and get to know each other during conversation cafés while their kids play.

Other located documents included supportive statements about student parents in different course outlines. One instructor's syllabus is included a lengthy section in their syllabus with the heading "Policy on Children in Class" that began with following text:

> It is my belief that if we want parents in academia, that we should also expect children to be present in some form. Currently, the university does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom. The policy described here is thus, a reflection of my own

> beliefs and commitments to student, staff, and faculty parents. (University C course outline Topics in Gender and Sexuality).
>
> Another instructor took a similar approach and shared the following:
>
> I believe that academia should be family-friendly. The choice to have children has disproportionately affected women in academia. I do not want child care or other parenting issues to be a barrier to your success in any aspect of this course, and as such welcome conversations about accommodations (see https://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/childcare/family-friendly-syllabi-examples). (University C course outline lifespan psychotherapy).

Two documents pertained to supporting students seeking academic accommodations, one was a flowchart outlining the process for course exemption, whether under student accommodation policy or informally through instructors. The other document was a form that students had to fill out to aid to seek accommodation based on protected characteristic. These were included in the general documents because I came across them by chance, rather than by conducting a more targeted search in those places on webpages that ordinarily would house policy and procedure information.

Reference was made to another document from the student accessibility services regarding supporting students returning to campus for in-person learning and accommodation for family responsibilities.

> Instructors may also be contacted by their department delegates regarding a student seeking accommodation based on family status or by Student Accessibility Services based on medical consideration. This document aims to help instructors determine what flexibility may be possible when faced with these requests. (University C Finding

Flexibility in In-Person Learning for Off-Campus Learners, Student Accessibility Services, 2021).

Other documents originated from different areas of the university – graduate student health plans that family care counselling, a call for donations for food bank, a job posting that mentioned supporting international students with families, and a family-friendly event for Indigenous Peoples Day. Remaining documents made reference to a focus group as part of strategic plan that highlighted family housing and needs of international students with families. The final document identified a library liaison who supports students from various backgrounds; in this case, those who are student parents are given support.

University D

Documents gathered from University D are summarized below.

Policy Documents.

The university calendar revealed two documents with the search term “family status”. One explained that family status is collected as personal information, and the other indicated that family status is a protected characteristic under provincial human rights legislation. A search for university policies yielded three that referred to family status: access to information and protection of privacy procedures, discrimination harassment and duty to accommodate policy, and the duty accommodate procedure. On the accommodation site, there was a referral to the dean of students if accommodation related to protected grounds other than disability. “Inquiries about student accommodations for protected grounds other than physical and mental disabilities should be directed to the Office of the Dean of Students” (University D, Academic Accommodations). The only document that spoke to leaves of absence for maternity and parental reasons and it was on the regulations of the faculty of graduate studies and research.

Leadership Documents.

The Dean of Student's webpage referred to a *Students Who Parent* project, which is an initiative to enhance support for student parents and to "meaningfully shift perceptions of our student parents on campus". There was an associated page with information about submitting proposals to the *Students Who Parent* subcommittee.

Inventory Documents.

Documented gathered from the University D website revealed that the institution offers 12 of the 16 practices that support students with family responsibilities. Those missing are family housing, lactation rooms, change table locator, centralized service, and data. Table 4-12 provides an overview of the inventory practices that University D has in place, as well as those seven services that are promoted to students with family responsibilities.

Table 4-12.

Summary of University D's Inventory Documents, General and Specific Audience

Inventory Item	**University D**	
	General	**Specific**
Child care	Y	Y
Eldercare	Y	Y
Family housing	N	N
Counselling	Y	N
Health care	Y	Y
Financial aid	Y	N
Food bank	Y	Y
Lactation/breastfeeding	N	N
Change tables	N	N
International student services	Y	N
Indigenous student services	Y	N
Student groups/peer supports	Y	Y
Dedicated spaces	Y	N
Dedicated central service	N	N
Academic accommodations	Y	N
Data (e.g., self-identification)	N	N

University D has a *Student Parents on Campus* "family-friendly student group", and the page provides an opportunity for students to sign up for newsletters and/or to follow on their social media accounts. There are six daycare centres that provide care for members of the University D community. There is a needs-based child care grant for graduate students available through their union. There is reference to eldercare for graduate students as part of their health-care plan. International Student Services had several pages that provided information to support international students with families, including information about immigration, child care and the public school system. On this page there is a message to international students with families: "We understand that the accompanying spouses, partners, and children of our international students need support too. We provide information, support and organize events to address the questions and concerns of our international family community" (University D, International Student Services). University D students and their family members have access to health care on campus. The foodbank is available and there is a family box promoted on the page.

General Documents.

There were 32 documents included as part of the analysis for University D. Of these documents, nine that originated from the graduate students' union ranged from minutes and reports of the executive and board that captured lobbying efforts for more child care, more child care grants, and breastfeeding spaces, as well as a call for expectations around bringing children to class. In an update to the GSA Council, the executive reported they would continue to "advocate for a family-friendly campus that includes increasing the number of breastfeeding rooms on campus and a change to the policy regarding bringing children to class" (University D, GSA Council minutes, 2017).

In other minutes, reference to students with family responsibilities were identified, including discussions related to mental health. The association also had material about welcoming and orienting new students the health plan, as well as information about the health plan. Documents originating from the Dean of Students' *Students Who Parent* project were the second-largest collection of documents (*n*=5); and they included survey outcomes, as well as pages from a webpage that promoted various aspects of the initiative and services. Similarly, there were two documents that referred to a housing consultation for student parents. There was a Provost report on the student experience that highlighted the need to consider flexibility in program planning and course scheduling given students family responsibilities. A report of the provost on mental health also identified family responsibilities as impacting learning and outcomes for students. Ancillary services carried out and reported on consultation for housing for students with families. Documents tied to teaching and learning (principles of, committee minutes on learning environment, an EDI section on the webpage) referenced the importance of considering the circumstances of students with family responsibilities.

There were documents pertaining to graduate student supervision that made reference to the importance of supporting graduate students with family responsibilities. Supervisors were encouraged to show support through "seeking to understand their students' interests and passions, strengths and weaknesses, future academic and career goals, and family and health needs as they pursue their degree".

A section of this document had the heading "Respect family life", which provided statistics as well as helpful information about the realities of graduate student life and their commitments outside of students' academic program. The following key points were summarized:

> Supervisors need to be sensitive to the restricted working hours of parents and should provide flexibility for parental duties during some regular work-time hours; Students have varying entitlements to maternity leave; and Supervisors should openly discuss with graduate students who have young children how they can support your students' ability to be good parents while they complete their degree in a timely fashion. (University D, Guidelines for supervision and mentorship for faculty and administrators).

Minutes from university executive meetings discussed learning in time of COVID-19 and caregiving issues: "the student concerns related to synchronous learning and assessment given challenges of time zones, family responsibilities, privacy issues, and variable internet connectivity" (University D, Executive Committee, March 8, 2021).

The university's COVID page asked students to consider what was needed for remote learning if they were returning home. One section related to technology and access asked, "will you have reliable access to a computer and space in which to complete your work (sharing computers, child and family care responsibilities, etc.)?" (University D, Important information for students considering travelling home).

The faculty of graduate studies and research page contained reference to leaves of absence for maternity and caregiving within the requirements for three different scholarship and funding opportunities. For undergraduate students, text in the calendar encouraged students when making choices about course registration to consider their commitments, including those to family. "Students are expected to select an appropriate course load taking into consideration work, family responsibilities, or other outside commitments, as well as regulations pertaining to eligibility for University and Faculty Awards" (University D, Regulations for students).

There was a document located that spoke to the closure of a library that had been designated as family-friendly. The faculties of medicine and dentistry profiled graduates with families who had completed their studies. Finally, a professional development conference for academic advisors featured a presentation on student parents.

University E

Below is a summary of the curated documents collected for University E.

Policy Documents.

Ten policy-related documents were located. I used key terms to review different sections of the university calendar. Within quick links and a support services section, information about on-campus child care was identified. The university has a university-wide academic concession policy that provides opportunity for students to request changes to the "timing or nature" of course or programs requirements if they have grounds. Within the regulation, having conflicting responsibilities can include caring for dependent or family member.

Information for graduate students was also located in the calendar. Specifically, there was information regarding parental leave of absence and a parental accommodation policy that made concessions for those with caregiving responsibilities who wanted to continue their studies with accommodation. This latter policy "makes it possible for a student to maintain full-time student status during an eight-week period surrounding the arrival of a new child, with all the benefits of such status, by standardizing a minimum level of academic accommodation during that period" (University E, Parental Accommodation Policy).

The governance webpage has a policy on discrimination that identified family status as a protected characteristic. The webpage for human rights led to pages on EDI that identified resources for student parents. The accessibility office provided information that distinguished

between and provided process for both accommodations and academic concessions, as well as information for those seeking accommodations for non-disability grounds. In University E's Frequently Asked Questions about Policy LR7 Accommodation for Students with Disabilities section, the following information is provided:

> A non-disability related need for an academic concession would be where, for example, a student required an academic concession for a conflicting responsibility such as: representing the University, the province, or the country in a competition or performance; serving in the Canadian military; observing a religious rite; working to support oneself or one's family; or having responsibility for the care of a family member.

Leadership Documents.

The institution's strategic plan referenced increasing child care capacity; however, the need for child care for students with children was not specifically mentioned.

Inventory Documents.

Based on the documents gathered, University E met 13 of the 16 practices within the inventory (see Table 4-13). I did not find evidence of eldercare, dedicated centralized service, or data identification. Of the practices in place, eight were promoted to students with family responsibilities.

Table 4-13.

Summary of University E's Inventory Documents, General and Specific Audience

Inventory Item	University E	
	General	**Specific**
Child care	Y	Y
Eldercare	N	N
Family housing	Y	Y
Counselling	Y	N
Health care	Y	N
Financial aid	Y	Y
Food bank	Y	Y
Lactation/breastfeeding	Y	Y
Change tables	Y	Y
International student services	Y	Y
Indigenous student services	Y	N
Student groups/peer supports	Y	N
Dedicated spaces	Y	N
Dedicated central service	N	N
Academic accommodations	Y	Y
Data (e.g., self-identification)	N	N

Student parents have access to on-campus child care, and some are eligible for child care bursaries. Additionally, part-time students at the university are eligible for financial loans. Eligible students are those who "require assistance in paying for child care while attending school" (University E, Loans for part-time students). Students supporting one or more dependents are eligible for more supports at the foodbank and are allowed two bags of food. (University E, Using the Food Bank).

At its larger campus, University E has family housing for students with families and programming is offered: "This residence is child-friendly and promotes healthy families through community activities, support programs, and nearby infrastructure like schools, shopping, green spaces, and child care services." (University E, Residences). Information about moving and getting settled as international students with families was identified on the university pages.

University E's documentation for your family states that "it may be possible for your family members to come live with you in Canada for the duration of your studies. In most cases, "family" includes spouses, common-law/conjugal partners, and dependent children".

There is a student parent page connected with EDI efforts and that contain an overview of existing services, programs, and information for student parents. University E recognizes that "caring for children while at university can be a challenging experience. In addition to time and financial pressures, many students may also be caring for children far from family support systems" (University E, Resource for students who are parents). Supports highlighted on this page included information about how to access the food bank and how to locate breastfeeding spaces as well as change tables. On the student services page, the grounds for academic concessions are identified as "unanticipated changes in personal responsibilities that create a conflict. These may include family care, paid employment, religious practices, or military duty that conflict with academic requirements and are beyond your control." (University E, Academic concessions).

General Documents.

University E had the largest number of general documents (*n*=52) that were curated and included as part of the analysis. The largest type of documents (*n*=12) were those articles published in the student newspaper that covered topics related to experiences of student parents. For example, there was an article titled "Balancing act: Inside the world of University E's student-parents" Other articles highlighted longstanding lobbying efforts by students and student leaders to increase child care on campus. As a student government VP external candidate explained, "The simplest and most effective policy changes that can be advocated for the

restoration of capital funding are: for child care facilities, allowing for more care spaces and alleviating the burden on student parents".

Several surveys and reports were located that originated from various areas of the university and from different campuses in which child care and/or students with family responsibilities were identified. From a housing consultation, on-campus accommodations for students with dependents were identified. University E's Graduate student strategy and operational plan states that "immediate concerns for prospective and current graduate students often have to do with the availability and affordability of housing. This has a significant impact on the productivity and wellbeing of student parents".

Seven documents focused on news, events, or activities that promoted family-friendly activities on campus. Recreation services sought to remove barriers for students with families. University E acknowledged that "sometimes it can be hard to find the motivation to exercise between class, work, studying, commuting, and family responsibilities" (University E, How can we help you move). In other instances, there was an institutional-wide effort: "Campus and Community Planning's Community Development team, working under the banner of UTown @ University E, heads up a number of programs for kids who live in University E's student family housing and in UNA neighbourhoods " (University E). Other information was given in the form of a university-hosted blog that identified "affordable, family-friendly activities on campus"

Faculty-specific documents included the promotion of financial supports for family care during COVID-19, for example, an academic department had a specific fund available for students and faculty with families. There was also advice provided by faculties to students with caregiving demands. University E advises that "if you commute, have family responsibilities,

work, or volunteer more than five hours a week, do not attempt a full course load" (Choosing your courses in First Year Science).

The following advice on inclusive teaching practices highlighted the need for instructors to be flexible given other responsibilities that students balance, including families:

> Now more than ever, we encourage you to continue to be mindful of your students' differing backgrounds and needs. Many are likely to be experiencing challenges, including family responsibilities, and limited or no access to digital devices and the internet. While you may not be able to resolve all these difficulties, you can still apply inclusive and equitable considerations to your online teaching so as not to unintentionally reproduce or exacerbate inequities. (University E, Inclusive teaching)

Two course outlines stated expectations about children in class, and one referenced content available on its social media account:

> Policy on children in class (adapted from a Twitter colleague). Currently, the university does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom. The policy described here is simply a reflection of my own beliefs and commitments to student parents and the other highlighting family responsibilities as valid grounds for needing concession. (University E, Kinesiology 381: Leisure, Sport, and Popular Culture)

Documents tied to the Equity office included information about family status and housed the following information about the baby family initiative. "…we take pride in creating an inclusive campus for all. University E is committed to providing a supportive and safe campus for breastfeeding" (University E, Baby Friendly Initiative). In its annual report, the Equity office provided an update on a Student-Parent Programing and identified the initiative's goals, which included creating a guide for resources and supports and connecting with student parents.

Housing and financial support documents that were located indicated that the university offered financial support for students with children. “University E’s Students may be eligible for awards and bursaries related to child care costs (University E, Bursaries).

The graduate students’ association documents included a media release that called for more financial support from the government and a commissioned report on the experiences of graduate student parents at the university. This report presented an in-depth research project that sought to “explore the experiences of graduate student parents” because “their voices are rendered invisible by insufficient institutional understanding” (University E, Understanding the experiences of graduate students with children at University E).

Summary.

The analysis of the documents for this research was a multistep process that began with the initial collection of the documents and continued during the methodical curation process. In the preceding sections, an analysis of the documents was provided and presented by university and document categories. In the next chapter, I present the main themes that I identified during the thematic analysis of the interview data.

Chapter 5 – Thematic Analysis: Documents and Interviews

In the previous chapter, I explained how, through document analysis, the documents were curated and organized to provide insights into the breadth or depth of the level of support provided by each university. In this chapter, I present the thematic analysis of both documents and interview data sources. As explained in chapter 3, some categories were identified inductively through the analysis, while others were categorized using deductive codes drawn from the conceptual lenses and the theoretical framework. Analysis was an iterative process of coding until I reached a point where I was satisfied that the rich and complex data from the data sources could be described under seven main themes, which are:

- accommodating family status
- policies and practices
- leadership and institutional priorities
- student populations and their needs
- supports, services, and programs
- teaching and learning
- community building

Organized under each of these seven main themes were subthemes with the main theme serving as a unifying thread. Below are the findings of each of these seven main themes and their corresponding subthemes in relation to the documents and the interview transcripts.

1. Accommodating Family Status

The theme of accommodating family status captured the degree to which a particular university grounds their approach is grounded in supporting students with family responsibilities within human right legislation.

The subthemes are (a) family status as a protected characteristic, (b) formalized accommodation process, and (c) responding to specific situations. Each of these three subthemes is presented below.

a. Family Status as a Protected Characteristic

As identified in the previous chapter, each university referenced provincial human right legislation within its respective calendars or policy documents, was referenced when identifying protected characteristics, which including family status. However, only one university had a dedicated office that supported and/or accommodated the needs of students with family responsibilities. Participant A explained that "we did branch out to provide support to all protected categories and so family status is considered one of those categories". The office's webpage states that it is "guided by [province's] Human Rights legislation and the duty to accommodate individuals requiring accommodations based on disability, religion, family status, and gender identity".

This same university was the only one of the five that had evidence of documents exploring what family status means in term of policy and procedures related to students with family responsibilities. However, these explanations were provided by participants and not located on the webpage. Under participant A's university's policy, students must have a legal obligation to provide care (child care or eldercare). Participant A further explained that caregiving includes "children…parent and legal responsibility to a child under the age of 18. But then also if you have…if you are legally a care provider to your elderly parent".

At the time of the interview, University A was in the process of creating documents to better articulate the grounds under which students could receive accommodation for family status and what that accommodation might look like. Participant A shared that there was some

complexity: “We instead try to communicate that there is a lot of grey area in the area of family status accommodation and even if it doesn’t engage the legal requirement, we will still meet [with the student]”. The specific language from University A’s draft document that explains what is meant by legal requirement is as follows:

> Students may experience barriers to their education due to legal caregiving obligations in the area of parent-child relationship. Legal obligations refer to the student-parent’s legal caregiving responsibilities, such as child care (e.g., adult supervision for a minor child) and providing their child with the necessaries of life (e.g., medical care). It should be noted that the parent-child relationship includes adult children who are providing elder care to a parent. The term “parent “is defined by the Code as “a person who stands in place of a parent to another person” and may include non- nuclear family relationships.

Between the draft policy and the information shared by Participant A, University A is providing the university community with clarity about the institution’s obligation to accommodate student’s legal caregiving responsibilities; however, are also encouraging flexibility and support for students who are caregivers but who may not be able to demonstrate they are legal caregivers.

When asked how members of University A have responded to the office’s expanded mandate, Participant A explained that the mandate was met with support from those areas that oversee university policies, including the legal office: “We have a fantastic human rights lawyer that we work with who was at the law firm that the university has on retainer, he said, “family status is up and coming” (Participant A). As well, the university secretary’s office agreed, saying “this is fantastic, family status, absolutely, we can do this”. Similarly, the reception from faculty

has been positive. Participant A indicated that when presenting to departments and faculties, students encounter little push back. She shared the following information:

> It's not unusual for me to hear from a faculty member who says, "God, I went through grad school you know, I was in my PhD program. I had a baby; I had a toddler. I didn't know that there was [support], or there were no supports available back then for me, this would have been great".

At University A, students themselves are highly supportive of the office, key referral for the unit is the Parents on Campus group and participant A shared documents that the centre provides to help with referral "one is a longer version of family status accommodation, and the other a shorter version…that we wrote for our Parents on Campus group to handout to parents who are experiencing difficulties".

University A's Access and Equity office's intake process mirrors that which is used for students with disabilities, but where it differs is the need for medical documentation. Participant A explains that students who wish receive assistance from the office base on family status, the requirement is to self-declare. This in contrast to students with disabilities, also supported by the office, who must provide medication documentation. The advisors within the unit are assigned to work with specific faculties, leading to strengthening relationships as well as referrals. As participant A explained:

> When there are students who come forward to their instructors or to their programs to say, I'm struggling because I'm a parent, this is what's going on. My child is unwell…they're referred to us and then we can start providing support with the program to the students. (Participant A)

The Access and Equity office at University A appears to be critical in signaling to students with family responsibilities that they have rights given their family status and that there is an office to provide support. The Access and Equity office is also an important resource for faculties as well in their efforts to support students.

The office takes a case management approach with advisors assigned to specific faculties which is beneficial because the advisor can create meaningful relationships with the faculty and associate deans. The office empowers students to approach faculty to receive the accommodations they require related to course work. In participants A's words:

> Sometimes it is a matter of saying to the student have you contacted your instructor to explain that your child's been really unwell with an ear infection the last few days, and, and you're needing a day extension on your paper? if the student says, no, I've not done that yet we'll say, "do you feel comfortable emailing your instructor, or do you need help doing that? Do you need the advisor to do it? Do you want to copy the advisor on the email? (Participant A)

Participant A revealed that the actual number of registered students is quite low compared that of students who seek accommodation for other protected characteristics; specifically, those with disabilities. Oftentimes, students reach out to receive affirmation that they have the right request assistance to meet their academic needs arising from challenges with caregiving. The advisors subsequently work to empower such students. As participants A explains:

> When they reach out to us for advice, if they are feeling comfortable about reaching out to their instructors and seeking the accommodation as a first step, sometimes those students end up not registering with us. They contact for advice because they don't even know if they can ask for an extension or if they could ask for their exam to be moved, and

> so to hear from us that no, you absolutely can do that, and your instructor probably knows that and so do reach out to them, sometimes that's enough. And so, we don't hear from those students again.

b. Formalized Accommodation Process

Across the universities, three (A, C and D) indicated that there was an avenue for students to seek accommodation on protected characteristics other than disability. University A has a more robust system, thanks to its dedicated office and supportive policy documents, while universities C and D identify the vice-provost/dean of students as the office to contact for assistance. For example, at University D, information about academic accommodations included referrals to the accessibility centre and the following statement: "inquiries about student accommodations for protected grounds other than physical and mental disabilities should be directed to the Office of the Dean of Students."

A key feature of University A's formalized process was the creation of accommodation planning committees that were used mostly for clinical or field placements. Participant A explained that the purpose of the committee was to "look at what the core competencies are of that program in order to understand what accommodations are possible"; to do so, one must have representatives from the academic program who can speak to the "bona fide occupational requirements or the core competencies of the program."

The unit creates letters to be given to the instructor at the start of term outlining the accommodations for the students and Participant A explained that "instructors understand that these academic accommodations have been approved either through AEs or through a joint AE accommodation planning committee."

At University C, accommodation based on grounds other than disability – such as family responsibilities and religious obligations – are directed to the vice-provost (students). However, units under the vice-provost (students) such as Student Wellness are often the offices that tend to work closely with students seeking supporting due to caregiving.

There was recognition that there is not always a clear designation between disability and other protected grounds, and "accommodation gets a little muddy because some issues that students present with are medically related" (Participant C), such as "caring for a family member who's immunocompromised" (Participant C). Sometimes a case involves medical grounds, but for a family member, not the student and these scenarios became more pronounced due to the pandemic.

Process-wise, the University C is working out processes to help with referrals and the handling of cases. As participant C explains:

> They're talking quite a bit about trying to make sure that that they're on the same page and in the process for the accommodation, trying to get the medical, the documented ones as much as possible with student accessibility services, because that's, by far, the majority and trying to keep the non-medical more with the vice-provost for grounds other than physical and mental disabilities.

c. Responding to Specific Situations

Apart from universities having or not having a centralized office or having or not having a formalized policy and procedure, all participants were able to share how they would respond to requests in the absence of formalized policy. Participants were able to elaborate through responding to the two case scenarios that were included as part of the interview protocol. The first scenario involved a student who had been asked by the program to stop bringing her infant

to class because other students had complained it was disruptive. The second scenario involved a student in a professional program who failed the year and was appealing on the grounds of eldercare responsibilities. The perspectives shared by the participants about the scenarios are presented below.

Scenario 1: Bringing an infant to class.

Hearing about or having to respond to situations of students bringing infants or children to class was not an uncommon experience for the participants. One participant stated, "this scenario is familiar" (Participant C). Across the responses from the participants, there was consensus on the need to gather information, consult, and explore options, prompting Participant A to follow existing processes and call together an accommodation planning committee. The other universities followed up by consulting with legal counsel and/or their human rights office "just to see where we were legally and our obligations" (Participant B). The participants also identified the need to hear the perspectives of the student and from the academic program, including the instructor and the program director or associate dean. Participant A explained the need to explore the rationale of the academic program. "The first thing that I would like to know is if the program is feeling that they can say no to the student…*why* are they thinking that? What have they thought about? Why are they coming to that conclusion?" The rationale provided by the academic program helps to determine whether an accommodation is appropriate given the requirements of the specific course or degree program.

In reviewing the situation, the participants wished to obtain more information about what happened in the classroom; for example, they needed to know "what was disruptive about it and whether it was interfering with other students' learning" (Participant D1). One participant, having been aware of, or having been involved with, similar situations commented: "I've heard

of these scenarios where you know a really small baby comes into the class that's if it's not disruptive and it just happens in an emergency it's okay; otherwise, it's not okay. People complain and it's hard to get a child to not be disruptive" (Participant C). Participant C highlighted the challenge of responding to competing rights, in this case a student brining a baby to class versus the other students in the class who feel their learning environment is negatively affected.

Critical for the participants was the need to consider how to resolve the matter and how they, in their respective roles, could help facilitate, whether by being directly involved in the decision or by providing a supportive role. Another participant felt that although there is generally a "line of undue hardship for the institution in terms of what accommodations can look like… that threshold is very high (Participant D2) and the university has to work with the student to come up with a viable option. Another pointed out that often "situations like this scenario, honestly, most of the solutions I've seen over the years, aren't ones that I would call formal", and explained that often the outcomes were ones that "were reliant on just good helping people wanting to make life a little bit easier" (Participant D1). Participant D1 highlighting the informal way that students may be supported by their faculty outside of a human rights and accommodation framework.

Participants generally did not state explicitly what ought to happen as an outcome but rather the steps they would take to explore the situation by reflecting on possible options or complicating factors that may have made it difficult to come to a solution deemed satisfactory by those involved:

> …if the reason is nursing that does become a little bit trickier if they're looking to keep the child physically with them. My other thought was, is there child care while the

> student was in class?... But are there reasons that those haven't been explored? Is there a financial issue? Is there an accessibility issue? Maybe the student can't afford it. Maybe the wait lists are just a year long. So, trying to explore what the solutions look like as well. I think that the hard thing about this is sometimes it's not the lack of solutions, but sometimes even the options available don't actually make a big impact. (Participant D2)

Participant D2 perspective underscoring the importance of considering these scenarios from a holistic and practical perspective to help lead to impactful outcomes for the student.

Scenario 2: Eldercare and retroactive accommodation.

For University A, having a dedicated office and a policy in place meant the response to the scenario was clear for Participant A: "Perfect timing for an accommodation-planning committee to be struck". For the other four universities, the next steps were like what was shared regarding scenario 1, but with the understanding that this scenario involved a retroactive element.

The retroactive nature of the issue was identified as a challenging factor in attempts to handle the situation. Participant D shared that they would

> get the right people in the room and have the pretend time machine: What were other things that we could have explored and at what point in time? When the student asked for help? Because maybe it isn't all the institution, it's also for the student to let us know what's feasible for them [in a timely way].

Participant C had a similar perspective and pointed out that:

> In some respects, I have sympathy with the associate dean. The semester is finished, the course is finished. It's very difficult to go back and recreate a scenario or provide accommodations that might've been able to help at the time…but you can't recreate that.

Another pointed out the potential unreasonableness of the situation, and that the student bears some responsibility:

> Who's being reasonable and who isn't? …That faculty member may not have had to deal with eldercare yet. Right? And when they do, they might rethink how they dealt with this situation. Or maybe they just felt that we all have things going on in our lives. And if you didn't come to me at the time when I might have been able to try and address this, then you can't retroactively ask me to. (Participant B)

One participant shared that in these situations, it is often better if the student does not attempt to complete the course requirements (for example, write final exams) because it is so challenging to address grades after the fact:

> that does kind of lock things in quite a bit, more than, you know, having potentially not written like even just not writing, it actually might be, the student might be in a better position than having kind of gone through all of the final pieces. (Participant E)

Participant A wondered, "so retroactively what can we do to assist the student so that they don't have a failing grade on their transcript? Maybe they're given the opportunity to repeat the course with an accommodation plan in place."

There was recognition from some participants that the student would likely need to pursue a formal appeal because the term had already been completed. Participant E explained:

> At this point, this becomes a bit of a Senate issue that we would need the student to formally petition, which is a bit more unfortunate. I guess this is a bit more rigid now we're in academic policy a bit more.

The need to connect students to support offices was commonly shared across the interviews. These offices included those that could help explore what had happened and to help the students

bring forward their cases by working with a human rights advisor, for example (Participant E). Similarly, Participant C wondered:

> is there something else that's underlining the student's reluctance to come forward earlier in the semester or to continue trying to advocate for themselves? I certainly would want to bring in a student support case manager who might be able to help the student articulate more clearly what was going on.

Some participants also pointed out that, regardless of the outcome, it would be important that students be supported for their continuation in the program. Participant B stated that "you want to make sure that the student is set up for success in the future, as well as trying to deal with what's happened in the past".

2. Policy and Practices

Distinct from policies that specifically to accommodate for family status as a protected characteristic, there is an existing web of academic procedures and regulations that provide options for students with family responsibilities. Additionally, there are guidelines and unwritten practices that may provide relief or solution. Within this theme, three subthemes were identified: (a) academic policies and regulations, (b) student self-advocacy, and (c) bringing infants/children to class.

a. Academic Policies and Regulations

Apart from those university policies that are informed by human rights legislation, universities have had academic policies for which family responsibilities might be grounds for special requests. University E has a policy on academic concession that may be accessed if students can demonstrate that they are encountering "conflicting responsibilities" or "unforeseen events"; examples include "having responsibility for the care of a family member."

Leaves of absence policies were located at all university websites for students in particular faculties. Participant B identified child care as a reason that students could seek a leave and that depending on the faculty, a withdrawal from courses might also be possible. “You can get an authorized withdrawal and actually specify the reason being related to family responsibilities” However, Participant B identified how she has seen that students who present grounds tied to family obligations may not be taken seriously or believed by instructors or decision makers:

> There would be difficulties in accepting the fact that someone might have to spend a lot of time at a hospital or …. take time off for a funeral. And, so, I think that there’s a sense of, well, you’re going to be pulling the wool over my eyes and we can’t keep making exceptions.

Participant B further highlighted how this is an equity issue, as for some students, family encompasses more than immediate family:

> …for Indigenous students, but also in some of the international communities, an auntie in the community, someone who you would call grandmother but was not a grandmother by blood, or someone who just took care of you because your parents or grandparents, or your own aunties and uncles weren’t around or not in the country…

Participant B went on to share that in the absence of a policy that provides accommodations for students with family status, students and those who support them may encounter resistance because of the workload that instructors face in accommodating students with disabilities, where there is a clear policy in place:

> Some of them still cannot get beyond accommodating students with disabilities, never mind accommodating students with [family responsibilities], because there are so many

> students with disabilities and so many different types of disabilities that, feeling they're spending all their time trying to accommodate [their students], and become frustrated [but] that's not a reason not to do it.

Another participant said when attempting to explore options for students with family responsibilities, particularly related to accommodations for assessment, it is important to push back a little and explore if there are other ways that student can meet the requirements:

> Can ask the right question, ask the faculty if is there another way that the student can show that they're meeting the course competency instead of writing an exam. Is there another way to demonstrate that? And I think trying to push people to like rethink evaluations, especially in situations where I don't think you're testing the student's ability on what they've learned in those situations. You're almost testing their ability to juggle things and multitask and manage stress. (Participant D1)

Participant B explained "if I had an issue in a class with submitting papers or having to defer exams, I think that there would be a discussion on a one-to-one basis, and I would try to get the faculty to just be more aware and open to accommodation".

Participant D1 shared a goal to create a document that would provide guidance "to students as well as faculty and staff on what supports were available and how students they could ask for help." She shared a scenario to illustrate:

> We would hear things like, 'I have an exam tomorrow'. We know that when most students wake up knowing they have an exam on a Saturday and they'd been up all night with some really bad stomach flu, they're not going to write the exam; they're going to call in sick. But I think it became clear to us that it was *unclear* to people with caregiving responsibilities. If they had the same agency to ask for help if they were up all night with

> a child who was throwing up, or if they needed to take their parent to the hospital in the middle of the night.

b. Student Self Advocacy

At least three universities had documents on their websites that provided guidance to help students advocate for themselves regarding, for example, the ability to nurse on campus. One such document from University E read as follows:

> Dear Professor _____, I am a student in your (class name). I am a new mother, and I am balancing school and parenthood. I have decided to breastfeed my baby, as it has been shown to be the most beneficial for my child. As a result, I may need to occasionally excuse myself from your class to go and breastfeed my baby. If you need any further information from me, you can contact me at (email address).

On the websites of universities, A and B, documents were found that encouraged students to approach their instructor for flexibility due to caregiving demands. Below is specific guidance within a presentation that was delivered to student parents at University B.

> Successful self-advocacy as a student-parent: Draft your email and edit before sending; Do not feel pressured to share detailed personal information unless you want to share this with your Instructor; Ask your Instructor what the options are for addressing your question / concern; Provide information that helps your Instructor to support you: dates or a timeline for the stressor you're dealing with specific resources you are seeking out; Specific elements of the course or assignment that you are finding problems with.

These particular documents collected across these three universities suggest that empowering students with family responsibilities to ask for help is an important strategy in helping to remove barriers.

At University A, where there is an accommodation policy in place, students are encouraged to advocate for themselves in terms of approaching their instructor for assistance. Participant A stated that advisors in her office discuss with students whether they have already contacted the instructor and, if not, if they feel comfortable in doing so. For example, a student may need to "to explain that their child's been really unwell with an ear infection the last few days and they're needing a day extension on their paper". Participant A went on to explain that students are often adept at advocating for themselves fortunately, faculty are generally receptive. She shared a common scenario:

> Students will say "yeah, you know what, I'll just ask the instructor, but if they have a question or if they're not understanding, I might reach back out to you. And I would say for the most part, instructors are really good. they'll say, "oh, no, I, get it, take the weekend and get paper to me".

Participant D2 explained that many students did not think support was available for them because "there was just an internalization and an assumption that, you know, I chose to have a kid or chose to have children so it's my responsibility to figure it out" this type of thinking results in the students not engaging in help-seeking behaviour and "assuming that [the responsibility] was all on their shoulders".

c. Bringing an Infant/Child to Class.

All participants spoke a lot about bringing children to class, even before the scenario was introduced as part of the interview protocol, demonstrating the challenging nature of this issue. Lack of policy and reliance on informal practices contributes to greyness that can be difficult to navigate. In the case of bringing a child into the classroom, one participant explained that without something specific to refer to, it is not clear what is appropriate:

> What are their [students'] rights in those situations? And then concurrently, both of us receive questions from professors on occasion saying, 'What are my rights in this situation? What can I do for this student? What am I allowed to do?' And, you know, often they are struggling because they'd like to help, but they weren't sure if they were putting themselves or the institution at risk, if they were saying, 'Yeah, bring your kid into class', or whatever the case may be. (Participant D2)

Participant A explained bringing a child to class in this way: "like with any kind of accommodation it really is often case-by-case". She explained that it depends on where the course is taking place. "The request to bring a baby into a chemistry laboratory would be a different kind of request than to bring the baby into the English classroom for the lecture." Participant D1 agreed and pointed out that lecture-based courses are "almost easier spaces to bring a baby if you're nursing" and it is "more complicated if a student is maybe in a hospital setting, like on a rotation. It just might not be safe".

The discussion with the two participants from University D explored the benefit of having something in writing rather than a policy prescribing procedure; it is better to have a document that instead identifies overarching principles to help with decision making:

> That was going to be our approach, as well as to have something probably based in principles…if an instructor calls and says, "Well, this, this person wants to bring, they don't have child care and they need to bring their infant to class" Well, you know, it might not be a yes or no, but maybe there's some principles, so there's probably going to be one around safety, right? So, if you know certain environments [where] it would not be safe for the child or the class. … maybe just to give people some things to consider to

> help them make that decision, and we can help them with that process, but also to signal back to students: Where do you go to ask for help? (Participant D1)

One participant shared an example where faculty and staff in a particular program were open to students bringing their infants with them to class. One said, for example "If you're comfortable, bring me your baby for an hour" Then there would just be support for that person. Maybe they would go for a walk. And they'd be available if it was close to a nursing time or something" (Participant D1).

This perspective was identified in course outlines that were located. An individual faculty member at University E had a section devoted to "policy on children in class" that stated:

> Currently, the university does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom. The policy described here is simply a reflection of my own beliefs and commitments to student parents: (a) All exclusively breastfeeding babies are welcome in class as often as is necessary. (b) For older children and babies, I understand that unforeseen disruptions in child care often put parents in the position of having to miss class to stay home with a child. While this is not meant to be a long-term child care solution, occasionally bringing a child to class in order to cover gaps in care is perfectly acceptable…

Another participant shared an opposing view that bringing children to class is often seen as a last resort. "And I think that the students and the staff who probably feel that if they bring their kids, it should be an exception or, they'll disturb work, they'll disturb a class. …the thought is that your attention as a parent will not be on doing a lab, listening to a lecture …" (Participant B).

3. Teaching and Learning.

The third theme that arose from the data was categorized as teaching and learning to highlight the direct involvement of instructors, their proactive approaches in supporting students

within their courses, and flexibility in the delivery of content or programs at universities. Also categorized under this theme are the institutional efforts to educate and provide information to instructors. These findings are discussed under three subthemes that arose from the data analysis: (a) pandemic responses, (b) flexible programming, and (c) supports and education for faculty.

a. Pandemic Responses.

There was strong consensus from the participants that, at their universities, in response to COVID-19, instructors were encouraged by the institution to provide flexibility, be empowered to situations on a case-by-case basis and be inclusive. This consensus was corroborated by documents located on university websites, for example, the following guidance was provided to faculty from University E's teaching and learning centre:

> The current COVID-19 situation has been a difficult time, with multiple challenges, including a profound shift to online teaching. Now more than ever, you are encouraged to be mindful of your students' differing backgrounds and needs. Many are likely to be experiencing challenges, including family responsibilities, and limited or no access to digital devices and the internet. While you may not be able to resolve all these difficulties, you can still apply inclusive and equitable considerations to your online teaching so as not to unintentionally reproduce or exacerbate inequities.

University C's accessibility office proactively provided guidelines with the "aim to help instructors consider options to adapt or alter the course" to provide flexibility for students requesting assistance meeting academic commitments, whether on medical, family status, or other grounds.

Helping to facilitate this change during the pandemic at some universities was removing the need for documentation, leading to more flexibility from faculty. Participant E explained that

"it was highlighted at Senate about that level of flexibility, to not be so structured". He explained that there was not "a specific policy change, other than allowing support for students to be negotiated at the instructor level" and gave an example of a student whose parent contracted COVID. The student was able to support the family while that parent was isolating and could get an extension without requiring medical documentation.

Participant A, who stated how proud she was of the instructors given the degree of flexibility, observed:

> I sit on one of the COVID working groups and heard instructors changing the way that they were teaching their courses so as to not have timed exams, but rather have an exam that a student had 24 hours to complete, or a weekend so they released the exam on Friday and then students had until Sunday evening to turn it in. That really assisted those students who were at home homeschooling little ones, caring for parents, trying to do their schoolwork.

Participant D1 shared a similar observation about instructors at her university that demonstrated compassion in facing challenges presented by the pandemic:

> We saw some really creative, I mean, I think there's a mixture of stories in terms of what students experienced this year. But I saw …faculty really wanting to help and really wanting to work towards this. I saw a great deal of empathy this year with a lot of the situations that we were facilitating, which was nice. And I feel like that needs to be said because we hear the bad stories so much, but I think the professors that start from a place of yes, they don't always get their recognition.

Participant A surmised that the increase in compassionate approaches was due to faculty themselves experiencing similar issues of attempting to balance caregiving with other

commitments. In her words, “I think the same thing happened to our faculty. Instructors there weren’t in school any longer, they’re homeschooling and trying to teach classes and they have some empathy. It’s like, “I’m right there with you….” These examples shared by the participants illustrate the willingness of faculty to be flexible, not because of a policy directive, but because it is the right thing to do given the circumstances.

The pandemic also helped to demonstrate that increased flexibility does not necessarily lead to integrity issues. Participant E explained that that the pandemic and the resulting “ambiguity and things in flux and change” at the university led to increased understanding that “students aren’t looking to game a system”. He felt that “one of silver linings of COVID” was the establishment of compassionate grounds for supporting students that require additional time for a variety of reasons.

Participants expressed the hope that the responsive and compassionate approaches that were observed during the pandemic would continue. Participant D1 expressed optimism for the future given what has been learned during the pandemic:

> That’s really happening at the grassroots level – people that are intentionally trying to make spaces for people to receive support and check in with each other. So, it’s great to see that taking place and just the level of resilience. The resilience of our students this year has been incredible. Resilience of everybody within the university community this year has really been incredible. (Participant D1)

b. Flexible programming

COVID-19 presented opportunities for compassionate approaches. Universities have long demonstrated flexibility through their program and course delivery that benefits students seeking alternatives, including those with family responsibilities. Participant C explained that “there has

intentionally been, and I don't know what percentages, an increase in online courses available, and in asynchronous formats as well. So, if you're not free at seven o'clock at night, you can watch the recording later" She went to explain that delivering courses in alternative formats is beneficial for the university because it's a way of retaining students in the face of competition from "an online university in [province] …that's the go-to if you can't get it…well, how silly is that, if you can increase the number of offerings at your own institution."

Participant E agreed that offering courses outside traditional class times such as "extending our class day into the evening to…allow greater flexibility for individuals that have to work during the day and are supporting family but are looking for some flexibility to be able to maintain a job and continue with their education in the evening" is one way his university helps support the needs of students who are caregivers.

c. Supports for and Education of Faculty.

Although the pandemic brought out empathetic approaches, and universities may have encouraged the flexible delivery of courses and programs, often it is the relationship between the instructor and student in a course that is critical. University D, in a principles of good teaching document, encourages mutually respectful relationships between faculty members and students and highlights the complexities of students' lives:

> … We must respect the circumstances of their lives -- work, other courses, family responsibilities. We must respect the fact they learn in different ways, at different rates, and eventually, to different levels. We must respect their ideas, their aspirations, their beliefs. We must make it evident we respect and value them as individuals if we are to be successful in engaging their minds.

The participants identified the ways in which faculty become informed of policies, guidelines, and support for students with family responsibilities.

University A has a centralized unit that provides information to faculty on an ongoing basis. Participant A states that "…part of my role is to regularly attend faculty meetings, meet with programs, colleges. We make them aware…also the way that my office is set up, the advisors are responsible for specific programs and colleges" (Participant A).

Participant D2 explained that working with faculty in responding to challenging student situations can offer opportunities to share information with faculty:

> … Sometimes it opens the door for some education with faculty members and instructors about what are the rights, and what are protected rights? And from a human rights perspective, but also what are the opportunities that exist? And sometimes I think, because people don't know what the rights are, they just default to whatever the presumed policy or guideline is, which of course there isn't. So, you know, sometimes it's an opportunity to start an important discussion with the faculty or the department.

Participant C indicated that it can be challenging to get the word out instructors. She shared that you "can't guarantee instructors don't ignore the information that they're given". However, "associate deans…department heads have regular monthly meetings…and included in those meetings is the director of student accessibility services, partly because that comes up so much in teaching and learning discussions…that's a pretty good connection through to the individual instructors".

Participants B and C shared similar concerns about instructors feeling either overloaded or uninterested. Participant B commented that "I don't know if you call it training or socializing, you need to let people know that this is something that they need to consider. I know from a

faculty point of view…that they feel that there's so much that is asked of them." Participant C explained that "there's still, probably the minority, but there's still a group who don't believe in accommodations at all or who aren't particularly supportive. But I'd say that's mitigated by those as the associate-dean level, who are already involved in trying to navigate".

Participant A explained that at her university, it more common to receive positive responses from faculty in response to the information and training provided by her unit, and that some faculty share their appreciation that this level of support exists for students with family responsibilities:

> I found for the most part when I go to colleges and I meet with faculty and departments and I talk about family status, the questions that I get are very supportive questions...It's not unusual for me to hear from a faculty member 'God, I went through grad school you know, I was in my PhD program. I had a baby; I had a toddler… there were no supports available back then for me; this would have been great.

One university that mentioned respectful relationships between faculty and students as part of document-outlining principles of good teaching also highlighted:

Outside of providing training and education, participants identified where instructors may turn for information or guidance. Participant D1 stated that "I think some would go to their, their chair or, they might ask HR… a bunch of them do call us. And I think the more people call us or more faculty, it just kind of solidifies that relationship". Participant B felt the sources of information could be "hit or miss" for faculty: "If they don't know the answers they might ask colleagues, and if they and their students they're trying to help are lucky enough, then you're calling their dean's office, where their colleagues might have the answer" (Participant B).

4. Student Populations and Their Needs.

This theme presents findings particular to students with family responsibilities as a distinct student population. The findings include the way in which universities identify (or don't identify) this special population, as well as some of their characteristics, including gender and challenges and barriers they face. The data also revealed differences between subpopulations, including those students with family responsibilities who are Indigenous, international, or who are in graduate studies or professional programs. The subthemes in this section are (a) identification, (b) gender, (c) hyphenated identity, and (d) needs and barriers.

a. Identification

Except for one university, University A, which encourages students to self-identify, institutions did not have a mechanism in place on their campuses to identify students with family responsibilities. To get a sense of prevalence, universities have relied on survey findings. Participant D1 explained that they did a survey a couple of years ago "because we didn't have any sort of baseline and that was the first time that we had some numbers."

Participant D2 explained that not having data hasn't prevented them from supporting this group of students at their university. "At this point, there hasn't been a specific demand for us to have those numbers, because I think people generally have been supportive of us doing more things in this direction."

Participant B, who referenced a 2013 report from a working group that provided some conservative estimates on the number of students, staff and faculty who were parents, states, "I think that everyone was actually a little shocked – even taking the most conservative numbers – to recognize how many people this would affect." An infographic that was developed based on University B's working group report provided some insight into the actual number of students

parents (3,204). Also, of all parents on campus student parents are the largest group of students on campus, with 7 out of 10 parents being students.

Other universities commented on the efforts of their student unions to collect information on this student population. Participant D2 shared that the graduate students' association "has had a much better understanding of kind of who their population includes". Also, the undergraduate student union, although "still early days in terms of where they go with that…but have recognized the need to have this information to 'better awareness of who comprises their undergraduate population.' Likewise, Participant E explained that their student union is in the early stages of looking into collecting this information: "They're seeking to – not for lack of interest – they do want to understand; they just don't have that information right now, but I think they've come to understand that they need it."

b. Gender

Participants shared different responses to whether there were gender differences about accessing supports or seeking assistance. Most participants spoke of experiences involving mostly women. For example, Participant D1 shared that "99% of the people who've asked for help, when it's relating to child-giving responsibilities, would be like female-identifying in my experience." Participant E stated that it is balanced with respect to student demands.

Two participants pointed out the larger societal reality. Participant C shared that "it ends up being the main caregiver is often the female, and it's sort of up to them to organize all of the bits and taking responsibility… it is still pretty prevalent that [caregiving] is mostly a female responsibility." Participant B stated that "there are mothers, aunties, women are still having primary responsibilities within the society. I just think it's true, but is that the way it should be? No."

Beyond gender binary roles, Participant A shared that "I can think of some parents who have contacted us for support, and it's a two-male household or two-female households, single moms; I can think of a single dad." Participants B expressed a similar sentiment: "I've seen male students who have primary responsibility for child care…I know there are lots of LGBTQ parents out there".

c. Hyphenated Identity

Participants spoke of the hyphenated identities of students with responsibilities and that this is not a homogenous group. Participant B pointed out:

> You can't lump all the students together; it really depends on who the student is. Are they an undergraduate student? Are they a graduate student? Are they part-time? Are they full-time? Are they within the Indigenous community? And if so urban or rural? Are they in [the city] or not? The same for international students. They may be here without any supports but may have had children or a spouse with them.

Additionally, identity as a caregiver is not static, or may not be planned. Participant D2 stated that "it's challenging because it's so fluid. Individuals will become parents or suddenly end up with dependents part way through their education."

Through the documents gathered and from participants interviewed, how students became part of other equity-deserving groups was identified (for example Indigenous students). In an article on University A's website, it was highlighted that "Indigenous students face multiple barriers, including financial difficulties, family responsibilities, loneliness and isolation". Participant E shard that "we've already had quite a bit of success with the Access program, a really strong access program for Indigenous students… we see a number of students coming through the pathway program with family responsibilities."

The needs of international students were particularly pronounced in the findings and mentioned by all participants. Participant A stated that "… we do have a lot of international students that come with their families." Participant E shared information about changing student populations at his university, "vast majority of that growth is in all but two areas: graduate students and international students…and more than half of our graduate students are international who are coming with partners or family members."

With these increasing numbers, came increased expectations from students on how the university ought to support them. Participant D2 stated that "international students are bringing families with them for undergraduate or graduate work and managing those dependents while they're juggling their academic career and work and home life. They are becoming more aware and more engaged in advocating more strongly." Participant E agreed and shared that "because of the age of many graduate students… and more likelihood that they're supporting family abroad or family members who have come with them, … they are a bit more vocal about the kind of the supports that they need."

Participant A pointed out the students in programs such as the health sciences, who tend to have program requirements that are not compatible with caregiving, for example, on-call shifts. Participant A elaborated that:

> …[Medicine] residents are on 12-hour shifts, strange hours; they have issues with where the residents will sleep when they need to take a quick nap. But it's a whole other story if you have someone who's parenting, if they're a single parent, if there's a baby…it's tricky.

d. Needs and barriers

All participants spoke about the needs of this population and the role of the university in helping to either meet these needs or remove barriers.

The institutional expectations of a student can be a barrier to student success. University D's 2015 report on mental health identified that a "Lack of flexibility in programming and course scheduling presents a barrier to those students with work and family responsibilities." Participant C shared about students who are caregivers: "that's not necessarily how students have traditionally been seen. Your privilege, you must have the money, or you wouldn't be here, so figure it out. And that [perspective] is changing, but it's still a struggle to be a parent and a student.

Participant B explained that "for many a student parents it's very difficult to balance work and family responsibilities. And so, by work in this case, I mean study, although some of those students are also in the workforce as well, so trying to balance everything."

Participant D2 stated, "I don't know whether the increase is due to increasing numbers or if it's more of just a general awareness and people feeling more comfortable about asking for what they need." Participant B provided similar rationale: "People are talking about it more now, recognize it. We're talking about it more, but I think on the ground, I suspect that faculty, deans, associate deans, and folks in student affairs are probably seeing as much as they did 10 years ago …it's an issue that's been there."

The increased demand is also coming from those who wish to support students with caregiving needs: There are "…groups that are reaching out saying, 'we're preparing orientation, we want to let people know what the options are for parent-friendly spaces within the university community'. So, people are being more mindful and are asking" (Participant D2).

Participant E agreed and shared that community members are reaching out because it is not clear what supports are available. “It isn’t clear what support the university provides students with family responsibilities in terms of opportunities for support services…be those particular services like child care or financial resources or flexibility in terms of scheduling…”

Participant B pointed out that even if services are available, they may be affected during regular hours when students with family responsibilities are less likely to have the opportunity to access them. “The reality is that the life of the student is not 9 to 5or 8:30-4:30…the needs that they have can sometimes be on weekends or in the evenings, when in fact the campus is fairly empty.”

Participants stated that demands became more pronounced because of COVID-19. Participant C observed that she has seen “more issues come up during COVID because of family accommodation – both “capital A” and “small a” issues – and now they’re coming up as we’re planning to return to predominantly in-person classes, further complicating work, studying, and attending classes.” Participant D1 explained, “especially with exam time, the number of questions or urgent concerns people were having, [such as] how legitimately do you expect me to write my exam? I have a child running around and COVID prevents me from accessing child care.’”

Participants were somewhat reticent about indicating whether students with family responsibilities felt supported at their universities. Participant A indicated that “I would like to think that we are assisting as best we can to provide supports to them while they’re in their studies…I would say to get a more accurate idea, you’ve got to speak with those students, but we do try as best we can to provide accommodation.” Participants C commented that “I would say generally they feel supported and I’m hesitant because I’m thinking if they feel supported, it

probably doesn't come to my attention. When students come to me, it's because they don't [feel supported]."

5. Supports, Services, and Programs

The theme of supports, services, and programs connects specifically to the targeted data collection related to the inventory of practices. As identified in chapter 4, each of the five universities had in place many of items identified as best practices with respect to services, programs, and supports. The participants highlighted some of the services already in place at their institutions, some of which resulted from the pandemic. As well, identified current gaps. The subthemes in this section are (a) existing highlights, (b) gaps, and (c) promising practices.

a. Existing Highlights

Participants explained how their universities were helping to make child-feeding more accessible on campus, with Participant A sharing "we have comfort rooms". This supportive space is promoted throughout the university's website; for example, on the page about housing the following information is available: University A "has several designated comfort rooms on campus for student parents who may require a private space for breastfeeding or other caregiving responsibilities". Participant C stated that "we established rooms for mothers to nurse their children because there wasn't identified spaces for that."

Housing was another area participants highlighted. Participant A spoke to on-campus housing available. "…one of the largest apartment towers is for families… there's a playground there, there's an elementary school close by… there's a community garden…"

Funding was another area that was mentioned. Participant C explained that due to the pandemic "there's many bursaries that don't have any conditions around them. There's one right

now; it's emergency support, a few emergency support bursaries that are loosely defined so that they can be used for whatever".

Beyond the inventory, all participants spoke of the importance of effectively communicating services, programs, and policies to students. Participant A explained "We have posters up around campus, we advertise on the [digital] screens. We work closely with The Parents on Campus group and word of mouth does a lot to assist..."

b. Gaps

Although the participants mentioned some of the work their universities were doing in the area of supporting students with family responsibilities, they spent more time identifying gaps and areas for improvement. In terms of child care, despite the efforts of many of the universities to increase capacity on their campuses, participant B pointed out that "this is coast to coast to coast: there isn't enough…the university has expanded the spaces that it has for child care on its main campus, but that's like a drop in a big bucket."

Participants pointed out that day care is not available in equal ways across university's campuses. Participant B explained that "students [from] various health, health disciplines – many of them are older as well – I mean, older chronologically, they're in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy…there's no daycare or child care in the immediate vicinity of that campus" Moreover, if there is child care, the hours may not meet the needs, as highlighted by Participant B: "Many of them are on shifts, or working in the evenings, and certainly even studying into the evenings and up very early in the morning…the needs might change from week to week…and they don't always need full-time care and because they don't have a lot of money, they are seeking, more flexibility in what can be provided. Participant D1 agreed and stating that daycare centres often "were never really designed for people that weren't working outside of those hours. And they're

forced to rely [on] family … or if not available, it tends to be more expensive options in terms babysitters or nannies." Participant C echoed that child care costs can be prohibitive for students. "...daycares tend to be a more expensive option, so that wouldn't surprise me day homes and family members are a more common caregiver for the children." Participant B pointed out that adding more child care spaces on campus may not meet needs:

> For some students, the resources would be better placed closer to where they may be living, in their communities, a place that's culturally appropriate, not just for Indigenous students, but it might be international community resources, or for some of the international communities that are quite connected to churches, and they're able to provide some help or resources.

Transition needs of international students were brought up by a couple of participants to help combat – as Participant E identified – "the isolation that can happen for family members coming to Canada." Specific gaps include help with "connections both in the community and understanding and navigating, resources like the school district, health services…employment and support…appropriate housing…expansion and growth of our daycare and supports." Regarding the latter, Participant E explained that having a housing strategy is critical to help international students and their families "as they think about their likelihood of staying in Canada, post-graduation and how do they feel connected to the local community". University E had a page dedicated to international students with family, with the message that "caring for children far from extended family support systems can be an isolating experience". This page included links to services and helpful tips and resources.

Communication, or the lack thereof, was another gap that was identified. Participant D2 explained that "right now…there's lots of little disparate pieces of information, but it's not well

coordinated. There isn't a central place that a student with dependents could go to get access to pieces like the policy …along with information on child care, leave options… financial resources." Participant B agreed and questioned "How do you communicate information that they need in a timely manner?" Despite increased efforts to promote services and programs, students remain unaware of what is available. As Participant B explains:

> I think we have we're better at providing information or students look for [information], but sometimes there is such a panic, or they don't know where we would have that information. So sometimes it's word of mouth. And unfortunately, sometimes students will find out in the second or third year of an undergraduate degree that there were resources that they could have accessed.

Another identified gap was funding. Often there are barriers for students with family responsibilities to access funding in the form of scholarships, bursaries, and grants. Participant D2 pointed out that funding is "available to someone who's got a medical condition, but in the case of a student parent, depending on those circumstances, some of those doors close for them and why is that? There are some significant barriers that need to be addressed."

> A lack of infant or child feeding spaces was identified. Participant D2 explained,
>
> we were hearing a lot that women were doing it in a bathroom stall…recognizing there was no place for people to go to find information about a private place where I can breastfeed or pump. With that community education piece, to recognize that people should feel safe and comfortable to breastfeed wherever that is.

In terms of family-friendly physical spaces, Participant A reflected that despite on the amount of greenspace on campus, "we don't have playground equipment on the university campus where our college buildings are."

c. Promising practices.

The gathering of institutional documents highlighted some promising practices across the five universities. During the interviews, the participants identified those initiatives that were emerging or just underway. These are shared below.

Participant A explained that the student health centre helps the families of students. "They can bring their children to the physicians at our student health center as well. We have new mother and new baby care programs. I believe that…it's one of our nurses that will go and visit and do the home visit."

Participant D1 pointed out the efforts of university libraries, and the role they have; there's been some really interesting opportunities to try piloting some parent-friendly spaces."

Participant D1 spoke of grassroots peer support that was encouraged by the faculty:

> I remember in the student lounge in law, sometimes the students who parent would bring their kids together, and they would take turns babysitting for each other. And our student service office had kind of like a big open area where we were like 'if you want to hang out in there with the kids'. We liked it too. And again, it felt like a very small ask of us… it just seemed kind of like win-win for everybody, it was like kid therapy for us.

Participant E spoke of initiatives that included a bursary program for off-campus housing as well: "We're trying to work with one service provider to streamline the process for students. And we've created a new position around an off-campus housing ambassador to navigate the system which students can reach out to directly."

Participant D2 discussed plans to improve communications through creating "a virtual space that we can use to consolidate" the many pieces of information in one place. Included in the plans would be the identification of facilities, "whether that looks like a heat map or whether

it indicates different zones where there are change stations, including available areas in libraries." Participant B agreed that what is critical is "developing clear website where they can get information, or resources on and off campus." This webpage was also underway at the university.

Participant E discussed the importance of adequate funding and spoke about the needs of PhD candidates in particular. They indicated that doctoral students should receive "a minimum income guaranteed, particularly as we know, many come with families, having your first year covered".

Participant E also mentioned that to help with the transition of international students, "we have created a position that's intended to not only facilitate our student experience better but also that of their extended family." Areas of focus include, but are not limited to, the "immigration process in Canada, their connection to school boards, health service, and creating a network of international students with family responsibilities and their families…"

In addition to what they were doing at their own universities, a couple of participants were aware of what other Canadian universities had in place and looked to them for inspiration. Participant D1 shared that at "U[niversity] of T[oronto], I mean, they have a whole office; U[niversity] of S[askatchewan], they've done some cool things." Participant D1 also mentioned. The University of Saskatchewan "as the only school I knew of that was encouraging people to self-identify."

6. Leadership and Institutional Priorities

The degree to which students with family responsibilities are acknowledged as a special student population and prioritized was explored through the data collected. In this theme, leadership and institutional priorities, participants reflected on the efforts of their respective

universities and the leadership taken by themselves or by other members of the campus community. The findings are presented under four subthemes: (a) understanding of family and family responsibilities, (b) strategic priorities, (c) leadership and champions, and (d) role of students.

a. Understanding of Family and Family Responsibilities.

Participants revealed how they conceptualized what was meant by family and family responsibilities, facilitated by definitions that were shared as part of the interview protocol (see Appendix D). All participants agreed with the presented definitions but felt that their respective universities – or least individuals or segments of the campus community – may not share the same understanding.

Participant C stated that "… there's still people throughout the university community that might see family a little bit more traditionally, but certainly when you deal with students, we accept the definition and the relationship description." Participant B considered the role of decision makers, stating that "I think that what is taken into account for the most part … when we talk about family responsibilities, we were thinking it was for students in relationship to children and really, we hadn't thought of eldercare; it really was a sort of a second thought or just outside of the realm."

Participant E agreed, adding that "[the family definition], it's probably broader than the immediate consideration that we would usually use for students and their families… I would say that the initial thinking and reflection would usually be on students with parental responsibilities."

Participant B shared that a more inclusive understanding of family and family responsibilities is critical in supporting equity-seeking groups. "…for the Indigenous

community… families might not be along the lines of more traditional families and might be kokums or grandparents, aunties, and uncles, or just the community itself that would be needing care." Although the university may hold a traditional view of family and family responsibilities "for other student populations", Participant E explained how initiatives like the Access program for Indigenous students, show that his university is "trying to take into consideration a full scope of a family."

Participant D2 shared how he supports a more inclusive understanding of family, given that his university has "such a diverse population …Indigenous community, LGBTQ two-spirited community, even students living in residence, they would consider their floor mates to be family sometimes."

b. Strategic Priorities.

Within the findings that refer to students with family responsibilities, evidence was mostly indirect in the universities' institutional strategic planning and related documents. Participant E stated that this student population is "is referenced indirectly, but the conversations are directly related to students with family responsibilities." Participant C stated that students with family responsibilities are references "indirectly, our strategic plan has particular pillars, interwoven in those pillars…community and student experience and broadly, that would include family… and campus mental health strategy, which does talk about a caring campus community." Participant B agreed that students with family responsibilities were brought up indirectly in the institutional strategic plan, when child care was mentioned.

In some cases, it appeared that family responsibilities were an emerging area. Participant D2 explained:

> Certainly, in the last year we've seen a significant increase in interest, both at the top senior leadership level but also at faculty levels with regards to equity, diversity, and inclusivity, and all of that speaks back to guiding principles that very much support wanting to ensure the success, both academically and just in terms of life, for all members of the community, including students who might have dependents.

Participant B shared that discussion related to the university's strategic enrolment management (SEM) plan were on "who our students are and who we want them to be and, going into the future" and that "planning around that was very important because we began to look at the numbers of international students and certainly a desire to increase Indigenous students." University B had child care working group report and this document highlighted how the institution's strategic priorities and the SEM plan are tied to supporting students with family responsibilities:

> Exceptional student experience and Indigenous achievement, priorities that support inclusive and supportive services and support for students, including students who are parents. The development and support of a university SEM plan provides for ongoing opportunities to examine efforts to support and retain students, including students with children.

Responses from the participants provided insight how the participants themselves had connected, or were connecting, their efforts related to this student population to the larger institutional plans or priorities. Participant E stated that "it's in our best interest to also be thinking strategically about supporting [international students with] families…ensuring that they are supported in their transition in, though, and then staying in our communities, post-graduation and feeling they're well set up."

c. Leadership and Champions.

Participants shared how they themselves came to recognize the unique needs of students with family responsibilities, and how they leveraged their position to create opportunities.

For Participant A, it meant seeing the opportunity to expand the mandate of her office due to the demand from students as well as referrals of students from faculty or units on campus. She commented that "we noticed that there were more students who were seeking guidance and advice because they were members of the other protected categories outside of disability" Additionally, Participant A explained that "it didn't make sense for students to be coming to an office called Disability Services when they weren't students with disabilities and so when we changed our name to Access and Equity…we do want to make the campus inclusive, a welcoming and a safe place for people to be able to be successful. We thought it was, it was important to make this change. And I'm so glad that we did."

For Participant D1, it was chance encounter with a student parent facilitated by a friend outside the university and recognition that we can do better to support students with children:

> I was actually contacted by a personal friend of mine. And she was in a Facebook group …and the chat was 'hey, I'm going to be a student at the university in the fall. I'm still breastfeeding. Does anybody know a place that's on campus I could go to breastfeed or pump that was private?' And so, my friend texted me: 'I think this is the kind of thing that you help with. Are you okay if I give this woman your email address?' And I said, absolutely.

Participant D1 went on to explain how removing barriers such as this for students "in that very holistic approach, this is to me, this is what student success looks like."

Participants spoke of efforts happening at a faculty or unit level. Participant D2 explained:

> The Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry has gone out of their way to really advocate for appropriate [breastfeeding] space. Education, Faculty of Graduate Studies, and Research…they're some of the champions that we've been able to partner with. And I think you would get fairly positive support from libraries.

Participants talked about being encouraged by changes that being made to long-standing policies and regulations that had contributed to systemic barriers for students, including those with family responsibilities. Participant D2 shared an example of a larger faculty that was taking steps to "get rid of the program-load requirements [that a] student must maintain X number of credits in a term" because when a student made move from a full-time to a part-time load, it could "jeopardize the scholarships."

For Participant C, it has been a career-long wait to see some of these changes. She explained that the campus mental health strategy has served as a vehicle for some important messages around the importance of flexibility and attending to the needs of a diverse student population, "…in particular those students in "high performing programs …it's so high pressure and costs are so high."

Participant C shared the following observations:

> For the first time I've seen structural changes starting to happen, like the old view of all you should be thinking about is being a good student and you shouldn't have entered into [university] being a student if you didn't have the money and support. It's like this totally unrealistic old-fashioned view is starting to ease up. Probably not enough, though, but I'm seeing movement in the last three years more than I've seen in my whole career.

Participant D2 felt that as leaders, they should use their influence to remind decision makers who are deciding on outcomes impacting students that there can be allowances, and that the policy may need to be updated to reflect current times. He explained what it is like being involved in handling challenging student situations:

> We often navigate these conversations the existing policies and procedures, but I think it's also reminding the group that we control those, and we can make exceptions because, usually for students with these kinds of pressures, the typical policies and procedures … are really hard to apply to those situations, because those are typically designed for students who don't have all of these other demands on them. And they're outdated…they haven't evolved.

Participant C put out the challenge to creating change rather than to waiting for it to happen. She asks rhetorically, "do you want to keep waiting for small incremental support or do you want to actually get something driven [through]? Maybe it's through the national advocacy of students or some high-profile cases … that starts to speed up progress."

d. Role of Student Leaders.

Participants identified how students, whether in leadership roles or by self-advocating, have helped to make changes on their campuses. Participant B explained that student leaders who were the impetus for institutional action related to child care:

> It was actually the graduate students' association who brought up the whole issue of needing more child care spaces. I don't think it's surprising because I think a number of those students on that executive were international students, and they were actually parents or were about to become parents themselves … they were living, I think, the stress of trying to figure out how they were going to balance all these responsibilities.

Participant C shared that the unions for "grads and undergrads are connected provincially and nationally that [these student leaders] often get involved in larger campaigns and advocacy … I've certainly seen support for students as caregivers and in support of student families come up." Participant D2 flagged that strong advocacy from the student leaders comes from a "growing awareness, even amongst the undergraduate student association that their own demographic has changing."

Participants identified how they can facilitate the impact of student voice through their inclusion in consultations and decision making. Participant B explained:

> When we ask if they could write letters of support, for instance, to the government, as we were advocating for daycare and child care funding from the provincial government …we could always count on their support to both write letters and to come with us if we were meeting a minister. And there were some meetings where they spoke up in senate or the board of governors.

Participant D2 shared the importance of students meaningfully contributing to committee work: Dean of Students [portfolio] over the last five years has really transitioned to a model that includes projects like this [that will] always engage diverse community members, not just service providers, … just from student associations, but students with lived experience."

University E had evidence of a study commissioned by the graduate students' society that focused on understanding the experiences of graduate student parents with children. The reason for the report, in part, was because graduate student parent "voices are rendered invisible by insufficient institutional understanding."

In addition to advocacy, Participant A pointed out that student leaders help through direct service delivery and referrals. "The students' union does run a daycare… the Women's Center

and the Pride Center are referring students and are working with our Parent on Campus group. Our Graduate Students' Association also is involved in and supportive of Parents on Campus."

7. Building Community

Evidence of community that is inclusive of those with families emerged in two ways through the data: (a) student or parent groups and (b) family-friendly environments. Both ways are discussed as subthemes below.

a. Student or Parent Groups

One of the items on the inventory was the existence of a peer group that came out through the documents collected, as well as within the interviews. University A had a strong parent group that was open to all parents (faculty, staff, and students) and appeared to be active in promoting the needs of the group. Participant A referred to this group, Parents on Campus several times within the interview, as they were a key referral source for the Access and Equity unit.

At University D, a student group to support students with caregiving needs was facilitated by a central initiative through the Dean of Students area but the impetus was a student seeking support. Participant D1 explained, "what really started the project was just women asking for help. They were looking for support to manage whatever that looked like, and we very quickly realized there were some things we could do". Participants D1 explained the evolving nature of supports for students with family responsibilities at her institution:

> [Our efforts] got divided into a community building aspect, which has morphed into a student group, which doesn't really need a whole lot of support from us now…They call themselves SPOC: Student Parents on Campus, but before they existed, we held a couple of get togethers, just like, you know, coffee chats and things. And it was neat because the

> women and men that came out were either parenting kids, or they had legal responsibilities for their aging parents.

A document was located on University A's website that explained that this student group is open to the following:

> sharing tips, frustrations, ideas, etc. about balancing the school/work and parenting responsibilities at the [university]. Working in partnership with Student Health Services, we are starting initiatives to improve life on campus for parents (including more breastfeeding and pumping-friendly locations, relevant resources, and nutrition programs) and require input from all those interested in parenting on campus issues!

Creating community for this student population can be challenging, given student commitments, as shared by Participant D1:

> Chatting with colleagues [at other PSEs], nobody really had what they thought was knock-out-of-the-park success on creating an in-person physical kind of group. And the reasons were pretty funny and obvious: students with caregiving responsibilities are really busy, they might not have a lot of extra time.

Encouraging virtual connections was one way to help connect students. Participant D2 explained that social media is helping to facilitate community building: "some of that happens virtually through Facebook, but now it's probably something new and different".

Participant E reflected on a gap at his university and shared that they "don't create much opportunity for students with family responsibilities to make connections with other students" and recognized the need to help facilitate community building for those with caregiving responsibilities. He further explained the importance of student with family responsibilities

meeting with peers who “understand and the share experiences and [who can] provide a network of support to navigate [university].”

b. Family-Friendly Environments

Some universities had events or programming that was specifically promoted as family-friendly. These included anything from recreation and fitness sessions that were open to children or events that were developed specifically to welcome children on campus. Participant C talked about efforts at her university: “So, there’s a move to more a family-friendly campus, and that includes everything from activities like picnics, outdoor events, fitness, physical activity kind of events, open houses, which, I think does help”. Participant E, likewise, listed examples of family-friendly elements at his institution:

> Campus daycare, easy access through either parking, if you own a vehicle, or transit hub on campus for easy access for all family members. Whether that’s summer camp for youth, our recreation programs are all extended to students, staff, and faculty and their family members.

University E had a baby-friendly initiative, and the associated webpage states that the university “is committed to providing a supportive and safe campus for breastfeeding mothers” and provides information on rights and guidance on how to create a baby-friendly environment.

However, there was also recognition that universities were not designed necessarily to welcome families. Participant A shared that “someone just actually a couple of weeks ago in a meeting said, ‘we don’t have any playground equipment’. So, we have a beautiful campus with lots of green space, but there’s not a swing set in sight”.

Participant B shared a similar sentiment: “The buildings are old. I don’t think they were built for children. I don’t think they’re built for people who are older and unsteady on their feet either… I don’t think it’s a place that feels necessarily welcoming for children”.

As well, having family programming or a physical space that is family-friendly doesn’t necessarily mean that students who have caregiving responsibilities will find themselves supported when it comes to their academic commitments. Participant C commented, “I think it’s still a struggle. I think it’s a struggle when you’re a student with caregiving responsibilities”. Participant B explained:

> Even though there are child care facilities on campus, and people would see little kids running around, and we have programs for children, like the music conservatory or science programs…I think that there’s still this notion that you’re a student and that’s your work and that’s what you should be focused on and figure something out to take care of all those other responsibilities.

Summary

This chapter presented the seven themes that I identified from the document and interview data:

1. accommodating family status;
2. policies and practices;
3. leadership and institutional priorities;
4. student populations and their needs;
5. supports, services, and programs;
6. teaching and learning; and
7. community building.

I presented the findings from each of these seven main themes and their corresponding subthemes as it relates specifically to the policy, website documents, and interview transcripts.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

In this final chapter, I review the main themes in relation to the research questions, the conceptual lens, theoretical framework, and relate how the findings contribute to the body of literature. I propose recommendations in the areas of policy, services, and programs for leaders, researchers, and practitioners to consider to support of students with family responsibilities. I identify limitations of my study and suggest areas for future research. I conclude with reflections on my research as a practitioner scholar and the research process.

Guiding my research was the literature, policy theory, and my own perspective as a practitioner scholar (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). First, the literature review yielded four main themes: access and success, students with family responsibilities, human rights, and leadership (see Figure 2-1). These themes provided conceptual lenses for the study. Cooper et al., (2004) four dimensions of policy theory – normative, structural, constituentive, and technical – served as the theoretical framework. This alignment between the conceptual lenes and the theoretical framework helped identify data sources, support the research design, and inform the data collection and the analysis of the documents and interview transcripts.

These are the seven themes that emerged from the data:

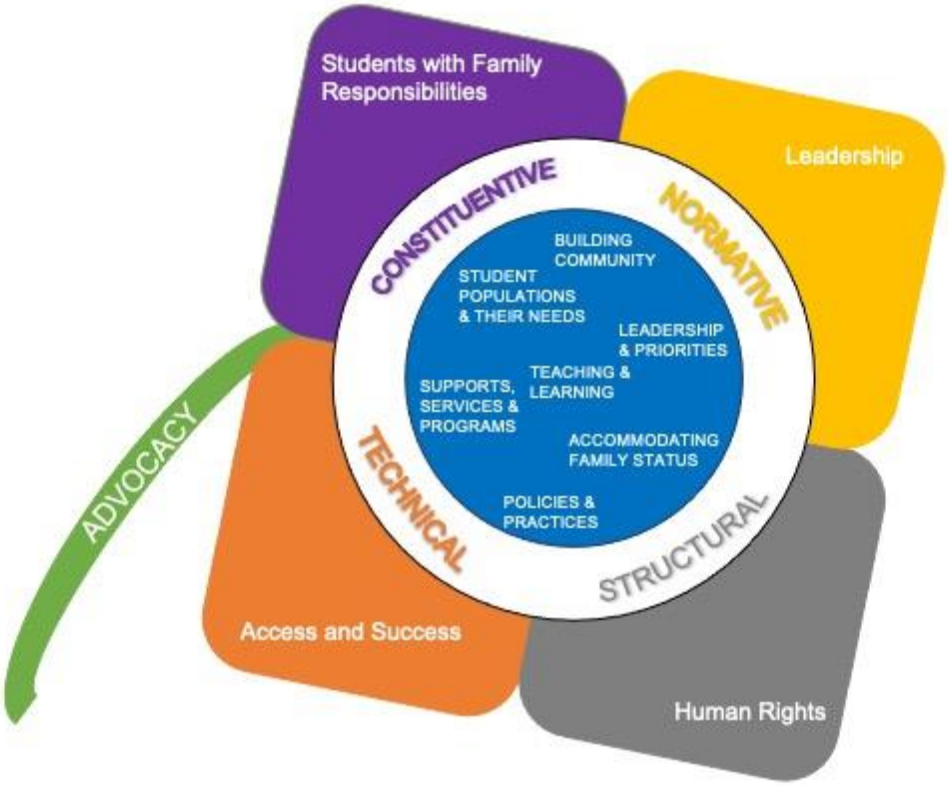
1. accommodating family status,
2. policies and practices,
3. leadership and institutional priorities,
4. student populations and their needs,
5. supports, services and programs,
6. teaching and learning, and

7. community building.

Each of these seven themes have subthemes that were presented in chapter 5. After the completion of the analysis, I revisited the relationship between the key elements of the literature (conceptual lens) and policy dimensions (theoretical framework) and considered the dynamic of the seven main themes with these other elements. The result was the development of the Flower Petal model of supporting students with family responsibilities (see Figure 6.1). In the next section, I describe each element within this model.

Figure 6-1.

The Flower Petal Model of Supporting Students with Family Responsibilities



The Flower Petal Model of Supporting Students with Family Responsibilities

The relationship between the research findings, conceptual lenses, and the theoretical framework is portrayed as a stylized flower on a stem. Each of the four petals represents the

areas of the literature presented in chapter 2 and discussed within the context of the findings below. In the middle of the figure are two circles or rings. Around the outer ring are Cooper et al., (2004) is four dimensions of policy theory which serve as a lens or frame to consider the research questions. Each of these four-policy dimension relates to an area of the literature contained within one of the four petals. Within the inner circle are the seven themes that emerged through the analysis of the data. Each of these seven themes is placed in relation to the policy dimensions and the areas of literature. Some themes are wholly within a petal (as is the case with accommodating family status; supports, services and programs; student populations and their needs; and leadership and priorities. Other themes span two petals (as is the case with policies and practices and building community) or span all four petals (as is the case with teaching and learning). Supporting the flower is a stem that represents advocacy, which is congruent with the Cooper et al., (2004) policy dimension model that has social justice and ethics at the centre. The stem, or advocacy, serves as a critical and supportive aspect to the model.

I further explore each element of this model in the sections below. In doing so, I identify some highlights of the findings and contextualize within the literature. Eighteen recommendations for research-intensive universities in Canada are identified. In developing the recommendations, consideration was given to a holistic approach that creates the potential for maximum impact at research-intensive universities. Ultimately, what is being proposed is a cultural change; such change must consider the entirety of the institution and its various constituents, as well as levers that can impact change. In a review of university policies and student parents at ten higher education institutions in the UK, Moreau (2016) identified three policy interventions: universal, targeted, and mainstreaming. The first, “universal or careblind” (p. 914), corresponds to little to no policy intervention; reference to student parents was almost

nonexistent in university policies and web content. Student parents are treated the same as other students without family responsibilities, but this "equal treatment" requires the student parents to "adjust their care practice to fit in" (p. 920).

With the second approach, "targeted", there is evidence of some support that provides positive impact and helps to increase the visibility of the needs of student parents. However, Moreau (2016), cautions this approach as it views student parents from a deficit lens; the interventions are "add-ons" that do nothing to create systemic change at the university.

The last approach, "mainstreaming", refers to "attempts to mainstream the needs of student parents in academia" (p. 920). Mainstreaming provides the most effective approach, leading to better outcomes for student parents. However, for such an approach to be effective at a university, it must be "well-resourced, deeply ingrained in institutional cultures, and to become a collective project to which all subscribe" (p. 921).

Applying these categories to the five university sites in this research, all five demonstrate a targeted approach, with University A moving in a positive direction towards mainstreaming. The flower petal model is compatible with a mainstreaming approach. It advocates for prioritizing students with family responsibilities and recognizing the value they bring to the institution. To be successful, this approach requires university-wide support and commitment. While the eighteen recommendations proposed can be implemented individually, to make lasting impact, all of them should be pursued as part of an overall university plan. The universities that were part of the sample had some or many of these recommendations in place or in progress. The first recommendation serves to provide an organizing function related to institutional-wide efforts.

Recommendation 1.

Establish a University-Wide Committee for Students with Family Responsibilities.

To support the work of reviewing and implementing the recommendations proposed within this research, the first recommendation is to establish a committee that will be responsible for reviewing, prioritizing, and implementing the recommendations. Depending on the organizational structure of the university, such a committee would likely report to the vice-provost students or equivalent. However, those matters involving course and academic program considerations would benefit from perhaps dual reporting to the vice-provost responsible for teaching and learning. Critical would be the inclusion of representative members with lived experiences as students with family responsibilities.

Petal – Human Rights

The lower right petal incapsulates human rights legislation in Canada and related literature. The petal also contains the structural policy dimension proposed by Cooper et al., (2004), which includes "governmental arrangements, institutional structure, systems, and processes that promulgate and support policies in education", p. 43). Two themes from the findings are also within this space, one theme, accommodation of family status, is firmly within the petal, while the other theme, policies, and practices, sits between the adjacent lower petal, access and support. I will start by providing highlights from the accommodating family status theme.

Theme: Accommodating Family Status.

A secondary research question was designed to explore how relevant provincial human rights legislation informs the type of policies, services, and programs that are available at Canadian research-intensive institutions. Human-rights-related documents were a targeted data

type as part of the collection process. All five universities had documents that referenced their respective provincial human rights legislation listing family status as a protected characteristic. However, this information was not necessarily in the context of providing accommodations for students with family responsibilities. There were three universities that through their different documents, stated that students who have family responsibilities that interfere with academic commitments have grounds to receive accommodation. These students were subsequently referred to the office to direct their requests. University A had a centralized service with a mandate to support students with family accommodations. However, there was no evidence on the website that there was a formal university policy and procedure within the university calendar or on the governance page. At the time of the interview, the office was involved in updating the procedures linked to their accommodation policy. The office had also created summary documents that provided helpful information for students seeking support and accommodation for family status. Aside from University A, Universities C and D referred students seeking accommodation for protected characteristics other than disability to the Vice-Provost or Dean of Students for assistance. Therefore, although family status was not identified specifically as a ground, it was suggested that other protected characteristics may be accommodated.

In reference to the structural policy dimension, the degree to which provincial human rights legislation influences policies within universities was considered and indeed it appeared to have an influencing but not strong relationship. Family status as a protected characteristic within higher education environments is underdeveloped and at the time of writing, remains an untested area of human rights caselaw. This contrasts with accommodating students with disabilities where there are stronger directives from provincial human rights commissions, provincial

mandates, and university policies and procedures. An element of promoting inclusive education is to have clear definitions (Specht & Thompson, 2022), thus leading to the first recommendation.

Recommendation 2.

Clearly define and identify family status as a protected characteristic within institutional policy and provide procedures or guidelines about the rights and responsibilities of the students, faculty, and academic administrators.

Defining what is meant by family status for a student with family responsibilities is within the context of a university. University A demonstrated that universities can successfully build on their existing efforts to accommodate students with disabilities and expand the mandate to remove barriers for other protected characteristics, including family status. Although family status is an emerging area, having a policy not only shows the value placed on this population, but also provides a definition that creates clarity about the meaning of family status and its application to learning contexts.

The third recommendation supports the idea that it is important to ensure that offices are aligned and that there is a shared commitment to support and as build together a knowledge base upon which the university community can draw to guide its decisions.

Recommendation 3.

Consult with the university's legal counsel and university secretariat about family status as a protected ground, accommodations, and case law.

To ensure support from a legal and policy perspective, it is important to have support from those offices such as university secretary and legal counsel, or their equivalents. As part of their core work, they consult with and provide guidance to academic administrators with the

jurisdictional authority to make decisions regarding academic requests and appeals. In the case of University A, the participant highlighted that there was support from these areas at her university that has helped with the expansion of the Access and Equity's office's mandate to support students with family responsibilities. Having support from these stakeholders is important given that family status and its related case law, particularly in post-secondary contexts, is still emerging.

Petal – Access and Success

The Access and Success petal refers to students with family responsibilities as an underrepresented group on university campuses. It also refers to supportive interventions, including policies and services. The technical policy dimension is one that considers what Cooper et al., (2004), call the "nuts and bolts of policymaking", including the "educational planning, practice, implementation and evaluation" (p. 45). Within the Flower Petal model, the policy and practice theme straddles both Human Rights and Access and Success and fully incapsulates supports, services, and programs. Both themes are discussed below along with related recommendations.

Theme: Policies and Practices.

Though the findings, it was identified that students received a form of flexibility or forgiveness through an accommodation process tied to the protected characteristic of family status and/or used family responsibilities as grounds for one of several academic policies or regulations. Recommendation 2 puts family status on the books and recommendation 4, presented in the section below, ensures that pre-existing academic policies are inclusive of caregiving responsibilities.

Recommendation 4.

Accept caregiving as a reason within policies that grant flexible options, concessions, or special request.

In the collected documents, there was some, but not consistent evidence of caregiving being identified specifically as an acceptable reason that warrants a concession or the granting of a special request, (for example, late assignments, deferred exams, etc.) However, through the responses to the case scenarios posed within the interviews, participants cited academic policies at their institution that were inclusive of caregiving as grounds. Additionally, communications developed in response to the pandemic, caregiving responsibilities were highlighted as a need to be accommodated and an issue warranting flexibility by faculty. Universities returning to in-person classes may mean reverting back to previous processes; thus, caregiving responsibilities need to be explicitly identified in policies for flexibility to continue. As an alternative, short-term-temporary absence policies may be introduced to provide flexibility without requiring students to divulge the reasons for their absence or lateness.

One area where there was clear identification of caregiving as grounds was for leaves of absence, particularly within graduate education and medical programs. Typically, these policies suspend a student's ability to continue with their academic work and removes access to services and resources during the leave. A promising practice was identified at University E. At this university, there is a graduate-student parent accommodation policy that provides the opportunity for students to both take some time away without a modification to their status as a full-time student, thereby minimizing the potentially negative consequences related to funding, and permitting them to have uninterrupted access to various services.

Apart from handling requests from students related to absences, missed assignments, or test/exam deferrals, institutions are also required to come up require decisions that are more nuanced, given the circumstances. These are addressed in the next recommendation.

Recommendation 5.

Create institutional document that provides the over-arching principles of supporting students with family responsibilities to guide decisions.

This recommendation can be considered in conjunction with recommendations 2 and 4 to create supportive policy framework. This document is not meant to create a prescribed set of procedures, but rather to identify an institutional commitment towards this particular population and to encourage flexibility as situations present themselves. A set of guidelines can be created to identify some common scenarios (for example, bringing a child to class). There may be guidance around flexibility balanced with safety if the class is a laboratory.

Theme: Supports, Services, and Programs

In addition, to examining policies, services, and programs at the targeted universities was also key research goal. There is a strong relationship between effective policy and the existence of supportive services and programs. Bretag et al., (2011), in their review of academic integrity policy, underscore the importance of "enabling strategies [that] *enact* the policy. Without long-term, sustainable, and practical support resources, a policy will not be enacted, no matter how well it is articulated" (p. 7). The next three recommendations are informed by the findings are connected to the supports, services, and programs.

Recommendation 6

Establish a new or expand mandate of an existing central unit that coordinates supports for students with family responsibilities.

There was no evidence of a centralized unit that provides a coordinating function for services and programs, in fact aside from University A, which assists with accommodations for family status, there was no centralized office at any of the five universities. One participant mentioned a long-standing Family Centre at the University of Toronto as a goal for their own campus. Although the university-wide committee identified in recommendation 1 serves as way to bring stakeholders together to make and implement recommendations, it does not provide the necessary day-to-day supports to students with family responsibilities. What did emerge from the findings was the fact that there were several supportive actions being taken at each university, some more than others, but very little in the way of bringing these together under the banner of a support office. The next recommendation speaks to the identification of these services and programs.

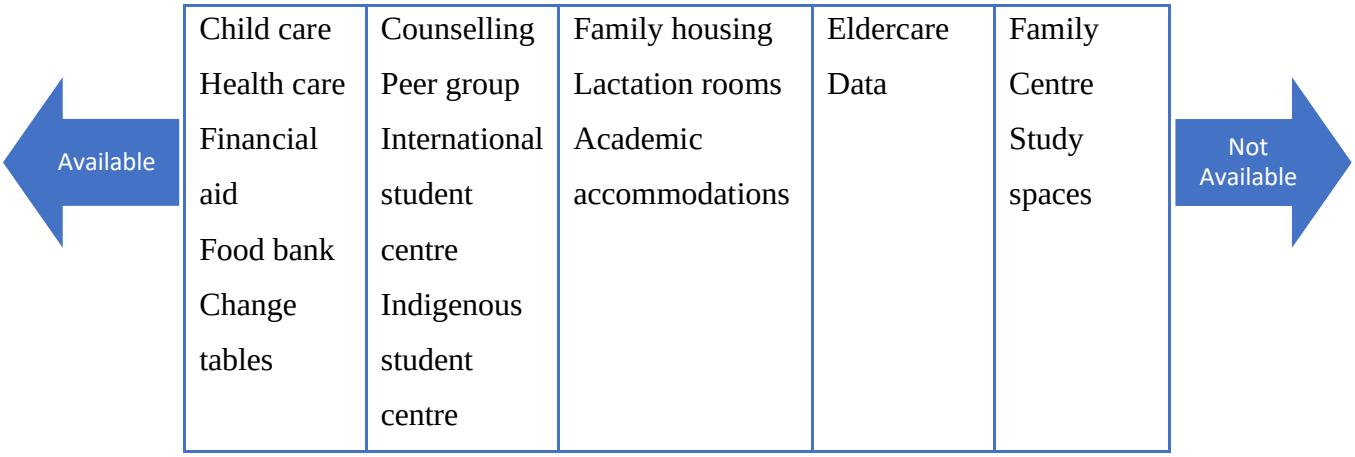
Recommendation 7.

Evaluate campuses using an inventory of services and programs.

As part of the data collection, an inventory tool was updated and adapted with permission from Georgian College (2005) and additional items informed by Karp et al., (2017) and Francis et al., (2017) (see Table A-1 in Appendix A). This inventory identified 16 items. This research has created a baseline of existing supports and policies for the period during which the data was collected. Figure 6-2 identifies how, collectively, the universities fall on a continuum of supportive practices for students with family responsibilities.

Figure 6-2.

Continuum of Supportive Practices for Students with Family Responsibilities



Universities are encouraged to carry out self-assessments to determine where their campuses may fall on the continuum of supportive practices and are encouraged to address existing gaps. Addressing the gaps is identified in the next recommendation.

Recommendation 8.

Revisit existing student services and programs and consider the needs of students with family responsibilities.

In the documents shared in the interviews, students with family responsibilities must interact with an institution that typically operates with a traditional student in mind. This may mean offering services only during traditional business hours of 8:30am – 4:30pm. The pandemic has created opportunities for virtual supports that have helped with accessibility. Other gaps include restrictive eligibility that excludes student caregivers who may not be full time students or whose financial resources may fall just outside need-based criteria because it is focused on students supporting themselves and not families. Examples include financial aid as well as scholarships and bursaries. Program offerings also focus on non-traditional student

through the content being delivered (e.g., orientation and transition) as well as through peer-based activities that could be family-friendly to be more inclusive. This is an area discussed later in recommendation 11. Other gaps include experiential opportunities, whether curricular (see recommendation 16) or co-curricular, that are not accessible for students with dependents.

Petal – Students with Family Responsibilities

In the upper left-hand corner of the model is the petal that represents students with family responsibilities. The associated policy dimension – constituentive – refers to the "theories of the networks, elites, masses, interest groups, ethnic/gender groups, providers and end users" (Cooper et al., (2004, p. 43). In the context of this study, consideration was given to the stakeholders, in this case student caregivers themselves. Analysis of policy, website documents, and interview transcripts contributed to an understanding about how this group was supported. One of the emergent themes from the findings is that student populations and their needs, which fits firmly in this space and is explained below.

Theme: Student Populations and Their Needs

The documents and the responses from the interviews underscored the diversity of students with family responsibilities; They are not a homogenous group, thus makes identifying them a challenge. Student caregivers are all genders and all age and are represented in all academic programs. Additionally, their needs are complex, as they tend to have hyphenated identifies. For example, there are international graduate-student caregiver parents or Indigenous undergraduate student parents. The need for specific programming that allows for students with family responsibilities is covered later in recommendation 11. The following two recommendations focus on how to identify and communicate directly with students with family

responsibilities to better connect them to services and programs, explain rights under university policies, and help them feel "seen" and valued as members of the university community.

Recommendation 9.

Identify student caregivers through self-identification and collect institutional data for tracking and measuring outcomes.

It is critical to identify what proportion a university's student population is constituted of students with family responsibilities. University A was the only university that had in place a process for students to self-identify through the student information system. Participants recognized the importance of identifying student caregivers, and some had used surveys to attempt to get a sense of their prevalence. This recommendation is meant to implement a self-identification process like what is in place to identify students identifying as Indigenous.

Self-identification is needed to track persistence and completion rates and to measure success of interventions, including services and programs that are introduced or enhanced to support students with family responsibilities. Having a self-identification process and connecting students to supports relies on a robust communication strategy. This topic is covered in the next recommendation. Many Canadian universities are conducting EDI surveys to help identify students from equity-deserving groups and to implement supportive programs and services.

Recommendation 10.

Implement a comprehensive communications strategy for students with family responsibilities.

Collecting documents across the five universities highlighted that western Canadian research-intensive universities have a way to go in acknowledging that this special student population is part of the general student population. Through gathering documents, I not only

noted whether a service or program existed, but also noted whether they were promoted specifically to students with families; unfortunately, most of the time, they were not. This is an important consideration, because institutional websites have become the prevailing way to communicate important information to students and to extend the reach of their services (Cabellon & Junco, 2015). Students will often attempt to access online the information they are seeking about supports and resources. Grajek (2018) points out that "for many institutions, students' experiences with the institution are predominantly not face-to-face. Students expect the campus to come to them" (p. 38).

This recommendation encourages the development and implementation of a comprehensive communications strategy. Participants recognized, and the document collection revealed, that communications could be strengthened. Having a committee of stakeholders (recommendation 1), a centralized unit (recommendation 6), and an active student community (the next recommendation) to have input and to help in the implementation of a communication plan would be vital to strengthen the impact and widen the scope or reaching students with family responsibilities.

Theme: Building Community

The theme of building community is nestled between the petals of students with family responsibilities and leadership as both are needed for a community to be created and to thrive. Efforts to build community may be at the grassroots level, led by students, and/or encouraged by supportive actions by those in positional leadership positions. Community was discussed both in terms of the existence of peer supports, as well as the degree to which the campus is family-friendly, two areas that form the following recommendations.

Recommendation 11.

Create opportunities for a nurturing student community.

Student community was seen as a vital ingredient in supporting students with family responsibilities. Whether this was student affairs and services-led or student-led, there was recognition that having the opportunity to meet and connect with students who are also balancing family responsibilities alongside academic as well as, in most cases, work commitments. One university had a very active student group that served as a conduit of information and maintained a centralized website providing a comprehensive overview of supports, opportunities, resources etc., This recommendation speaks to the importance of providing support to the creation of community networks, which are often developed through champions and/or grassroots efforts, an area covered later in recommendation 15.

Connecting students with each other is an important goal but so is making the campus community more inclusive of students and other members with families.

Recommendation 12.

Promote a family-friendly campus with respect to the physical space and encourage hosting of events that are welcoming to the families of students, staff, and faculty.

Through the document collection and responses from the participants, there were various efforts in place to promote a family-friendly environment; However, these were rarely coordinated and not well communicated in a central way, in part because sometimes the participants were targeted, (e.g., within a particular faculty). Under this recommendation, universities could look at strategies to make their campus more family-friendly, whether by reminding those who host events (faculties, student union, student groups) to consider being inclusive of students with families or by looking into what might be missing in terms of

amenities and supports (see inventory under recommendation 7), such as change tables, child-feeding rooms or playground equipment in greenspaces.

Whether strategies identified in the preceding recommendation require minimal effort or need significant resource allocation, it takes leadership, often through the articulation of, and a commitment to, what is valued and prioritized. Leadership is the next and final petal.

Petal – Leadership

Leadership is contained within the fourth and final petal, located in the top right corner of the model. Leadership is compatible with the normative policy dimension, which represents "beliefs, values and ideologies" Cooper et al., (2004, p. 43). Within this space is the theme of leadership and priorities.

Theme: Leadership and Priorities.

The research design focused on the recruitment of those within leadership roles in student affairs and services who could share perspectives on the degree to which their universities were supporting students with family responsibilities. These perspectives, combined with documents that were identified through the data collection, highlighted how values and the prioritization of student populations reflect in the level of action. None of the universities identified this student population in their institutional strategic plan. If family responsibilities were mentioned, they typically related to child care capacity. There was, however, evidence of this population being prioritized though a human rights (University A) or EDI lens (University E). At another institution (University D), there was a special initiative – Students Who Parent project – supported by the Dean of Students' office. The finding also underscored the importance of both positional and grassroots leadership, considerations that are reflected in the following three recommendations.

Recommendation 13.

Make students with family responsibilities an institutional priority.

How students with family responsibilities become a priority may be through different avenues, depending on the university. They might be captured within the university Strategic Enrolment Management plan, with specific strategies identified to both recruit and retain this specific population. Students with family responsibilities warrant a specific focus as part of the efforts to recruitment retain students. The demographics of university students across Canada and at individual universities are changing, and to remain competitive, institutions must be inclusive. Universities must consider how they are creating learning environments beyond the traditional ones. Additionally, universities should consider their outreach to student populations and ensure students with family responsibilities are reflected in the documents developed and the data collected about student demographics. As the findings revealed, students with family responsibilities may also be, for example, Indigenous, graduate, and/or international students. How might recruitment efforts, including presentations and materials, include information that a student caregiver may be seeking? What are some of the strategies that might assist with persistence? How might this success be measured?

Student caregivers may be highlighted within the institution's Equity Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Students with family responsibilities are an equity-deserving group, albeit a rather quiet one on university campuses. They also tend to have hyphenated identities, and this underscores the importance of viewing the needs of students in a holistic way. Beyond collecting data on student with family responsibilities (see recommendation 9), progress on goals to create inclusive environments for this student population must tracked and measured.

Recommendation 14.

Acknowledge and support champions and grassroot-leaders.

Institutional leaders should acknowledge those who are raising the profile of students with family responsibilities within their sphere of influence, conducting relevant research, or engaging in service or other related activity connected to supporting student caregivers or creating a family-friendly campus. Acknowledgement may include providing support (financial or time) or recognition. Both actions help to legitimize the work and support advocacy efforts at different levels within the institution (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Situated in the middle of flower petal model, teaching and learning is a theme that touches on all four petals. The timing of the data collection, during a global pandemic, emphasized not only the challenges of caregiving for all members of a university campus, but the responses to those challenges – both informal or local within a classroom, or at the institutional level, with changes to policies.

Theme: Teaching and Learning

Recommendation 15.

Empower and educate faculty on ways to support students with family responsibilities within courses.

Through the findings, it was clear that there was little in the way of guidelines for faculty on how to respond to requests from student caregivers for flexibility. It was noted by the participants that during the pandemic, many faculty members were responding with care and compassion to students who were struggling with balancing remote learning while caring for children or other family members.

Revealed in documents at some universities was evidence of faculty who communicated their willingness to support students needing to bring children to class and/or who would accept caregiving as grounds for flexibility around assessments. In these examples, the instructors often prefaced their comments by indicating that, because there was a lack of guidance from the university, they were making their own expectations explicit.

Students have a high bar to meet if they are seeking accommodations due to family status. Policy statements that provide guiding principles or guidelines identifying some common scenarios would both help to communicate the importance of flexibility for this population and advise on how to respond to situations. The reality is that many of the conflicts between academic and family caregiving commitments are within an individual's jurisdiction. For example, conflicts develop over classroom management in the case of students requesting to bring their children to class or questions of fairness arise in the case of students requests to submit late assignments or other forms of forgiveness due to family responsibilities. Although policy statements may be helpful, it is important to note that compassion is a strong motivating factor supporting students with family responsibilities. Encouraging faculty to feel empowered to demonstrate support goes a long way to help create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for students with family responsibilities.

Recommendation 16.

Offer flexible course delivery and program offerings.

Shared by the participants and supported by information gleaned from the documents, flexibility is critical to provide support for students with family responsibilities. During the pandemic, despite challenges with caregiving including anticipated homeschooling for those with school age children, flexibility provided relief and raised expectations about what could be

offered to support students. In the literature that reflects on the impacts of the university on students, there is a sense that students expect flexibility to continue, for example, in having the option to attend synchronous lecture from home, to review recorded lectures, etc.,

The Flower Petal model of supporting students with family responsibilities has a final element, which is the stem.

Stem – Advocacy

Within the figure, as a stem holds up the flower, advocacy is vital and foundational to the interplay of the other elements. Cooper et al., (2004) argue that if we want to see improvement within educational institutions, "We must center our education policies around concerns for equity and social justice" (p. 49). Within educational policy analysis, to enact change, "knowledge activism" is needed (Gillies, 2014, p. 272). In my research, what has emerged is the advocacy within the universities that has led to the development of policies, services, and programs to support students with family responsibilities. Although the participants themselves did not necessarily identify themselves as "advocates", they certainly demonstrated that they were or indicated what actions were needed to be taken for progress to be made. In one case, they championed the expansion of the mandate of an accessibility office (focused on students with disabilities) to include students with other protected characteristics, including family status. Another institution created a cluster of activities that led to the creation of a Students Who Parent initiative. At one university, the focus was on increasing child care capacity through listening to and working with student leaders. Common among these examples was the amplification of student voices and needs, and advocating for these needs to be prioritized and resources to be allocated. The final two recommendations underscore the importance of on-going advocacy work both within and outside universities.

Recommendation 17.

Student Affairs leaders advocate for students with family responsibilities and their needs.

Through the discussions with the participants, it was clear that some of these individuals were instrumental in raising the profile of these issues on their respective campuses and were champions of initiatives, including expanding the mandate of an existing office, creating or revising policies and procedures, educating campus members, including faculty, staff and students; and making opportunities for students to create community. Overall, these leaders helped to amplify the voices of an often-quiet population of students.

Recommendation 18.

Raise the profile of students with family responsibilities in Canada.

Some of the participants had been in touch with or were aware of efforts of their counterparts at other universities. We need to celebrate our successes and share the challenges so that others can be inspired by and learn from our efforts.

Practitioners, researchers, and those committed to supporting students with family responsibilities should ensure that they are making public their work at their respective institutions. They should engage in the following activities:

- feature activities through institutional channels and promote stories to national listservs;
- present at professional conferences and publish articles in practitioner and peer-review journals; and
- join a national community of practice, such as the students with family responsibilities, which is part of CACUSS, a national organization for Student Affairs professionals.

Beyond sharing best practices and celebrating successes, those committed to supporting students with family responsibilities should also look to advocacy that will have an impact on a

local, provincial, and national level. These lobbying efforts can focus on demands for increased more childcare both terms of spaces and affordability and more funding opportunities for caregivers to remove financial barriers for those seeking post-secondary education.

Summary

The Flower Petal model of supporting students with responsibilities with the interplay of the elements was presented and eighteen recommendations informed by this model were proposed. As Chan (2005) observes, "making changes in university-colleges is contested and difficult, even when the institutional climate may call for continuous adaptations to change" (p. 136) It is hoped that moving towards a "mainstreaming" policy approach in which efforts to include the entire community and create change is possible and can be achieved through the implementation of this model and my associated recommendations.

Revisiting the Research Questions

In the previous pages, I have shared the findings, presented a model for supporting students with family responsibilities, and made 18 recommendations to help guide universities in their work. In this section, I revisit the research questions and connect the outcomes of the study to provide answers to the questions guiding the project.

The primary research question was to examine how research-intensive universities in western Canada support students with family responsibilities through their respective policies, services, and programs. The findings reveal the efforts of these universities, which were summarized in the Flower Petal Model for supporting students with family responsibilities (see Figure 6-1). The answers to the five secondary questions, which provide specific information and insights, and are shared next.

The first secondary question explored how relevant provincial human rights legislation, and family status as a protected characteristic under this legislation, inform the type of policies, services, and programs available at western-Canadian research-intensive institutions. Only one university had evidence of institutional policy and a dedicated service tied to the provincial human right legislation regarding the family status. The university expanded its mandate of the office that oversees accommodations for disabilities and added family status, religious observance, and gender. This office was adopting its processes and had been in the process of recommending a new policy. Two other universities did not have a governing document, but on related webpages, they directed students to the Vice-Provost students if they were seeking accommodations for family status (or other protected characteristics). Canadian universities are new to this area of human rights; this fact is reflected in the literature as well as the minimal case law in the context of post-secondary education and students.

The second secondary research question explored how formal policies, regulations, and other institutional governing documents refer to students with family responsibilities and their needs, either directly or indirectly. All the universities had evidence of a policy framework related to academic requests or special concessions in response to students who have medical or compassionate grounds and/or who are encountering barriers to academic success within their programs. However, not all universities explicitly identified caregiving as grounds for accommodation.

Exploring the degree to which universities have evidence of items from a list of inventory-related to services and programs was the third secondary research question. The documents gathered across the five universities revealed some commonly found services and programs (e.g., child care); however, there were some that were not in place (e.g. family care

centre). Figure 6-1 presents the prevalence of the services and programs across the five universities.

The fourth secondary research question involved seeking the perceptions of senior leaders responsible for student policies, services, and programs regarding their university's response to supporting students with family responsibilities. The interviews that were held with each of the five participants revealed committed leaders working within their university's student services divisions. The participants provided insightful perspectives that highlighted what was in place and were critical and thoughtful regarding gaps. The social constructionist approach to the research provided opportunities for me to explore with the participants how to understand their university's policies, services, and programs. This approach also informed the analysis of the data sources.

The fifth and final secondary research question was to identify promising practices at western-Canadian research-intensive universities in creating campuses that support students with family responsibilities. These promising practices were gleaned through the collection of the documents and/or through the responses provided by the participants. The 18 recommendations reflect what was learned about promising practices that are already in place or plans for future implementation.

Limitations

This study was exploratory, given the limited literature that exists. The boundaries of the study were established to develop a research project that could be completed within a certain timeline while still leading to the collection and analysis of meaningful data. The reasons for narrowing focus to western-Canadian research-intensive universities were explained in chapter 3.

Exclusively focusing on western Canadian, research-intensive, and English-speaking institutions is a limitation of the study.

Having interviewed only one representative from each university, I was not able to explore differing perspectives from other community members. Although it was a deliberate decision to focus on leaders' perspectives, the study is limited due to the absence of student voices and sharing of students lived experiences navigating the universities policies, programs, and services.

Collecting the data during the pandemic was both a challenge and a gift. It was a gift because the caregiving responsibilities of students, staff, and faculty was receiving unprecedented attention on university campuses and by society at large. University websites contained references to caregiving because of health care directives and supportive messages from university leadership. The timing was a challenge because it captured a particular space in time, and it will not be known until later if some of that information and the interventions connected to COVID-19 will diminish.

The data provide only a snapshot in time documenting the degree to which the five universities demonstrate support of students with family responsibilities through their policies, services, and programs. The research does not provide historical background for each but rather reports on what is available during the data collection period.

Although the research involved five universities, the findings do not lend themselves to a summary matrix from which to draw comparisons emphasizing similarities or differences. Recommendation 7 encourages completing an inventory as a self-assessment guide to help give direction to those who are wishing to evaluate the degree to which their universities may demonstrate support for students with family responsibilities.

Implications for Future Research

In this study, I examined only research-intensive universities. Expanding this research to include other types of post-secondary institutions across all regions of Canada would be helpful to create a more comprehensive picture of how this student population is being served. Extending the focus would be helpful in identifying provincial/territorial similarities, as well as uncovering unique promising practices at different institutions.

Human rights were identified as a literature theme and emerged as a main finding in the analysis. Only one member from each university was interviewed. Carrying out in-depth case studies would provide rich information, as would casting the net and employing a mixed-methods approach to gathering quantitative data to help create baselines across the country that could be used to track success and progress.

Students with family responsibilities are underserved and marginalized. Additionally, members of this student population tend to have hyphenated identities. They are not just student caregivers but individuals who have other identities that impact their experience at university and their progression through their degree programs. Implementing a critical theory as a paradigmatic approach to explore this research area would provide better insights into systemic barriers and lead to recommendations to effectively address challenges faced by students with family responsibilities.

The important role that student associations and student newspapers play in supporting students with family responsibilities was identified in the findings. Beyond the scope of this research, but recommended for future examination, is to investigate the role of student leaders to advance the issue of student caregivers through advocacy and lobbying efforts directed to university administrations and provincial governments.

Significance of the Study

The findings highlight the absence of a coordinated and holistic approach in supporting students with family responsibilities. Not prioritizing this student population negatively impacts student recruitment, retention efforts, as well as assist in meeting equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. Based on the findings, I identify 19 recommendations that provide clear calls to action in the areas of policy, services, programs, and leadership. These recommendations if pursued collectively will help universities move forward in a positive way to support students with family responsibilities. Those in leadership positions, particular within Student Affairs, can use the recommendations to guide discussions and prioritize work related to supporting this population of students.

Conclusion

As a practitioner scholar, I set out to examine a problem that I identified through my professional work within Student Affairs. I am keenly aware that universities were originally designed for the privileged and that even today, despite efforts to promote access, students who do not fit into the traditional student profile continue to face barriers. Students who have family caregiving commitments are not a homogenous group as such, they face common challenges at universities including being valued and having their needs prioritized. This prioritization, or lack thereof, includes policies that allow for flexibility in course completion, services that respond to unique needs, and programming that provides opportunities for meaningful engagement. Universities efforts to increase accessibility to their programs must be tied to a commitment to "developing support services and a more welcoming and inclusive environment in order to ensure student retention and success among an increasingly diverse student population" (Michalski et al., 2017, p. 81).

The Flower Petal Model of supporting students with family responsibilities (see figure 6-1) provides a holistic approach to responding to a unique student population whose needs have not been prioritized on Canadian university campuses. The relationship between the conceptual lenses (four themes emerging from the literature review), the theoretical framework (Cooper et al., (2004) four policy dimensions), and the seven main findings of the research led eighteen recommendations (see table 6-1).

Table 6-1

Summary of Recommendations

	Theme	Recommendation
1.	Accommodating Family Status	Establish a Student with Family Responsibility University-Wide Committee.
2.		Clearly define and identify family status as a protected characteristic within institutional policy and provide procedures or guidelines about rights and responsibilities of the students, faculty, and academic administrators.
3.		Consult with university's legal counsel and university secretariat about family status as a protected ground, accommodations, and caselaw
4.	Policies and Practices	Accept caregiving as a reason within policies that grant flexible options, concessions, or special request.
5.		Create institutional document that provides the over-arching principles of supporting students with family responsibilities to guide decisions
6.	Supports, services, and programs	Establish a new or expand mandate of an existing central unit that coordinates supports for students with family responsibilities.
7.		Evaluate campuses using an inventory of services and programs
8.		Revisit existing student services and programs and consider the needs of students with family responsibilities.
9.	Student populations and their needs	Identify student caregivers through self-identification and collect institutional data for tracking and measuring outcomes.
10.		Implement comprehensive communications strategy for students with family responsibilities
11.	Building community	Create opportunities for a nurturing student community.
12.		Promote a family-friendly campus with respect to the physical space and encourage hosting events that are welcoming to the families of students, staff, and faculty.

13.	Leadership priorities	Make students with family responsibilities an institutional priority.
14.		Acknowledge and support champions and grassroot-leaders.
15.	Teaching and learning	Empower and educate faculty on ways to support students with family responsibilities within courses.
16.		Offer flexible course delivery and program offerings.
17.	Advocacy	Student Affairs leaders advocate for students with family responsibilities and their needs.
18.		Raise the profile of students with family responsibilities in Canada.

This study helps to contribute to the literature on this under-researched population and provides insights into what policies, services, and programs western-Canadian research-intensive universities currently have in place to support students with family responsibilities.

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Appendix A: Inventory of Services and Programs that Support Students with Family Responsibilities.

Table A-1

Inventory of services and programs that support students with family responsibilities.

Inventory Item	**Evidence it is available**	**Evidence it is promoted/targeted to students with family responsibilities**
Child care		
Eldercare		
Family housing		
Counselling/mental health supports		
Health care		
Financial aid		
Food bank		
Lactation/child feeding rooms		
Change tables		
International student services		
Indigenous student services		
Student groups/peer supports		
Dedicated study spaces		
Dedicated central service (e.g., Family Centre)		
Academic accommodations (flexibility, individual considerations, formal accommodations)		
Data (e.g., self-identification)		

Inventory was informed by Georgian College (2005), Karp et al., (2017) and Francis et al., (2017)

Appendix B: Email Invitation

Email subject: Invitation to participate a research study about students with family responsibilities

Dear [Name],

I am contacting you in your capacity as [vice-provost/vice-president/dean of students] to invite you to participate in my doctoral research project examining the policies and practices within Canadian research-intensive universities that support students with family responsibilities.

Students with family responsibilities is an important population on our campuses yet they often are underserved and under-researched. The purpose of this study is to explore how western Canadian research-intensive universities promote success and remove barriers for students with family responsibilities. The primary research question is how do western Canadian research-intensive universities support students with family responsibilities through their respective policies, services, and programs? Perspectives of the senior executive leader responsible for students will be valuable in providing context about their respective institution.

I am seeking your participation in an interview that may take approximately an hour, but this is largely dependent on how much you wish to share with me. The interview will take place through video conferencing software (e.g., Zoom).

If you are willing to participate, please contact me so that I may arrange a time to meet with you:

Brandy Usick, Ed.D. candidate
Werklund School of Education
Brandy.Usick1@ucalgary.ca
(204) 230-3167

Your participation will contribute to the scholarly and practitioner communities understanding of how Canadian research-intensive universities support students with family responsibilities

It is important to note that participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study (REB20-0322).

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Brandy Usick, Ed.D. candidate
Werklund School of Education
Brandy.Usick1@ucalgary.ca
(204) 230-3167
or

Dr. Sarah E. Eaton, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership, Policy and Governance
Werklund School of Education
seaton@ucalgary.ca
(403) 220-6378

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283 or (403) 220-8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

I would very much appreciate and value your participation in my study.

Warmest regards

Brandy Usick
Ed.D. Candidate, Leadership in a Post-Secondary Context
Werklund School of Education
University of Calgary

Appendix C: Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email: Brandy L. Usick, Ed.D. candidate, Werklund School of Education, (204) 230-3167, Brandy.Usick1@ucalgary.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Sarah E. Eaton, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership, Policy and Governance Werklund School of Education

Title of Project:

An examination of policies and practices within Canadian research-intensive universities that support students with family responsibilities

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary. The researcher will strive to maintain confidentiality of the participants but given the targeted recruitment of vice president or vice provost (students) of Canadian research-intensive universities to participate in an interview, confidentiality may not be possible. Participants will be invited to use their own name or to select a pseudonym.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how Canadian research-intensive institutions promote success and remove barriers for students with family responsibilities. The research objective is to examine how Canadian research-intensive universities demonstrate support for students with family responsibilities through their policies and practices. Perspectives of higher education leaders responsible for student policies, services, and programs will be valuable in providing context about their respective institutions and insight into how efforts improve recruitment and retention outcomes.

The primary research question is:

- How do Canadian research-intensive institutions support students with family responsibilities through their respective policies, services, and programs?

The secondary research questions are:

- How do formal policies, regulations, and other institutional governing documents refer to students with family responsibilities and their needs, either directly or indirectly?
- How many of the inventory of practices are in place at the respective research-intensive institutions? How many are of these practices are related to student services and supports? How many are related to academic offerings or tools for learning?
- How does relevant provincial human rights legislation, and family status as a protected characteristic, inform the type of policies, services, and programs that are available at the research-intensive institutions?

- How do senior leaders responsible for student policies, services and programs perceive their institution's response to supporting students with family responsibilities? How is this support for students with family responsibilities demonstrated?
- What are the promising practices for Canadian research-intensive universities in creating campuses that support students with family responsibilities?

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

As a voluntary participant in the research, you will have an opportunity to participate in an individual interview through video conferencing software (e.g., Zoom).

The interview questions will ask for your perspective on how your university supports students with family responsibilities through its policies, services, and programs. Interviews will be semi-structured and will be recorded digitally (video) and written (e.g., researcher's notes) to facilitate data analysis. The digital files will be stored on a password protected and encrypted computer that will be used for data storage and processing in this study.

Your participation in the interviews may take a total of up to one hour but this is largely dependent on how much you wish to share with the researcher.

Participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any and all questions, and may withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender and to confirm your leadership role and the scope of your portfolio.

Study data included in reports will not contain personally identifiable information unless consented to by the participant.

Only the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the written or digital recordings of your participation. The recordings will never be shown in public.

There will be no remuneration or compensation for participating in this study.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No:

I grant permission to be video-recorded (e.g., Zoom)	Yes: ___ No: ___
I grant permission to have my institution's name used:	Yes: ___ No: ___
You may quote me and use my name:	Yes: ___ No: ___
I understand I may not remain anonymous, but I prefer a pseudonym be used to refer to me:	Yes: ___ No: ___

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks associated with participation in this study are no more than what participants encounter in their daily experiences as senior university leaders.

Benefits include contributing to the scholarly and practitioner communities understanding of how Canadian

research-intensive universities support students with family responsibilities. Participants will be invited to share their perspectives and speak to the policies, services, and programs that exist at their institution. The opportunity to discuss this particular student population–students with family responsibilities–and how their needs may be met through the university may be considered a valuable opportunity by the participant.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary. The researcher will strive to maintain confidentiality of the participants but given the targeted recruitment of vice provost (students) of Canadian research-intensive institutions to participate in an interview, confidentiality may not be possible. Participants will be invited to use their own name or to select a pseudonym.

After data collection, participants are free to withdraw up until one month after being invited to review their interview transcript. In the case that you withdraw from the study, all data you contributed to the study will be destroyed.

No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the written or digital recordings of your participation. Study findings will be summarized for scholarly presentation or publication of results. Study data will be kept on a password protected computer in a locked office accessible only by the researcher. Data will be stored for five years after which time it will be permanently erased.

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results? Yes: ___ No: ___
If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)

_____

_____

Are you interested in being contacted if there are any follow-up questions with the understanding that you can always decline the request? Yes: ___ No: ___

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Brandy Usick, Ed.D. candidate
Werklund School of Education
Brandy.Usick1@ucalgary.ca
(204) 230-3167
and
Dr. Sarah E. Eaton, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership, Policy and Governance
Werklund School of Education
seaton@ucalgary.ca
(403) 220-6378

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview Questions and Scenarios

1. Name or preferred pseudonym:

2. Preferred gender pronouns:

3. Position at the university is:

4. Portfolio includes following units/departments/areas:

Definition of Family and Family Responsibilities

In this study, **family** is seen to be a broad and inclusive term as defined by The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2014):

> [Family] includes family members who do not live in the same household, and relationships from bonds of blood or law, including common-law. It includes relationships between parents and children (including adoptive and foster children), and with spouses (marital and common law), siblings, in-laws, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, cousins, grandparents, and grandchildren. Families can also include relationships not defined by blood or legal bonds. This may include "chosen families," such as strong friendships and communities where unrelated persons provide care normally provided by nuclear family members. These relationships may be particularly important for [Indigenous] people or people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. (p. 2).

Family responsibilities refers to caregiving provided to family, which, as defined above, includes but is not limited to one's children, dependents and/or elders.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. I have provided you with the definition of family by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. How does this definition reflect how family is understood at your institution?

2. Family responsibilities was also defined. How does this description fit with how your institution views family responsibilities, particularly those of students?

3. If asked, what might a student with family responsibilities share if asked about their experiences at your institution, particularly in relation to the degree they may feel supported.

4. In terms of your institutional strategic plan, can you share how students with family responsibilities might be reflected either directly or indirectly in the institutional priorities or goals?

5. Can you explain whether students with family responsibilities are considered within recruitment efforts at your university?

6. How is data collected on students with family responsibilities? i.e., how are they identified?

7. a. Can you explain whether you have noticed if there is an increased focus on or increased demand from students with family responsibilities at your university? If so, what has that looked like?

   b. Has this become more pronounced during the pandemic?

8. How do students know where to go to get assistance if facing challenges or barriers due to their family responsibilities?

9. How do faculty and staff know where to refer students for assistance?

10. Supportive practices for students with responsibilities include flexibility in program or course delivery (e.g., blended, online, condensed, or go at own pace, etc.,). What types of options are available at your institution?

11. How does your institution respond to requests for accommodations from students with family responsibilities? What are the policies, procedures, or guidelines?

12. How might requests for alterations to course requirements be received? Example might include excused absences, extensions on assignments, make up exam or it might mean asking for an alternative assignment due to caregiving demands. Would caregiving responsibilities be seen as grounds for any of these requests?

13. How might faculty or academic administrators know how to respond to requests for accommodation?

14. In the literature gender is identified as playing a role in caregiving demands of students. What is your observation?

15. What about the environment on your campus? Would you consider it to be family-friendly, for example, spaces where student parents may feel comfortable bringing their children. Why or why not?

16. Student government or student organizations play an important advocacy role. In what ways have your student organizations demonstrated their awareness of or support for students with family responsibilities?

17. What are the ways in which student government or organization have supported the needs of students with family responsibilities through their own programs, services, and events?

Scenarios

I have two brief scenarios to read to you. (I will provide you with the scenario so you can refer to it while we discuss.) The questions I will ask you are in relation to how you and your institution might respond.

Scenario 1

You receive a complaint from a student parent who was recently told by her program director that she is no longer able to bring her 6-month-old baby to class. She had been bringing her baby so that she could continue to nurse. Two students in the program complained to a professor. They felt the student and her baby were too disruptive. The professor consulted with the program director and the decision was to inform the student she had to find alternative arrangements or withdraw from the class and retake it later. You check your email and see that the University's Human Rights office wants to set up a time to discuss this issue with you.

Scenario question: How would you want to see this scenario handled at your university?

Scenario 2

An associate dean of a professional faculty contacts you for advice. A student in their program did not perform well and the progression committee determined the student had failed the year. The student met with the associate dean and explained that in October, they became a primary caregiver for their father. Caregiving duties were heaviest in evening hours when the student had hoped to study or complete schoolwork. The student explained earlier in the term they had asked for an extension on one of their assignments, but the course professor did not feel the student's reasons were sufficient. This resulted not only in a failed grade in that assignment but led to the student's decision to not seek further help during the year. The associate dean although sympathetic, feels their hands are tied given the timing.

Scenario question: How would you want to see this scenario handled at your university?

Final Interview Question: Now that you have had a chance to reflect on the topic through the interview questions and the scenarios, I have presented to you, is there anything that you might want to add that perhaps I did not give you the chance to share through our discussion? Are there any additional initiatives, documents, or services that you would want captured as part of this interview?

Appendix E: Alignment between Interview Questions, Conceptual Lens and Theoretical Framework

Table E-1

Alignment between Interview Questions, Conceptual Lens and Theoretical Framework

Interview questions	Conceptual lens Main themes from the literature	Theoretical framework Four dimensions of policy theory (Cooper et al., 2004)
1, 2, 4, 5, 15, case scenarios	Leadership	Normative
3, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, case scenarios	Human rights	Structural
6, 10, 12, 13, case scenarios	Students with family responsibilities	Constituentive
11, 12, case scenarios	Student access and success	Technical

Appendix F: Description of the Information Collection for the Five University Profiles

The U15 webpage (U15, n.d.-b) was initially accessed to identify the type of data that is provided for each institution. The member institutions each contributed data to this consortium and report profiles are available in the U15 website. The most recent available is for 2020; however, it was not clear if the data was from the 2019-2020 or the 2020-2021 reporting year. Unless otherwise identified, the information presented in this section is from fall, 2020, enrolments. This timeframe was selected because the data collection for this study took place during the 2020-21 academic year, specifically the winter, 2021, and spring/summer, 2021, terms. In October 2021, I repeated the search steps to ascertain if there were additional documents to be included as part of the study, thus providing an opportunity to ensure that I did not miss any relevant documents in my initial collection. I also reviewed those documents that were screened to double-check if they should be included as part of the study. As part of this review, I also cross-referenced all the screened documents identified in the tables with the documents saved in the respective university subfolders.

For each of the individual institutional websites, I began my search by locating the "about" or "facts and figures" pages. From there, I located the university's page or repository for institutional data and/or reports. To locate information about specific demographics, the search function was used for some universities. Two institutions provided interactive tables that could be filtered, while others provided documents that appeared to be created as at an at-a-glance resource.