

WOMEN

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women's support group is open to all AAA women. This group organizes potlucks, workshops and lectures.

A women's weekend adventure group is for women who enjoy getting away from the academic world, roommates or kids for a weekend in the woods. Hikes are organized once a month.

A lesbian support group, open to all lesbian women, covers topics ranging from changing relationships and families to self-acceptance.

Peer counseling on an individual basis is also available either by appointment or in cases of emergencies.

The Educational Opportunities Program also offers students a variety of support services often helpful to women returning to the University. Administered through the Academic Learning Services in the Knight Library, EOP is a federally-funded intensive support service for qualifying students.

Students who meet the federal eligibility requirements can participate in EOP programs. If a need for EOP services is presented, low income students, students whose parents did not graduate from a four-year college, and mentally or physically disabled students can receive EOP support.

The following services are available:

- **Personal counseling** dealing with all kinds of personal issues is available. Incest, abuse, eating disorders and self-esteem are some of the concerns that can be addressed by this service.

- **Advocacy** in cases of conflict or trouble is offered. In the past, EOP has dealt with financial aid, housing and public assistance among other areas through this program.

- **Tutoring** in math, science and foreign languages is available.

- **Writing, math and critical thinking** courses for credit are offered.

- **Non-credit workshops** on test taking and preparing for tests are organized.

STRUGGLE

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kids and sometimes jobs."

These women who have it tough are becoming more and more common at the University, and the obstacles they face in getting an education are looming larger.

Families, finances and fighting off discouragement are the main problems of the so-called non-traditional student, the term usually applied to these women.

This pool of returning students has been increasing steadily since the women's movement of the late 1960s and early '70s, according to Women's Center coordinator Hasani Kudura.

"I, myself, was a mature returning student in 1968," she said. "I saw a lot of returning women students then and probably more now."

"Women are coming back to school at a steady rate, and I think it will continue," said Ruth Songer-Jensen, co-director of Women In Transition.

WIT is a support network through the Women's Center that provides services for returning and newly entering female students, including older women and single parents.

Family matters

Although these older women are attending the same classes as their younger counterparts, they have to deal with pressures that many typical younger students would not understand.

"There's a whole mess of stuff that can happen just within the family," Songer-Jensen said.

She noted that while younger students often have families who expect them to go on to

cause of school activities," Sumner said.

"Basically, I put my kids first, but I have to decide whether or not what they're asking for is a valid request," she said.

In addition, daily family obligations can interfere with a woman's study time, Songer-Jensen said.

"Frequently, women who still have younger children at home — say, a 30-year-old who has little kids — have to wait

'When you're a returning student, there's almost this added pressure of wanting to improve your situation, to get off welfare or have more job security.'

— Hasani Kudura

college, women over 30 may have to struggle with restructuring their entire family life so they can go back to school.

"If you're married and have kids, and you go back to school, where you used to have a day to spend in the kitchen to fix really nutritious meals, maybe now you'll be getting more packaged foods," she said. "And the family may not be used to that."

Sumner said when she returned to school three years ago as a single parent pursuing a journalism degree, she had five children at home and "it was an adjustment for the entire family."

"I went from being at home most of the time to being gone," she said. "They were used to me being home when they got home from school, so they didn't like the new arrangement."

"I also wasn't doing all the things for them — like making all the meals — that they wanted me to do, so we struggled with that," Sumner said. "And we're really still struggling with that."

Although many people believe older children handle a mother's absence easier, Kudura said even teen-agers can resent their mom going back to school.

"I thought it would be pretty easy for me because I only had a teen-ager, but it seemed like a crisis would occur just at finals time or when I had a paper due," Kudura said.

"Finally, I said 'I feel like you're trying to pick a fight with me,' and she said 'I think I am.'"

"After we realized what was going on and talked it out, it was easier," she said.

Communication

If a woman is married or has a partner, it's important to keep the lines of communication open with that person as well, Songer-Jensen said.

"It's really helpful that a woman, if she's married, shares her education with her husband, talks about it with him and includes him in that way," Songer-Jensen said.

"No matter how supportive your partner may be of your going back to school, it still takes some getting used to," she said.

Sometimes family activities conflict with school obligations and the woman has to choose between the two, Sumner said.

"There have been times when I've had to miss my kids' school activities because of classes, or miss my classes be-

until the children are in bed at night and asleep before they can really have study time," she said.

"That means they're going to be up even later and the next day they'll be tired," Songer-Jensen said.

"After awhile, that's going to show, and it makes everything more stressful," she said.

"It's a juggling act," Sumner said. "You juggle your schedule with the children's schedule with the demands of the teachers with your activities on campus, and try to save a little time for yourself."

Time out

And it's important for these women to reserve time for themselves so they don't burn out, Songer-Jensen said.

"If a woman can set aside an hour or so a week just to do nothing, that's important," she said.

Sumner said she tries to get away for a weekend by herself to refocus. "If I don't do that, by the time finals come around, I'm really stressed," she said.

Moreover, for many returning women students, money worries are another pressure, said to John Powell, coordinator of the Educational Opportunities Program.

EOP provides tutoring, support and advocacy services to 340 students, 133 of whom are returning women students who are over 30.

"Financial aid is definitely inadequate to handle the needs of older women, especially those with kids," Powell said.

And Sumner noted that scholarships often require a 3.00 GPA.

"I feel pretty lucky going to school full time, occasionally working and raising a family ... and pulling a 2.8," she said. "I think that's good, but I'm not eligible for anything because no one takes into consideration what else you're doing."

In addition to coping with family, time and money stresses, older women returning students often feel like they don't belong at a university dominated by young people.

"For one thing, overall the activities on campus are designed and oriented for the young population," Songer-Jensen said.

"Certainly I'm not saying those things should be eliminated, but what we need is some things for the older students," she said.

Discouragement

Sometimes professors and

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