

# THE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT

## Child Care: A Social Change That Has To Be Reckoned With

Part of a continuing series of articles

by Lishan W. Harrison

Non-traditional students have voiced concerns about not having enough financial aid funds to assist them in their child care needs in order for them to attend Fayetteville State University on a full-time basis. Let's focus in on one particular group of non-traditional students. Ursula Merriweather is a non-traditional full-time student who is married to a military service member and has one child who is in Kindergarten. "One never realizes how much day-care costs add up when you have to go to Biology lab or get help on a particular subject after regular class meetings," said Ms. Merriweather. Sharon Doutt, also a full-time non-traditional student who is a ex-service member, is faced with raising her eighteen-month-old little girl while her husband has been sent to Korea for one year to fulfill his military assignment. "I found the cost overwhelming and the conditions unsuitable for my child. After searching high and low, I finally found one [day-care] I could afford but the waiting list was a year long," Ms. Doutt exasperatingly said. Both of these students are a cross between being married and a single parent. The list could get longer and longer of various military family situations. This proves to be a normal situation for many military families, and the presence of the military provides a bedrock for Fayetteville's economy.

Ms. Merriweather and Ms. Doutt, like many others, are placed in the "middle of the road" position. Their spouses make just enough income to keep them above the poverty level but not enough income so that financial aid or loans are not necessary. And when financial aid or loans are put into play, it is not enough to provide adequate child-care for their children. Many single income families who are lower middle income (according to economic stratification) are falling through the cracks when it comes to child-care programs offered by the Department of Social Services. Maybe it would be easier if we, non-traditional students with child-care needs, would divorce our spouses and get on the local welfare system. That way our child-care needs would be provided for one hundred percent. And even those who are receiving Aid to Families with De-

pendent Children are on a state waiting list to receive day-care funding and could be on the list for months or years.

Some have even dared to take on the challenge of working full-time, attending school full-time, and raising a family. After one or two semesters of this grueling experience, they have to rethink their priorities. These non-traditional students have realized when you continuously spread yourself thin, you become like a piece of elastic. If you put too



much tension on both ends, the elastic is bound to snap in the middle.

I am sure there are many non-traditional students that have been faced with putting themselves and their families in compromising positions to search for child-care they can afford. And what do they find? If you open one door to a particular day-care, you might find that the air reeks of excrement that has not been dealt with in a few days. Or you may find that the child-care workers are changing the infants on newspaper like a puppy's which leads to unsanitary conditions. Or,

they may be feeding the children substandard food menus for breakfast, lunch, and snacks. Therefore, the student-parent is forced to pay more money for a better day-care which they cannot afford.

"Our job here is not to take care of your personal family obligations." "You need money, get a job." "Education is a luxury." These are words a non-traditional student might hear when pleading for help. I am sure I am speaking on behalf of many non-traditional students when I say: we are not looking for handouts, but

"damned if you do, damned if you don't" position.

We need to stop and take a moment to look at what has caused this onslaught of day-care problems. According to the anthropologist Conrad Phillip Kottak, "we . . . have to look at gender issues and industrialism." At one time in the history of human evolution it was believed that the woman's place was in the home due partly to biological reasons. Women were less mobile outside the home because of suckling infants. Then, wartime shortages of men caused the women to have to leave the home. This brought on the invention of bottles and disposable diapers to accommodate the change in mobility. And what always happens during wartime situations? Inflation. Employers discovered that they could increase profits by paying women lower wages than they would have to pay returning veterans. Therefore, families had to eat and survive and were forced to send the mother outside the home to work and get educated. So out went the Beaver Cleaver Family (Leave It to Beaver) and in came the Huxtables (The Cosby Show).

Now that is this new sociological system has created a new problem, what do we do with our children? And what does the rest of the world have to do with it? The system is putting our future in jeopardy. What is our future? Our future in our children. These children will unlock doors we, the students of today, have just found the combination to. In other words, when we are on the brink of a technological breakthrough, we must face a fate that all humans must deal with, death. Consequently, these children will break the technological barriers that we laid the foundation for.

What are we up against when looking for solutions to the problem? Let's start with the Financial Aid Office here at Fayetteville State University. I am sure traditional and non-traditional students alike have found dealing with the Financial Aid Office to be a most encumbering experience. Every time you visit the office it begins to sound like the recording that you might hear from the telephone company when a number is no longer in service. "I'm sorry, your award letter has not gone through the computer. Check back with us next week." In the meantime, your day-care pro-

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