

Parenting students' experience and challenges at UC

Recent national data suggest that more than a quarter of all undergraduate college students are raising children, and about 44 percent are doing so without the support of a partner.¹ The data also show that the share of Undergraduate parenting students enrolled in college has been steadily growing, but only a third of them complete a degree, with the completion rate even lower for single parents.

This topic brief provides a profile of Undergraduate parenting and graduate students at the University of California (UC). It examines their financial concerns, academic and social experiences and challenges, as well as their success at UC, by using responses from the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) and the Graduate Wellbeing Survey (GWS).

Profile of undergraduate and graduate parenting students

UCUES asks undergraduate students to report whether they are a parent living with children. Thus, if they are a parent, but do not live with their children, they would not self-identify their parenting status. As a result of this issue, it is important to note that the number of undergraduate parenting students presented here is likely underestimated. GWS asks graduate students to report whether or not they are a parent. The estimate should be more accurate than that of undergraduate parenting students.

QUICK FACTS

- Over one percent of undergraduate respondents in 2016 (707) and 2018 (713) reported as parenting students living with their children.
- About 12 percent of graduate respondents (634) in 2016 reported being parents.

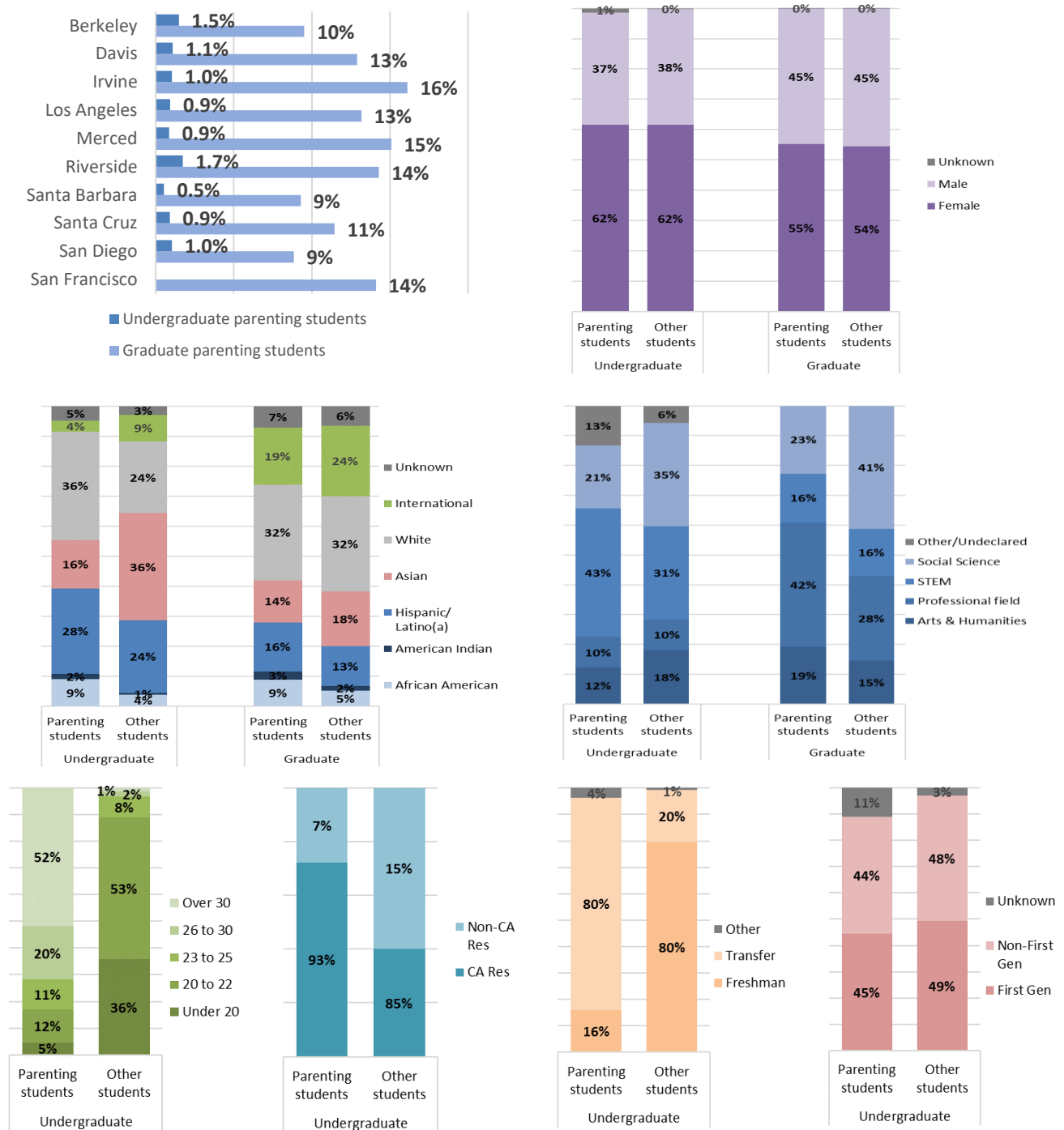
Response data to UCUES in 2016 and 2018 and to GWS in 2016 show (Figure 1):

- 1.3 percent of undergraduate students responded they are parents living with children. About 12 percent of graduate respondents to GWS self-reported as parents.
- Proportionally, UC Berkeley and UC Riverside have more undergraduate parenting students and UC Irvine has more graduate parenting students than other campuses.
- The gender distribution of parenting students is about the same as other students, 62 percent of females for undergraduates and 55 percent of females for graduate students. These proportions of female respondents are higher than for the overall population due to higher response rates of female students.
- Parents are more likely to be underrepresented students. Among undergraduate student parents, 39 percent are members of underrepresented groups (URG),² compared to 29 percent for other undergraduate students. Among graduate student parents, 28 percent are URG students, compared to 21 percent for other graduate students.

¹ <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2017/06/12/building-family-friendly-campuses-strategies-promote-college-success-among-student-parents/>

² Underrepresented groups include African American, American Indian and Hispanic/Latinx students.

Figure 1: A profile of undergraduate and graduate parenting students at UC



Note: Age, residency status, application level and first generation status are not applicable/available for graduate students.

Sources: UCUES (2016 & 2018); GWS (2016)

- By discipline, undergraduate student parents are more likely to be in STEM fields (43 percent), while graduate student parents are more likely to be in professional fields (42 percent).
- Over half (52 percent) of undergraduate student parents are more than 30 years old, while over half (53 percent) of other undergraduate students are between 20 and 22 years old.
- Undergraduate parenting students are more likely to be California residents than others (93 percent vs. 85 percent).
- Eighty percent of undergraduate parenting students are transfer students, compared to 20 percent for other undergraduate students.
- Undergraduate parenting students are slightly less likely to be first-generation students (45 percent) than other undergraduate students (49 percent).

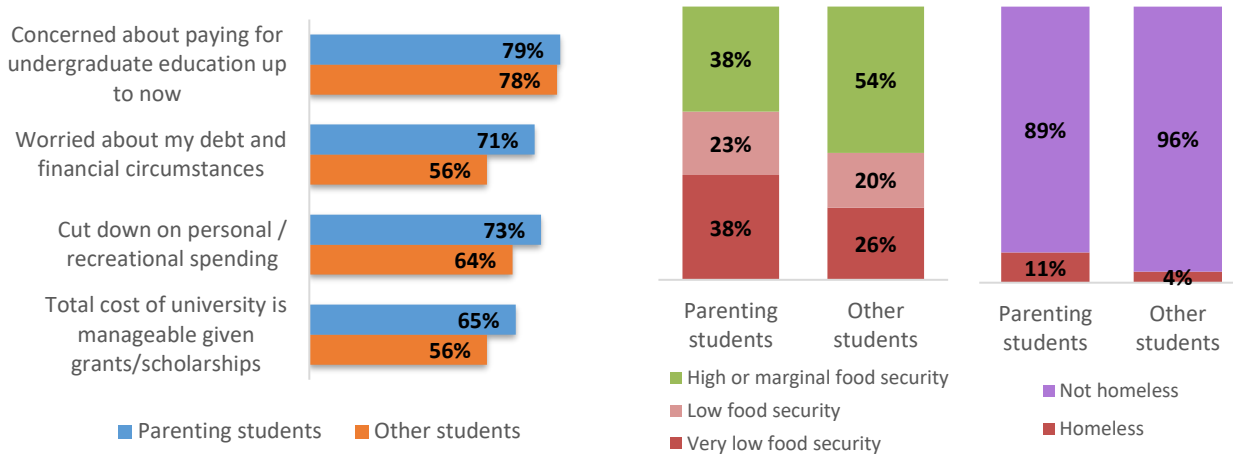
Undergraduate parenting students' experiences, challenges and success

Affordability and basic needs

Undergraduate parenting students are very concerned about the affordability of college and also have basic needs challenges (Figure 2).

- Similar to other undergraduate students (78 percent), a large majority of undergraduate parenting students (79 percent) reported being concerned about paying for their education. Undergraduate parenting students are more worried about their debt and financial circumstances (71 percent), and more likely to cut down on personal/recreational spending (73 percent) than other undergraduate students (56 percent and 64 percent, respectively). However, given the grants and scholarships received, proportionally more undergraduate parenting students (65 percent) agreed that the total cost of the university was manageable than other undergraduate students (56 percent).
- Undergraduate parenting students are more likely to have basic needs challenges than other undergraduate students. Eleven percent of undergraduate parenting students reported ever being homeless compared to four percent for non-parenting students. About two-thirds (61 percent) of undergraduate student parents reported having experienced food insecurity, 15 percentage points higher than for other undergraduate students (46 percent).

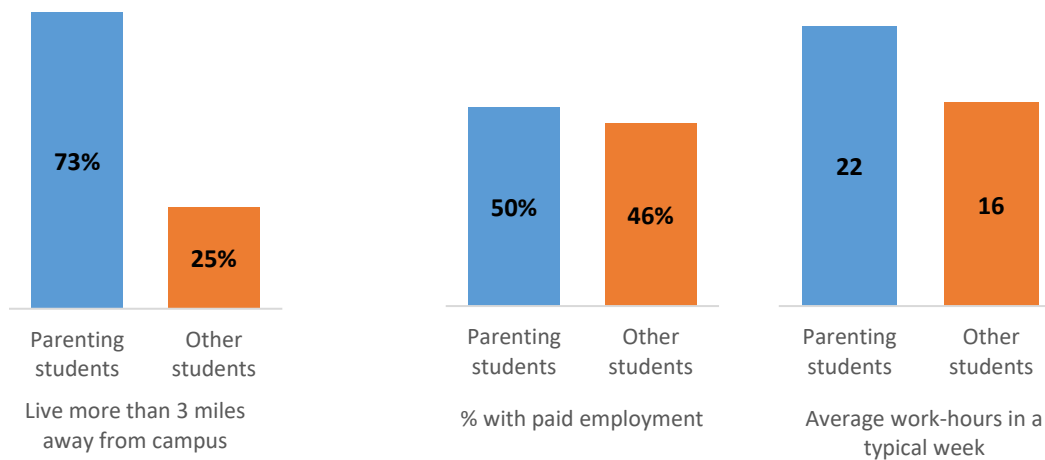
Figure 2: Undergraduate parenting students' financial concerns and basic needs, 2016 & 2018



Undergraduate parenting students generally live further away from campus and spend more time working (Figure 3).

- A large majority of undergraduate parenting students (73 percent) lived more than three miles from campus, while only a quarter of other undergraduate students did so.
- Half (50 percent) of the undergraduate student parent respondents reported having paid employment during the current academic year, compared to 46 percent for undergraduate non-parenting students. On average, those undergraduate parenting students with paid employment worked 22 hours in a typical week, six hours more than other undergraduate students with paid employment.

Figure 3: Undergraduate parenting students' living situation and employment, 2016 & 2018



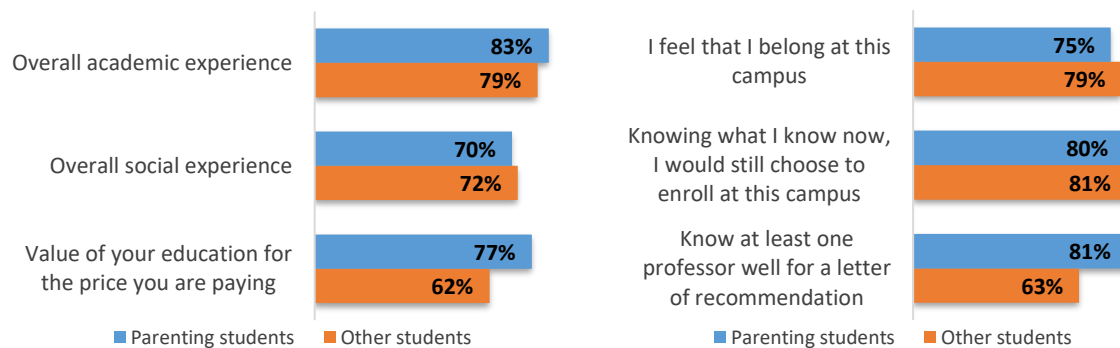
Note: Responses over 84 hours were excluded.

Experience and challenges

Overall, a large majority of undergraduate parenting students were satisfied with their experience at UC (Figure 4).

- Eighty-three percent were at least somewhat satisfied with their overall academic experience, compared to 79 percent for other undergraduate students, and 70 percent were satisfied with their overall social experience, slightly below the share of other undergraduate students (72 percent). A little over three-quarters (77 percent) of undergraduate parenting students were at least somewhat satisfied with the value of their education for the price they were paying, compared to 62 percent for other undergraduate students.
- Three-quarters (75 percent) of undergraduate parenting students said they felt they belonged at the campus they enrolled, compared to 79 percent for other undergraduate students.
- Eighty percent of undergraduate parenting students said they would still choose to enroll at the same UC campus, about the same as other undergraduate students (81 percent).
- Undergraduate parenting students are more likely to know professors well. Eighty-one percent of them said they can ask at least one professor for a letter of recommendation, 18 percentage points higher than for other undergraduate students (63 percent).

Figure 4: Satisfaction and belonging of undergraduate parenting students, 2016 & 2018



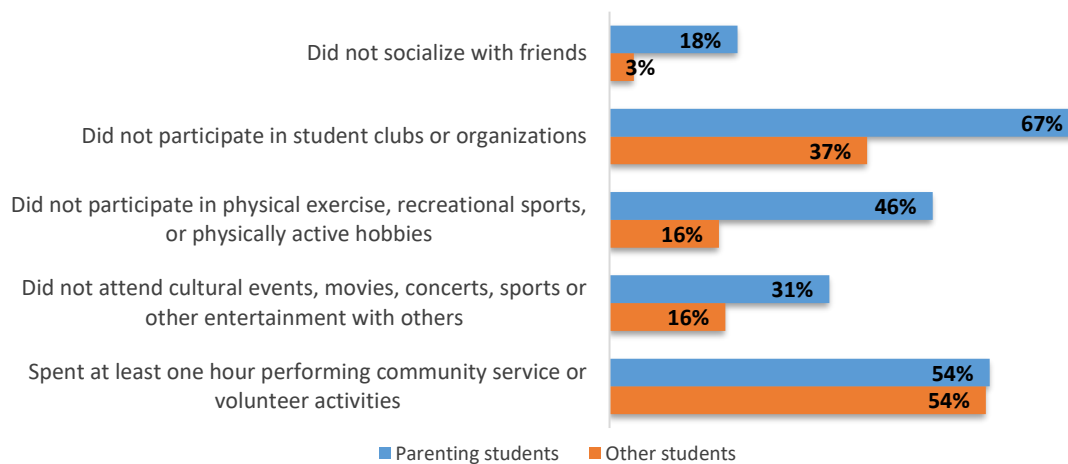
Undergraduate parenting students are generally less likely to spend time participating in extracurricular activities, but are as likely as other undergraduate students to perform community service and engage in volunteer activities (Figure 5).

- In a typical week, about one-fifth (18 percent) of undergraduate parenting students reported they did not spend any time socializing with friends, compared to only three percent for other undergraduate students. About two-thirds (67 percent) of undergraduate parenting students said that they did not participate in student organizations, compared to more than one-third (37 percent) for non-Undergraduate parenting students.
- Close to half (46 percent) of undergraduate parenting students reported that they did not spend any time participating in physical activities, while only 16 percent of non-parenting students did not do so. In addition, undergraduate parenting students (31 percent) are almost

twice as unlikely to spend any time participating in cultural events or other entertainment with people as other undergraduate students (16 percent).

- Similar shares of parenting and non-parenting undergraduate students (54 percent) reported they spent at least one hour performing community service or engaging in volunteer activities in a typical week.

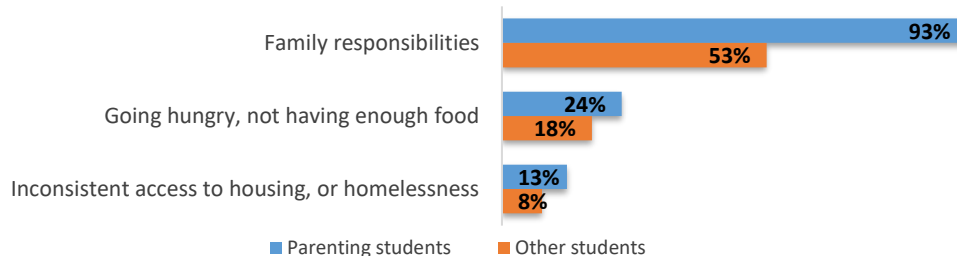
Figure 5: Extra-curricular experience of undergraduate parenting students in a typical week, 2016 & 2018



Undergraduate parenting students’ obstacles to academic success are more related to their family responsibilities (Figure 6).

- Ninety-three percent of undergraduate student parents reported to at least occasionally having family responsibilities as an obstacle to their school work or academic success, 40 percentage points higher than that of other undergraduate students (53 percent).
- Although a lot more undergraduate parenting students reported that they experienced food and housing insecurity than other students, only about one-quarter (24 percent) of them said that going hungry, not having enough food, was an obstacle to their academic success, and 13 percent said that homelessness was an obstacle, compared to 18 percent and 8 percent, respectively, for non-parenting students.

Figure 6: Obstacles to academic success of undergraduate parenting students experienced at least occasionally during the academic year, 2016 & 2018



Success and post-graduation plan

The number of freshmen parenting students is too small to calculate graduation rates, so Table 1 shows transfer students' outcomes only. Among all of the transfer parenting students responding to the UCUES 2016 survey, the first-year cumulative GPA for parenting transfer students is 3.23, slightly higher than that for transfer non-parenting students at 3.13. The two-year graduation rate for 2015 transfer entrants who were parenting students is 54 percent, six percentage points lower than that for other transfer students, but higher than the national average completion rate of 33 percent for all parenting students enrolled in college³. Data is not available to check their four-year graduation rate, but they may catch up by their fourth year at UC.

Table 1: Graduation rate and UC GPA of transfer undergraduate parenting students

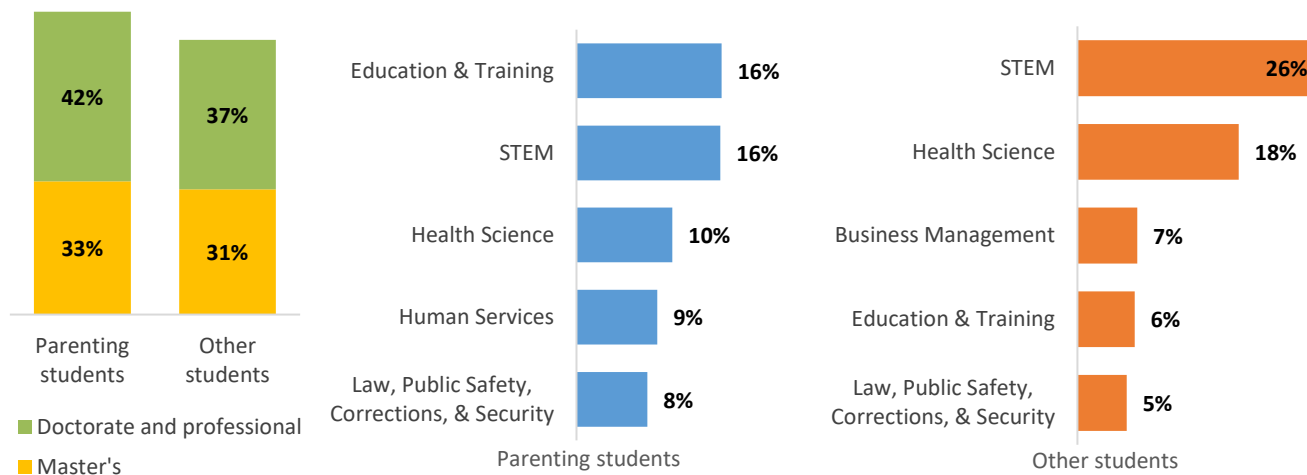
	1 st Year UC GPA (all transfer entrants who responded to 2016 survey)		2-Year Graduation Rate (2015 transfer entrants)	
	N	Mean GPA	N	Graduation Rate
Parenting students	535	3.23	207	54%
Other students	11,434	3.13	5,082	60%

Undergraduate parenting students are more likely to indicate that they plan to earn a graduate degree eventually and prefer working in education and STEM fields (Figure 7).

- Three-quarters (75 percent) of undergraduate parenting students would like to earn at least a master's degree eventually, compared to 68 percent for other undergraduate students.
- The top careers undergraduate parenting students plan to pursue include education and training, STEM, health science and human services. While over one-quarter (26 percent) of other undergraduate students are likely to choose STEM, only 16 percent of undergraduate parenting students are likely to choose STEM.

³ <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2017/06/12/building-family-friendly-campus-strategies-promote-college-success-among-student-parents/>

Figure 7: Highest degree and top careers to have eventually after graduation for undergraduate parenting students, 2016 & 2018



Graduate parenting students' experiences, challenges and success

Affordability and basic needs

About two-fifths (43 percent) of graduate parenting students are not confident about their financial situation, similar to other graduate students (Figure 8) and graduate parenting students have more debt than non-parenting students (Table 2).

- Graduate parenting students are as likely as other graduate students to have financial concerns. About half of them said they were confident about their financial situation (49 percent) and could get by financially without having to cut back on things important to them (54 percent). Over two-thirds of them reported being concerned about money lately (69 percent). Other graduate students responded similarly at 47 percent, 55 percent and 65 percent, respectively.
- A small proportion of graduate student parents received financial support from parents or relatives (16 percent), compared to 27 percent for other graduate students. A similar percentage of graduate student parents receive government assistance (13 percent), much higher than for other graduate students (1 percent).
- A quarter of graduate parenting students lived in university-provided housing and only a few of them experienced homelessness (3 percent), compared to 20 percent and 5 percent, respectively, for other graduate students.

- Seventy-five percent of graduate parenting students reported being employed in a paid position and their average work hours were 27 a week, similar to non-parenting students at 26 hours a week.
- On average, the reported total debt of graduate student parents was \$43,894, compared to \$28,748 for non-parenting students. However, graduate student parents have a much higher monthly income after tax (\$6,319) than non-parenting students (\$2,511). The average monthly rent or mortgage of graduate parenting students is about \$700 more than that of non-parenting students (\$1,672 vs. \$987).

Figure 8: Financial situations of graduate parenting students, 2016

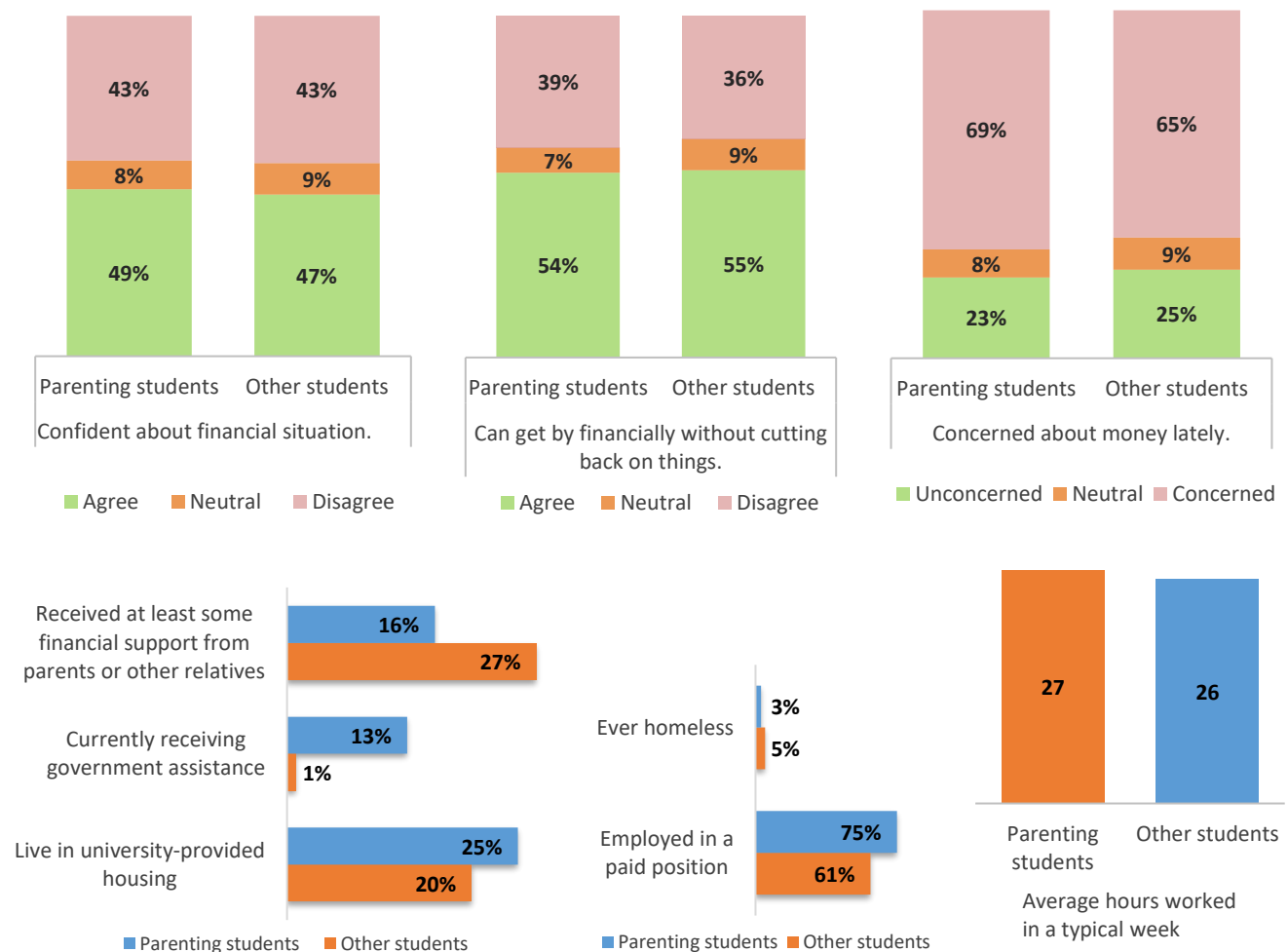


Table 2. Debt, income and rent/mortgage of graduate parenting students, 2016

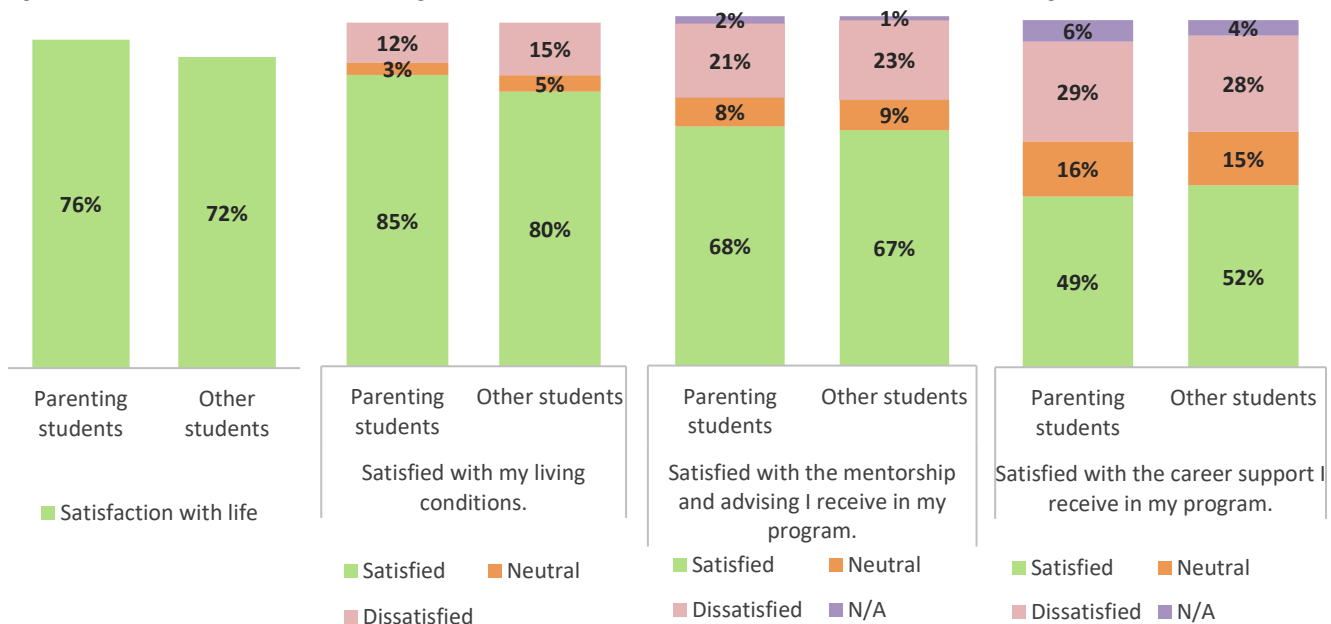
	Parenting students			Other students		
	N	Mean	Median	N	Mean	Median
Current debt in loans from current graduate degree program	596	\$23,824	\$1,500	4,331	\$15,383	\$0
Current debt in loans from previous degree programs	594	\$15,588	\$0	4,329	\$11,883	\$0
Current credit card debt	594	\$4,482	\$500	4,340	\$1,482	\$0
Average monthly personal income this term after taxes	589	\$6,319	\$2,100	4,320	\$2,511	\$1,800
Monthly rent or mortgage payment	591	\$1,672	\$1,500	4,370	\$987	\$900

Experience and challenges

A large majority of graduate parenting students are satisfied with their life, living condition, and the mentorship and advising they received in their program (Figure 9).

- Graduate student parents are more likely to feel satisfied with life (76 percent) and living condition (85 percent), compared to other graduate students (at 72 percent and 80 percent, respectively).
- Graduate parenting students (68 percent) were as satisfied with the mentorship and advising they received from their program as other graduate students (67 percent), but they were (49 percent) about as satisfied with the career support they received from their program as other graduate students (52 percent).

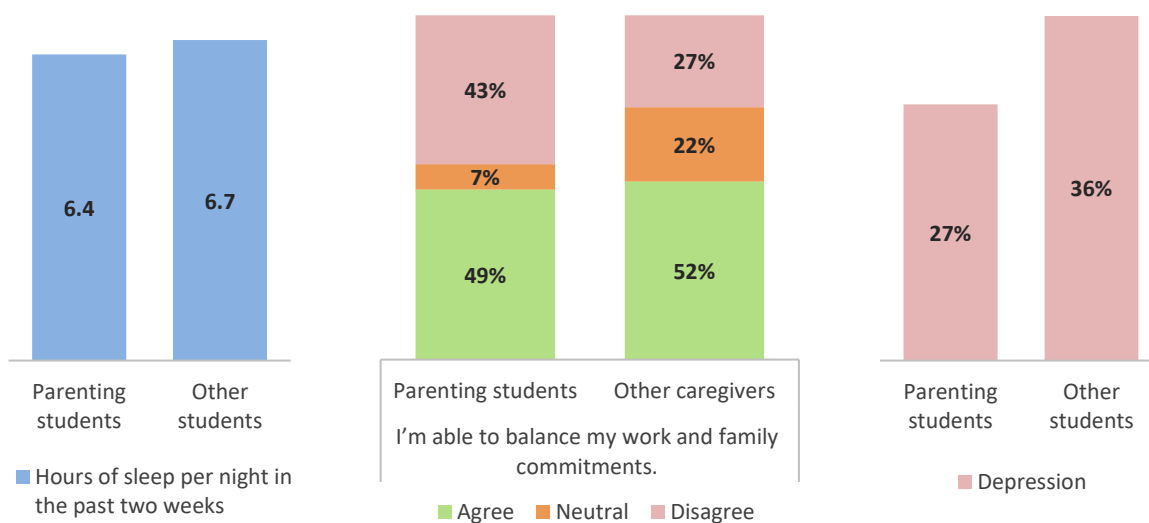
Figure 9: Satisfaction with living and academic program of graduate parenting students, 2016



Graduate parenting students slept 6.4 hours per night, two-fifths (43 percent) of them were not able to balance their work and family commitments, and 27 percent of them reported being depressed (Figure 10).

- Graduate parenting students slept 6.4 hours per night in the past two weeks, compared to 6.7 hours for non-parenting students.
- Less than half (49 percent) of the graduate parenting students agreed that they were able to balance work and family, a little over half (52 percent) of other caregivers had similar challenges.
- Graduate parenting students (27 percent) are less likely to report being depressed than non-parenting students (36 percent).

Figure 10: Sleep hours, balance between work and family, and depression of graduate parenting students, 2016



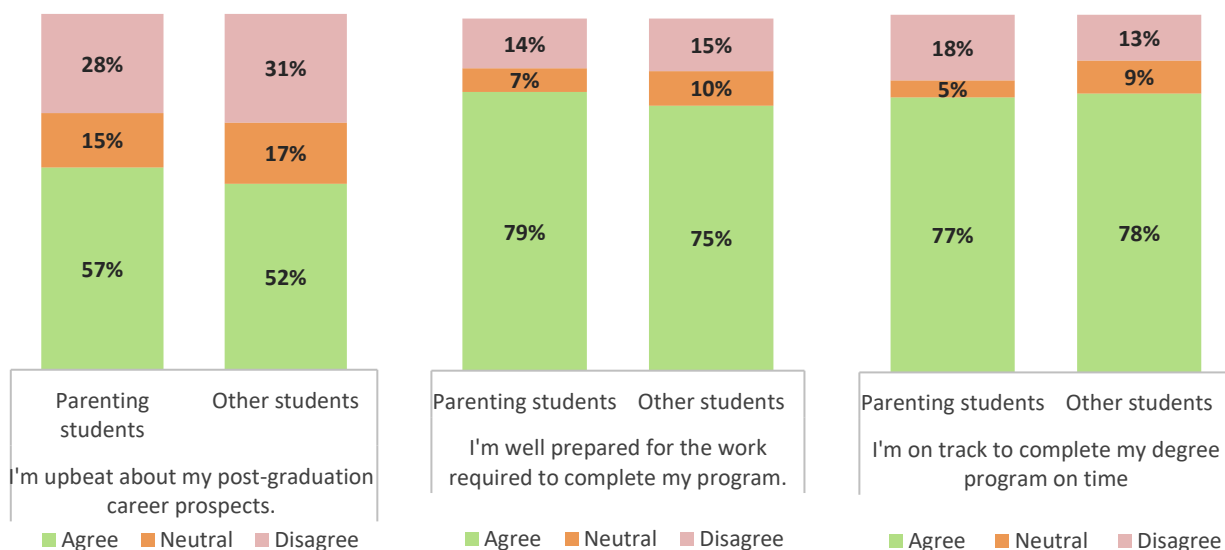
Success

The majority of graduate parenting students are well-prepared to complete their program and upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects (Figure 11).

- About three-fifths (57 percent) of graduate student parents felt upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects, compared to about a half (52 percent) for other graduate students.
- Close to eighty percent (79 percent) of graduate parenting students said they were well-prepared to complete their program, compared to 75 percent for other graduate students.

- Similar to graduate non-parenting students (78 percent), 77 percent of parenting students said they felt on track to complete the degree program on time.

Figure 11: Career prospects and academic readiness of graduate parenting students, 2016



Conclusion

UCUES and GWS survey data provide insight to the educational experiences of undergraduate and graduate student parents. Undergraduate student parents are more likely to be transfers, over 25 years old, and enrolled in STEM fields. They are as satisfied as other undergraduates with their academic and social experience, but less likely to participate in student clubs, extracurricular activities and community events. They often live further away from the campus than other undergraduates and report spending more time working and having family responsibilities that can be an obstacle for school work. Undergraduate student parents are as concerned as other undergraduates about paying for their education up to now, but more concerned about debt and financial circumstances and have a higher proportion reporting food insecurity and homelessness. Knowing what they know now, they are as likely as other undergraduates to say they would still choose to enroll.

Graduate parenting students are more likely to be in professional schools than other graduate students. Their confidence about financial situation and concerns about money are similar to other graduate students. They are less likely to get financial support from parents or other relatives and more likely to receive government assistance. Graduate student parents report slightly higher satisfaction with life and living conditions, comparable satisfaction with mentorship and advising, and slightly lower satisfaction with career support. Graduate student parents are slightly more likely to feel prepared to complete their program and upbeat about post-graduation career prospects.