

Parenting Students:

Newly available data makes new
insights possible

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Introduction: parenting students in context

Parenting students are a sizable sub-population of non-traditional college students

- Enrollment Trends
 - Males and females pursue post-secondary credentials differently
 - Online education has increased access for non-traditional and historically marginalized students.
- Sex-segregation
 - observed in major & career selections
 - observed in career & economic outcomes
 - not known or assessed for student-parents

Background: previous research

Previous research on student-parents tended to use small populations and focus on themes such as their

- needs and/or supports
- motivation
- time-poverty
- experiences of belonging

“Last year's survey of student parents revealed something very powerful. While more than **80%** of them felt welcomed and respected, **nearly a quarter** said that they didn't feel like they **mattered.**”

–Dr. Mike Flores (2025)
Chancellor, Alamo Colleges



Background:

insights from the Urban Institute

Parenting students are diligent & busy

- 74% have a job, working an average of 36 hours per week.
- Often enrolled part-time.
- Have 2 children on average, and half have a child under 6.

Parenting students take longer

- They are more likely to enroll part time
- Less than 1/3 of mothers complete their degree within 10 years
- Student parents are 55% less likely to complete a degree or credential in 6 years, even after controlling for demographics

Parenting students are successful

- Parenting students have slightly higher GPAs than non parenting students
- They are good students, with different motivations

Background: the parenting student population

Inconsistencies in how parenting students are identified left an empirical gap about the true size and distribution of the population of parents who are college students

- The Urban Institute reports it is believed that in Texas, there are almost **3.5 million** parents who have no college degree & are not in school
 - Remarkably, **1/3** of them have some college experience.
- The Spart Collective estimates that 18% of undergraduate students are parents, but notable variations by gender. Among undergraduates parents comprise:
 - 24% of female students
 - 11% of male students
 - 5 percent of students with other gender identities
- Trellis Student Financial Wellness Survey (Fall 2023) found that **~32%** of Texas respondents claimed they were parenting students
- Achieving the Dream reports that **~22%** of Texas students are parenting students with **~14%** attending a 4-year university

New research

A 2023 law in Texas (HB 1361) requires public institutions of higher education (IHEs) to identify and report on parenting student populations. This created new archival records, and allowed new insights about the enrollment behaviors of students who are parents of dependent children in Texas.

What do you think?

Do mothers and fathers make different choices as they pursue higher education?
If so, where might we expect these to show up?



Research questions

	Institution Type	Enrollment Modality
Are the variables related?	RQ1: Are sex and institution type independent variables for student-parents who are pursuing higher education at public institutions of higher education in Texas?	RQ2: Are sex and enrollment modality independent variables for student-parents pursuing higher education at public institutions of higher education in Texas?
If so, describe the relationship	RQ3: Is the proportion of female student-parents who attend a Texas public community college different from the proportion of male student-parents who attend a Texas public community college (versus a Texas public four-year university)?	RQ4: Does the proportion of female student-parents who attend a Texas public institution of higher education online (versus in person) differ from the proportion of male student-parents who attend a Texas public institution of higher education online?

Methodology & research design

This non-experimental, quantitative, archival study used existing data

- Student records obtained via public information request
- Sought to evaluate sex-based differences in observed enrollment
 - by institution type
 - by enrollment modality
- No manipulation of variables was performed
- Inferential statistics were calculated using chi square tests of independence and independent sample proportions tests.



Results: institution type

RQ1: Are sex and institution type independent variables for parenting students pursuing higher education at public IHEs in Texas?

Result:

A statistically significant relationship exists between a parenting students' sex and their institution type.

Proportional Distribution of Student-parents' Institution Type
by Sex

Female Student-parents

Community
College
91.5%

University
8.5%

Male Student-parents

Community
College
95.7%

University
4.3%

Results: enrollment modality

RQ2: Are sex and enrollment modality independent variables for student-parents pursuing higher education at public institutions of higher education in Texas?

Result:

There is a statistically significant relationship between student-parents' sex and their instructional modality

Proportional Distribution of Student-parents' Enrollment

Modality by Sex

Female Student-parents



Male Student-parents



Findings

Institution Type

Mothers make up the majority of parenting student populations

A parenting student's decision to enroll in a community college or a university is not independent of their sex.

While most parenting students are mothers, a 4.2% larger proportion of fathers enroll in community colleges.

Enrollment Modality

A student-parent's decision to enroll in a fully online modality is not independent of sex.

A significantly higher (14%) proportion of mothers took all of their classes online.

Recommendations

- For community colleges: attend to the needs of fathers.
- Community colleges may bring best ROI on funding and resources for supporting parenting students.
- IHEs benefit from collecting student-level data about parenting students, as it allows for identifying and tracking success metrics
- Add enrollment modality to the data collected in future iterations of the THECB Parenting Student Survey





Thank you



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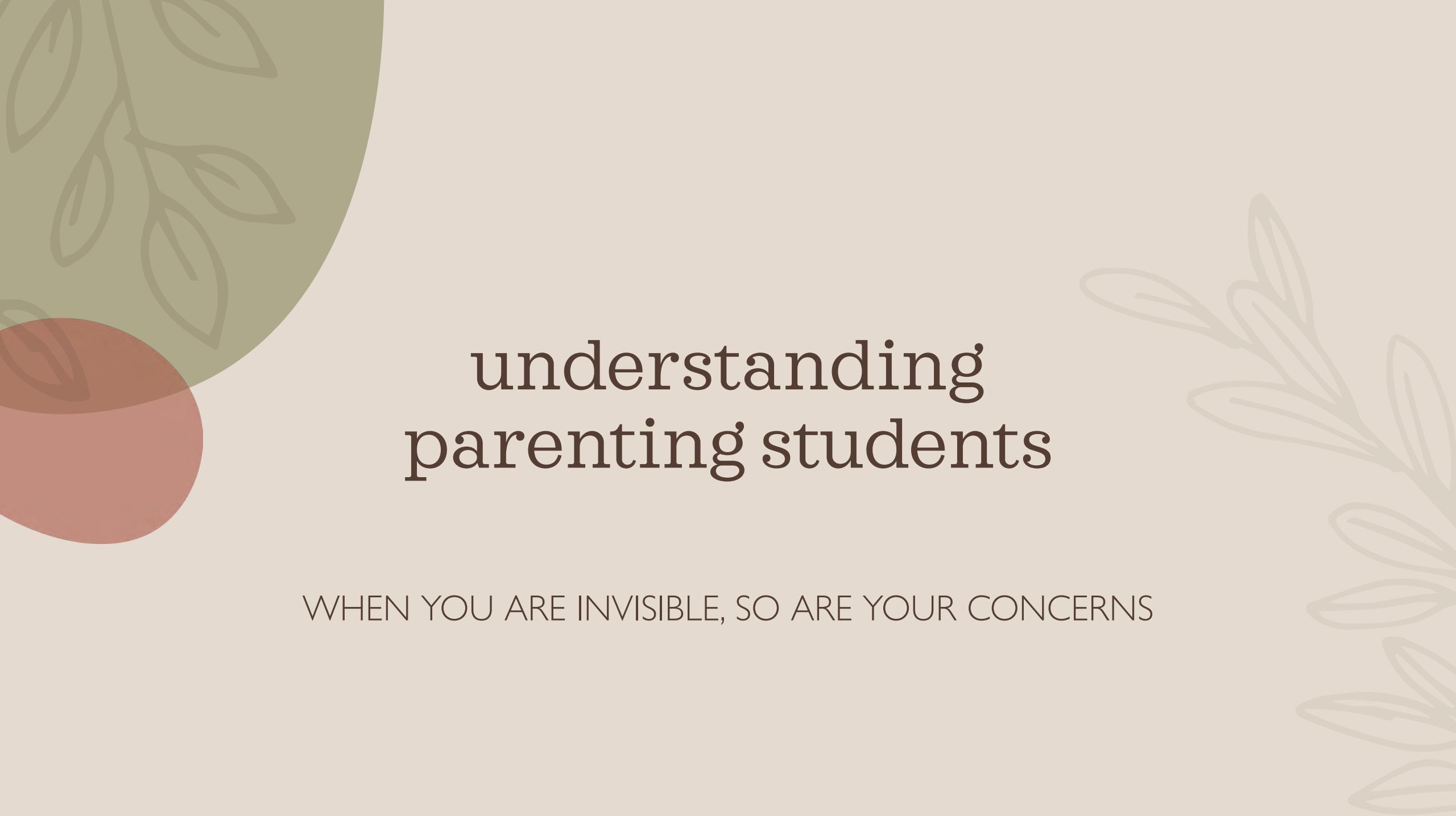
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APPENDIX

Limitations

- These records are newly being collected
- Reliance upon archival record-keeping and data collection by different institutions
 - Observational in nature
- Overrepresentation of community college students in this sample
- Limitations of non-parametric tests





understanding parenting students

WHEN YOU ARE INVISIBLE, SO ARE YOUR CONCERNS

Population and Sample

Study sample included 7,013 students

Inclusion criteria for this study:

- Students who are parents of dependent children
- Enrolled at a Texas public college or university in the fall 2024
- Enrolled as undergraduate student
- Identified as either male or female (one student with sex identified as “unknown or not reported” was excluded).

Descriptive Statistics of the Study Sample

Frequency Table for Study Sample		2-year		4-year		Row Totals	
Sex		#	%	#	%	#	%
	Female	4715	73%	439	85%	5154	73%
	Male	1779	27%	80	15%	1859	27%
Enrollment Modality							
	Fully Online	2857	44%	331	64%	3188	45%
	Not Fully Online	3637	56%	188	36%	3825	55%
Race/Ethnicity							
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	22	0%	2	0%	24	0%
	Asian	353	5%	2	0%	355	5%
	Black or African American	1069	16%	58	11%	1127	16%
	Hispanic or Latino	2325	36%	208	40%	2533	36%
	International	72	1%	1	0%	73	1%
	Multiracial	226	3%	13	3%	239	3%
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	14	0%		0%	14	0%
	Unknown or Not Reported	83	1%	7	1%	90	1%
	White	2330	36%	228	44%	2558	36%
Enrollment Level							
	Full-Time	1935	30%	287	55%	2222	32%
	Part-Time	4559	70%	232	45%	4791	68%
Totals		6495		519		7013	