

# A Proposal for Work-Play Space for Students with Families

Morningside Heights Campus, Columbia University

## Problem:

Students with families spend time outside of classroom juggling familial, academic, and professional responsibilities, leaving limited time and energy to engage in campus life in a meaningful way. Students with families are often unable to take advantage of the full Columbia student experience, which is to the detriment of the student and the Columbia community writ large. Undergraduate and graduate students with dependents account for a significant portion of the student population at Columbia University.

## Objective:

To create a warm, welcoming space for parent-students and their children that will draw students and their families to campus as an effort to integrate this hard-to-reach population and their families into campus life. The space will act as a centralized node for students with families, providing space designed intentionally for play, study, resource sharing, network building, and an increased connectivity to campus culture. The Work-Play Space for Students with Families will serve as a draw to campus for this hard-to-reach population and provide a portal to connect with valuable yet hard to locate university resources and other members of the community.

## Vision:

- A. Students with families will have space to study and work when their children are with them.
- B. Children, alongside their parents, will be able to play with age-appropriate materials and activities.
- C. Parents will have access to the *Family Resource Library* ("Family Resources at Columbia"), which will provide access to information regarding established on-campus services for families and upcoming child-friendly programming. The objective of the Library is to act as a central node for publicizing the various ways that the University offers support for families.
- D. Commuting students will benefit from individual-use storage lockers, available by application.
- E. The *Play Program* will recruit students who do not have families of their own to apply to be volunteer play facilitators. Applicants with experience as teachers, tutors, summer camp counselors, and babysitters will be selected to engage children in play while parents work alongside. Facilitators, children, and parents are together in the Work-Play Space at all times. The *Play Program* is mutually beneficial for student-play facilitators, children, and their parents: play facilitators get a break from the stresses of academic life, connect with children and parents, potential employers, and gain volunteer experience to add to a resume; children have the opportunity to engage professional, adult, play companion; and student-parents are able to work while their child is engaged by another adult.
- F. The room will also house a secluded changing table to be used by parents and children only.

## Endorsed by:

- General Studies Student Council & Dean Rosen-Metsch
- Columbia College Student Council

This proposal was prepared by members of the Columbia University Family Support Network (CUFSN), a student-led organization, alongside allies for students with families within the General Studies Student Council and University Senate. CUFSN hosts programs on a weekly basis, disseminates a weekly newsletter including on- and off-campus services, and advocates for University-wide policies on behalf of students with families.