UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs

UNDERGRADUATE PARENTING STUDENT BUDGETS AND FINANCIAL AID

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University conducted analysis on student parent experiences, which elevated higher costs related to their dependents as a concern[1]. Additionally, several studies highlighted the need for budgets to more accurately reflect child-related costs[2,3]. Beginning with the 2023-24 academic year, campus financial aid offices will proactively identify students with dependents. This group is defined as student(s) with children under 18 years of age who will receive more than half of their support from that student[4], hereafter referred to as 'parenting students' for the purposes of budget add-ons in defined areas.

Effective July 31,2025, the GAINS Act[5] instituted methodological and model practices for estimating and adjusting cost of attendance elements for student parents which have informed this guidance, though the components herein are specific to financial aid.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF PARENTING STUDENT BUDGETS AND FINANCIAL AID

Component	Policy Source and Focus	Funding
Housing	Federal law requires students with dependents have an allowance to be the greater of mean/median of cost for institutionally owned/operated housing. Starting in the 2026-27 academic year, off-campus and living with parent housing will be informed by the UC Cost of Attendance Survey and HUD.	Gift aid strongly encouraged
Personal/Food	On campus food costs are informed by campus housing offices, all others are informed by USDA Moderate Food Plans.	Loan or gift aid
Transportation	Starting in the 2026-27 academic year, UCOP will provide student parent-specific transportation expenses informed by the UC Cost of Attendance Survey	Loan
Dependent Childcare	Federal law indicates actual costs for dependent childcare are allowed based on the number and age of the students dependents. Campuses may use Department of Social Services reimbursement ceilings or the student parent's reported expenses for adjustments.	Loan

[1] 2019 Parenting students' experience and challenges at UC; 2021 UC Parenting Student Workgroup report

[2] Anderson, T., & Green, A. (2022, Dec). Roadmap for change to support for pregnant and parenting students.

[3] California Competes. (2023, Jan.). Policy agenda for California student parents.

[4] Cal Ed Code 66025.81(b). https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=66025.81.

[5] Cal Ed Code 60027.82. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=66027.82.

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENT PARENTS

Student parents are defined as students with one or more dependent children under the age of 18, self-certified or verified through existing systems. Identification should at minimum include use of the relevant financial aid application, but may also utilize other campus resources, including offices that serve student parents. Formal counts of student parents to the UC Office of the President will be issued via the established process for enrollment data reporting using the related data field. Reported data will be included in the data submissions to the Cradle-to-Career Data System.

STUDENT PARENT COSTS

The FAFSA Simplification Act (116 Pub. L. 260, Division FF, Title VII) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (117 Pub. L. 103, Division R) jointly modified the COA components and consumer information pertaining to those components. This in addition to the aforementioned state legislation establish certain requirements and recommendations which inform the content below.

The UC Office of the President (UCOP) consults with the UC Education Finance Model (EFM) Steering Committee on policy and program recommendations to maintain UC's affordability and financial accessibility. The EFM Steering Committee advises the Vice President and Vice Provost for Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs on the implementation of the University's Regental Financial Aid Policy for undergraduates. Funding policies regarding student parent budgets will be recommended by this committee.

UCOP requests campuses reach out to potential recipients (e.g., those who report having a dependent on the FAFSA) so that they can confirm/verify that they have minor children and would qualify for a budget add-on.

HOUSING

Effective for the 2023-24 academic year, campuses are required to recognize housing allowances for students residing in institutionally owned or operated housing with dependents to be based on the greater of the average or median amount assessed to such residents for housing charges.

UCOP is responsible for providing these amounts as informed by campus housing offices, where available. For 2023-24, campus financial aid offices were permitted to use alternate data

sources for this portion of the student expense budget. For 2024-25 and moving forward, financial aid offices are provided and should use add-ons from UCOP as informed by campus housing offices. Campuses are encouraged to use gift aid to meet the additional financial need resulting from changes to the housing allowance.

Starting for the 2026-27 year, off campus housing will also be provided by UCOP using the UC Cost of Attendance Survey, which isolates costs as reported by parenting students, and establishes a cost floor using the regional Fair Market Rent HUD figures. UCOP requests campuses reach out to potential recipients (e.g., those who report having a dependent on the FAFSA) so that they can confirm/verify that they have minor children and would qualify for a budget add-on.

PERSONAL AND FOOD COSTS

Subject to the campus verification process, the budgets for student parents should be adjusted for food and personal expenses using one of two methods: 1) USDA moderate food plan and share of personal costs from the UC Cost of Attendance Survey (COAS)related to the number of children they support in the household, or 2) COAS averages for parenting students when survey data is available for parenting students. Amounts for both methods are provided by UCOP.

For option one, see Appendix A for the methodology tied to number of children.

TRANSPORTATION

Starting in the 2026-27 academic year, UCOP will provide student parent-specific transportation expenses informed by the UC Cost of Attendance Survey.

DEPENDENT CHILD CARE

The challenges in estimating childcare costs arise from varied social supports and availability of openings with subsidized childcare providers. The former reduce or eliminate higher costs, and the latter can result in significantly higher costs if student parents must seek market rate childcare. Given the drastic differences from family to family, we recommend this cost component be addressed through the cost of attendance appeal process. Campuses may use actual cost increases for childcare as provided by the student parent or may use Department of Social Services reimbursement ceilings. Students should be provided with accessible instruction on how to pursue the cost of attendance appeal process.

COST OF ATTENDANCE APPEAL

Campuses should include information on the cost of attendance appeal process on relevant financial aid websites. This information should detail how the appeal is accessed, list documentation that may be requested and ways the student can satisfy the request (which may incur a documented interview with a financial aid administrator), processing times, and type of aid provided. This information on the process for appeal should be linked or easily referenced from other sites that provide information or resources to parenting students.

Appendix A: SMB/USDA Approach, 'Berkeley' Method

Table 1 provides the data sources and methodology to address higher costs for these students under this method. Campuses may choose to implement this approach, or the alternative of the COAS informed personal/food add-ons. Under this method and based on the number of children, campuses incorporate the associated add-ons for these two budget components.

TABLE 1. SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY FOR FOOD AND PERSONAL BUDGET ADD-ONS6

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Food</th><th>Personal</th></tr>
<tr><td>Data Source</td><td>USDA Cost of Food Report</td><td>SMB On-Campus Personal</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Method</td><td>● Calculate monthly average of moderate plan for ages 1-18 (March publication)

● 75% of cost for each additional child</td><td>● 75% of student's rate add-on for one child

● 50% of same value for each additional child</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">● Campus discretion: Assess personal/food composite at 50% and/or limit for high SAI students</td></tr>
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