



UNIVERSITY OF  
**NORTHERN COLORADO**

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## Lactation Support Program

### **Creating and Evaluating an Inclusive Lactation Support Program on a University Campus**

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#### **Background**

There are several benefits for employers and employees when lactation support is offered at the workplace, and initiation and duration of breastfeeding/offering human milk is often increased (Kim et al., 2019). Offering a supportive workplace lactation environment contributes to a more productive workforce, increased retention rates, raised morale and loyalty in the workplace (Bai et al., 2015; Bostick et al., 2016; Dinour & Beharie, 2015; Dinour et al., 2015; Sturtevant et al., 2021; West et al., 2017). Even though the benefits for the employer have been documented, more research is needed on how universities support their breastfeeding/chestfeeding/lactating employees and students, and how support influences lactation initiation and duration rates. Available data confirms the need for lactation support on university campuses, and lactation support should be available to both university employees and students to promote equity between these two populations (Bai et al., 2015; Bostick et al., 2016; Dinour & Beharie, 2015; Dinour et al., 2015; Sturtevant et al., 2021). Unfortunately, many employees and students face inadequate lactation support when returning to work or school such as lack of schedule flexibility, lack of private spaces, policies prohibiting children on-campus, lack of campus child care, and/or nearby/affordable child care (Bai et al., 2015; Bostick et al., 2016; Dinour & Beharie, 2015; Dinour et al., 2015; Sriraman & Kellams, 2016; Sturtevant et al., 2021; Sulaiman et al., 2016; West et al., 2017).

While breastfeeding is often associated with the biological mother of the child, it is important to recognize all potential lactating individuals' identities. Most existing laws, policies, and resources that support lactation access and rights support or reference a mother's or woman's experience with breastfeeding. Creating laws, policies and support that are inclusive of all lactation experiences and narratives is a critical component of successful outcomes for the breastfeeding/chestfeeding/lactating pair.

The aim of this article is to describe the grassroots development and evaluation of a Lactation Support Program (LSP) on a university campus and provide information to assist other university campuses who desire to create, enhance and/or provide inclusive lactation support for students and employees.

### **Development of an Inclusive University LSP**

The LSP at the University of Northern Colorado started in the fall of 2011. After a future LSP co-director, a faculty member in the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics and a certified lactation counselor, walked into a restroom on-campus and noticed a visibly uncomfortable individual hunched over a bathroom sink expressing milk, change needed to occur. As a result, Dietetics students enrolled in a professional development course completed an environmental scan of campus to identify existing spaces that could be used as a safe and private place for individuals to express their milk. Students identified and met with staff at the Center for Gender and Women's Equity (CGWE) who allowed colleagues and students to use their offices to express milk. The CGWE is a campus resource center that honors gender as a central identity and engages critical women's and gender issues, while challenging systems of inequity and advocating for change. Since initially meeting, the relationship with the CGWE has grown into a partnership and the two co-directors collaborate and direct the LSP. This relationship is unique in that it includes a faculty member in an academic department and a staff member at a resource center who have similar passions for lactation support.

### **Lactation Stations Descriptions**

The University of Northern Colorado has nine Lactation Stations (LS) on-campus and two LS at satellite campuses. Eight of the LS are private (e.g., locked private room) and three of the stations are semi-private (e.g., privacy screen within a multi-use space that has a door that locks). Ten of the eleven LS are all-gender inclusive, which ensures the station does not present a barrier for people regarding gender. Most stations are compliant with the Americans Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, and if the station is not ADA accessible, an alternative space is provided. LS are available when the facilities are open. All LS have a comfortable chair, side table, fan, access to an electrical outlet, artwork, and other items to provide comfort to the user (e.g., changing table access, free diapers, and toys/books for other small children). Items were donated by local lactation organizations, university student associations, the facility that houses the LS, purchased by the directors, or through internal/external funds. A lactation pod (e.g., Mamava) was recently purchased by a student organization on-campus for the library. Student

volunteers check on each LS once a week and ensure that the stations are in good condition/clean. If there is a concern, it is reported to the directors. Several departments/offices such as Human Resources, have offered offices/workrooms to students, staff, and faculty if the LS are not convenient or easily accessible. A Screen Rental Program was established to offer privacy for expressing milk through a free rental of a mobile privacy screen. The privacy screen can be rented for as long as requested.

### **Marketing of the Inclusive LSP**

A marketing plan was developed that included a multi-faceted approach and continues to be updated and reviewed since lack of awareness of the LSP is a barrier to access. First in the marketing approach was website development. The website contains information regarding: (a) lactation resources and support for returning to work, navigating university insurance policies for consulting services and pumps, printable privacy signs, and general lactation support services; (b) privacy screen rental program; (c) university and state lactation support policies; (d) a LS questionnaire to receive user feedback; (e) and all LS location information. University of Northern Colorado's Publications Department developed an interactive map that is accessible on the university's website.

Second in the marketing approach was working with Human Resources and the Dean of Students to co-develop a strategy for disseminating lactation support information to both employees and students at the university. Human Resources provides informational brochures that includes the LSP and Lactation Support Policy to all individuals who are going on family medical leave. The Dean of Students and the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance supports students and assures that the university is Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972 compliant.

Lastly, marketing through printed materials and multiple social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) were developed to share information regarding the LS and the LSP. Printed flyers/postcards were distributed throughout campus, with a primary focus in spaces where individuals might choose to express milk if they do not have a private space (e.g., restroom stalls or other secluded areas). LSP stories have been published in the university paper and aired on the university news station. Local media outlets have reported on the LS and LSP, adding to the visibility and marketing of the program. Annually, the website and all printed marketing materials are reviewed, updated, and redistributed throughout campus to ensure access to the most current and up-to-date information available. The program has been presented awards for supporting a lactation friendly campus.

## **Other LSP Offerings**

Lactation Support Groups, both in person and virtually, have been and continue to be offered at the CWGE and led by a certified lactation consultant. In addition, if an employee or student emails about a lactation concern, contact information for local lactation support groups, lactation consultants and local agencies (e.g., WIC) are provided. In addition, the directors are often asked to be part of local and state-wide community lactation support events where the promotion of the LSP occurs.

## **Inclusive Lactation Support Policy**

The most critical piece to any LSP is a Lactation Support Policy; the policy was completed in 2015. The policy was drafted by the LSP directors and reviewed by Human Resources staff, the Dean of Students, Title IX Office and legal counsel, faculty, students, and outside experts. In 2021, the Lactation Support Policy was approved to become part of University Regulations.

## **Toolkit for Establishing Inclusive LSP on a University Campus**

In 2016, the program directors decided to share their journey to establish a LSP with other university campuses by developing a toolkit. The toolkit includes information on benefits and barriers to lactation, current laws and policies, Lactation Support Policy examples and frequently asked questions, privacy screen rental information, and additional resources. The free toolkit is available by submitting a request at <https://www.unco.edu/center-womens-and-gender-equity/what-we-offer/lactation-support/toolkit-request.aspx>. Overall, users felt the toolkit was comprehensive and inclusive while areas to improve upon included best practice information, more inclusive language, statistics, and funding ideas. A second edition of the toolkit, “Establishing Lactation Support Programs on University and College Campuses”, was developed based on the feedback received and was recently released. Over 200 toolkit requests have been made by individuals working at universities or other institutions, nationally and internationally.

## **Evaluation of an Inclusive University LSP**

To ensure that the LSP at the University of Northern Colorado is meeting the needs of individuals, two evaluation systems were created and implemented to assess: a) the number of individuals who use the LS, and b) user needs and demographic data. Approval from the University of Northern Colorado’s Institutional Review Board was received (exempt) for each of the evaluations.

### ***First Evaluation System – Tracking Users of LS***

The first evaluation system was established to track the number of individuals who have used the LS. A sign-in sheet is available to identify their name or initials, email address, the date and number of times they used the space and university affiliation (e.g., faculty, staff, student, visitor). Since tracking started in 2012, 1,947 visits to the LS have been recorded with 238 individuals using the spaces over the past 7 years (refer to Table 1); this does not include those who chose to not document their information. Ninety-two (39%) were visitors, 69 (29%) were students, 59 (25%) were staff, and 18 (7%) were faculty. There are lower counts of faculty usage, because of private office access.

**Table 1: University Lactation Station (LS) Usage: 2012-2020**

| Academic Year | Total Number of Visits | Number of LS Users | Number of Staff | Number of Students | Number of Faculty | Number of Visitors |
|---------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 2012/2013     | 421                    | 14                 | 8               | 3                  | 0                 | 3                  |
| 2013/2014     | 670                    | 32                 | 12              | 11                 | 0                 | 8                  |
| 2014/2015     | 99                     | 25                 | 6               | 11                 | 0                 | 7                  |
| 2015/2016     | 199                    | 34                 | 6               | 5                  | 13                | 0                  |
| 2016/2017     | 150                    | 34                 | 10              | 9                  | 1                 | 19                 |
| 2017/2018     | 127                    | 30                 | 3               | 9                  | 3                 | 15                 |
| 2018/2019     | 180                    | 44                 | 9               | 15                 | 1                 | 26                 |
| 2019/2020     | 101                    | 25                 | 5               | 6                  | 0                 | 14                 |
| TOTAL         | 1,947                  | 238                | 59              | 69                 | 18                | 92                 |

***Second Evaluation System – Demographic Questionnaire/Needs Assessment***

The second evaluation system was to gather needs and demographic information of the individuals who used the LS, and to determine LSP satisfactory elements and improvement areas. An online demographic survey was developed using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). Twenty-six closed and open-ended questions were developed to collect demographic information, lactation experience

information and ways to improve on-campus lactation support. All participants provided consent before completing the survey. Surveys were sent out to individuals who utilized the LS from 2012 to 2019. The survey was sent out to 123 emails with 45 of those emails being returned because of family leave, retirement or leaving the university. Statistical analysis software, IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 25, (IBM Corp. Armonk, N.Y., USA) was used to conduct frequency distributions. Twenty-five individuals responded to the survey for a response rate of 32%. The average respondent was 35 years old (range of 26-40 years), married (84%) and had some graduate education or degree (68%). Twenty-four (92%) respondents identified as white, one identified as Asian (4%), and one (4%) identified as Hispanic/Latino. Eleven (44%) visitors, nine (36%) staff members, three (12%) faculty members, two (8%) graduate students, and no undergraduate students responded to the survey. Ten (40%) respondents stated it was their first-time breastfeeding/chestfeeding/lactating. Forty-eight percent have breastfed/chestfed/provided milk for two children and 68% felt they had met their personal lactation goals. Twenty-one (84%) encountered difficulties during their breastfeeding/chestfeeding/lactating experience (e.g., perceived low milk supply, latch concerns), and all who encountered difficulties reached out to a lactation consultant or health care provider for assistance. Twenty (80%) of the respondents who used the LS at the University of Northern Colorado felt the stations met their needs. Open-ended comments from the survey included:

*I am very happy to know that University of Northern Colorado supports breastfeeding, and that students, faculty and staff are provided places to pump while away from our babies.*

*The individuals who run the LSP are great. However, I did not feel that my direct colleagues were supportive of my needs regarding pumping or efforts. I was trying to balance the amount of time I spent pumping while still being a productive member of the department. It would be nice to have more education for supervisors regarding how to support lactating individuals, the time it takes, and the flexibility offered.*

*I wish my place of employment had a LS available; this space made my day!*

In response to how users heard about the LS, word of mouth was the top choice (9; 32%) while seven (25%) found out through flyers posted around campus. Respondents were asked what type of lactation support could be offered at the University of Northern Colorado or their place of employment/school to increase lactation support (refer to Table 2). Onsite childcare (18%), paid family

leave (15%), more Lactation Stations (11%), and support group/resources available at workplace or school (11%) were desired.

**Table 2: Lactation Support Desired by Employees and Students at Workplace or School**

| Lactation Support   | %     | N  |
|---|-------|----|
| Onsite Child Care   | 17.56 | 23 |
| Paid Family Leave   | 15.27 | 20 |
| Increased Flexibility in Work or School Schedule  | 12.98 | 17 |
| More Lactation Stations   | 11.45 | 15 |
| Lactation Support Groups/Resources at Workplace or School   | 11.45 | 15 |
| Increased Supportive Environment to Express Milk/Breastfeed/Chestfeed/Lactate in Public Spaces                  | 9.92  | 13 |
| Provide Ideas for Child Care  | 9.92  | 13 |
| Grants to Pay for Support Person to Travel with Employee while Attending/Presenting at Work-Related Conferences | 9.16  | 12 |

*Note.* Participants could choose multiple areas of lactation support.

## Conclusion

To assure that all individuals meet their own personal lactation goals as well as meet national goals, it is imperative that employers and universities offer an inclusive LSP when returning to work or school. To establish an effective LSP, support is needed from all institutional levels. Top-level support is needed to establish the tone and culture that breastfeeding/chestfeeding/lactating is welcomed and encouraged, communicate messages of support, and identify resources to establish ongoing support. In addition, providing information to employees when they submit their paperwork for family medical leave regarding the lactation support and resources available is imperative. Developing a Lactation Support Policy offers additional support for all students and employees as well as accountability for the university. Creating spaces that are ADA accessible and all-gender inclusive are crucial. Providing information on how to navigate insurance coverage of lactation consultations or pumps to employees is critical. Establishing support for breastfeeding/chestfeeding/lactating individuals is essential and should occur before the leave of absence, allowing discussions to occur about adjusting work or class schedules to accommodate expressing milk, and identifying accessible LS. Building collaborations and implementing effective communication and advocacy on the importance of offering these types of

programs and initiatives and identifying available funding opportunities is required. Meeting with stakeholders (e.g., administration, managers, faculty, students) and others who can assist in developing and supporting the LSP is vital. One of the major obstacles on any university campus is availability of space and funding; therefore, understanding space requirements and being creative while still upholding state and federal laws for lactation workplace accommodations, and being kind, is necessary in building a successful and inclusive program.

While the University of Northern Colorado has established a successful program, it is important to continue to evaluate and identify opportunities for improvement. Additional research is needed to identify the impact of offering an inclusive LSP on a university campus and if it affects lactation duration rates and employee and student retention and satisfaction.

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