

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

Student Parent Navigating Child Care & Academic Demands

Purpose: This vignette highlights the challenges for individuals who are trying to meet the demands of parenting while being a college student.

Student Vignette: Mia is a 19-year-old first-year student who has finally achieved her dream of attending college. Although she was accepted to the university as a high school senior, she decided to delay her enrollment a semester since she was raising an infant. She began college in the spring semester. Initially, Mia was thriving in her classes and earned all A's and B's on her assignments and tests, sacrificing sleep by working late at night or early in the morning while her son slept. Mia told very few people on campus that she was a parent of a toddler since she wanted to be seen as a "normal college student." Everything was going as well as could be expected until Mia's son caught a virus just after mid-terms. He could not attend daycare for a week, so Mia needed to stay home with him and missed all her classes. She thought things would be fine since she earned all the attendance points in her classes up to that point, but then she caught the same virus and missed another week of classes. Once she recovered, Mia realized that during the two weeks she did not attend classes, she had also missed in-person quizzes and presentations. She had not talked to her professors about her son's illness or her own; Mia worried about the implications her absences would have on her grades and ability to prepare for final papers/exams. When you see Mia on campus, you notice she seems a bit stressed and ask her how she is doing. As her eyes start to well up, she looks at you and says, "I missed the two weeks of classes because my son got sick, and then I got sick. And now, I'm going to fail my classes and get kicked out of college after working so hard to get here."

Guiding Questions:

1. Have you encountered situations similar to this? If so, briefly reflect on those experiences. How did you support the student? What approaches were beneficial? What approaches were less successful?
2. Describe the challenges Mia is navigating. What are the key issues that need to be addressed to support Mia before the semester ends? What resources exist on campus that may be helpful for Mia? What strengths of Mia's can be leveraged in this situation?
3. Given your role (e.g., academic advisor, program director, faculty, etc.), what might you do to support Mia? What are some limitations in your current knowledge and skills in meeting Mia's needs? What resources or opportunities can you connect Mia with on and off-campus?
4. Reflect on the concept of ecological validation. How could the norms framing student interactions (holistic, proactive, strengths-oriented, and developmental) and the work of educators (collaborative and reflective) be leveraged to support Mia?
5. What policies and practices could be shifted to support students in a similar situation? What would need to happen to initiate change? Who would be involved in this process?