Child care center a resource for students with children

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Alicia Brossette is an informatics major who is currently enrolled at University of Louisiana at Lafayette, as well as one of many students who juggle post-secondary education with raising a child.

"It is definitely not easy," she said. "I feel like sometimes I can’t spend as much time with my daughter as I’d like. But then again, it is difficult to make a consistent schedule work. A lot of time goes by driving her to and from (my family). She isn’t sick very often, but when she is, it’s very rough having to take a day off both work and school."

She said having a career and following her dream while raising a child is an amazing feeling, but she does face the perils of single-handedly donning these different roles. However, a lot of students with dependent children do not have a family that is as supportive as Brossette’s, or probably don’t live in the same vicinity as them.

According to Susan Arceneaux, director of the child development center, and Patti Endsley, nutrition and health provider for the center, more than 100 children are registered at the center, which prides itself on being a one of a kind facility with lower staff-to-child ratios, higher staff qualifications and in-service training requirements. The program has been aimed at providing quality care to children from 12 months to 7 years old.

A recent grant offered to the center, which has been in service since the early ‘70s, allowed the program to expand into a new building constructed on East Lewis Street.

Arceneaux said she believes one of the biggest advantages of their program is they cater to the needs of their students and faculty on a semester-to-semester basis. The program’s staff works around the schedules of their student parents’ classes. The center has an open-door policy that allows parents to come in and check on their young ones at their convenience to ensure transparency.

Endsley said most development center staff members have earned the Child Development Associate certificate, which recently became a mandatory requirement for child care staff in Louisiana.

“Almost 60 percent of our staff holds a bachelor’s degree,” she said. “The remainder has an associate’s degree and/or are enrolled in college.”

Arceneaux said to offset child care costs, the center also accepts Child Care Assistance, a program run through the state that offers aid based on financial need. Introduced this year, the program currently aids over two dozen UL Lafayette students.

Endsley said in order to be eligible, students must be enrolled full-time at the university and must be below a certain required level of income that is then determined by the state’s Department of Education. Additionally, the fee structure is different for student-parents and faculty parents, thus making it affordable for the former.

“Right now, we have about 26 students that have been able to receive it and it has been increasing ever since. We literally have new students getting added on to it every week and it pays off up to 80 percent of their child care costs.”

The center offers parents resources through workshops, counseling and events that involve parents extensively. Every semester, it organizes two big family friendly events, such as Mardi Gras parades in spring and Homecoming in fall. The programs also try to include parents in classroom, learning as guest readers, volunteers or by sharing their talents.

Asked whether the center will soon open up to UL Lafayette graduates, Arcenaux said she does not envision the center accommodating alumni due to the large amount of children on the center’s waiting list.

Arceneaux also advised prospective daycare parents to consult with the center and to ask questions.

“We are here to help you transition into balancing being a parent and a student, so always ask us if there’s anything you have in mind,” she said.

Endsley agreed.

“Breathe and don’t give up; in the end, it’s worth it,” Endsley said.