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*Honors Capstone Projects and Theses*. 343.  
<https://louis.uah.edu/honors-capstones/343>

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# Support of Breastfeeding on a College Campus: An Investigative Study

by

**Anne Marie Fraley**

**An Honors Thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors Certificate  
to**

**The University Honors Program**

**of**

**The University of Alabama in Huntsville**

**April 30, 2012**

## **Abstract**

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that mothers breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of the baby's life. Data shows that 74.6% of women in the United States have breastfed their baby and 14.8% breastfed exclusively through six months (Kaiser State Facts, 2008). The state of Alabama falls significantly below the averages with only 56.7% of women ever breastfeeding and only 5.9% of women breastfeeding exclusively through six months (Kaiser State Facts, 2008). Research discusses that many factors contribute to this decision, including legislation, family support, and healthcare provider support. No significant research discusses the impact of college campuses on breastfeeding outcomes. Through administering surveys at the University of Alabama-Huntsville, information will be obtained to help change behaviors and allow college campuses to be better equipped to support breastfeeding students and employees.

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## **Introduction**

The evidence based question for this research proposal is “What influence does a college campus have on women who decide to breastfeed?” Through a literature review the foundation of this proposal will be revealed. In this investigative research proposal, the effects of the decision to breastfeed will be discovered through a short survey that will be given at the University of Alabama-Huntsville. This survey will explore how the campus is perceived in relation to breastfeeding, whether supportive, unsupportive, or indifferent in the decision to breastfeed. Exploring this topic will allow college campuses to better equip and support students or employees who are also breastfeeding mothers. A few points must be clarified to further explore this topic. This area of Madison County has been chosen because the state of Alabama consistently has one of the lowest rates of breastfeeding mothers in the nation, at only 24.5% reporting breastfeeding at six months and only 5.9% of women reporting breastfeeding exclusively through the first six month of life (Kaiser State Health Facts, 2008). Six months of age is significant because the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that mothers breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of the baby’s life and continued during the first year. Exclusive breastfeeding is characterized by not introducing any additional foods or fluids to their child, such as whole milk or rice cereal, within the first six months of life.

## **Summary of Literature**

Although it has been determined that exclusive breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for the first six months of life, many mothers chose not to initiate breastfeeding. A review by Atchan, Foureur, and Davis (2011) suggests that women less than twenty-five years of age are most likely not to initiate breast feeding. Reasons women cited for the lack of initiation include

inconvenience, a “dislike of the breastfeeding act”, embarrassment of feeding in public areas, personal health problems, fear of pain, inability to produce enough milk, disapproval from partner, need to return to work, and the comparability or superiority of formula. The findings propose that the most significant factors associated with failure to initiate breastfeeding included lack of support from the father, social pressures, and media. This study further suggests that 30-50% of these women have made decisions based on the aforementioned reasons prior to conception or in the early stages of pregnancy (Atchan, et al., 2011). Further research is indicated in determining the roles of healthcare providers and support systems in influencing the initiation of breastfeeding, as well as determining why first time mothers are not initiating or continuing breastfeeding practices.

Healthy People 2010 determined that the targets for breastfeeding would include 75% of mothers initiate breastfeeding, 50% continue breastfeeding through the first six months, and 25% continue throughout the first year. A study by the Centers for Disease Control was published in 2010 by the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) that discusses the initiation and duration of breastfeeding. This information was discovered through a National Immunization Survey and broken down by state and ethnic groups. For the state of Alabama, Hispanics had the highest rate of breastfeeding initiation at 72%, followed by white, non-Hispanics at 65.7%. In the categories of breastfeeding through six months of age and through one year, these ethnic groups were very similar for Hispanics and white, non-Hispanics at 31.1% and 31.2%, and 15.5% and 13.8%, respectively. The black, non-Hispanic population had significantly lower results than the other two ethnic groups. Only 34% of black, non-Hispanics initiated breastfeeding, 14.1% breastfed through six months, and 5% breastfed through the first year of life (CDC, 2010).

The study suggests that many factors contribute to the lack of breastfeeding. Regardless of race, women who had higher levels of education, who were over 30 years old when giving birth, and who were not a part of or eligible for Women, Infants, Children (WIC), were more likely to initiate and continue breastfeeding (CDC, 2010). The most significant finding nationally, that is also consistent with the state of Alabama, indicates that black, non-Hispanic women who were eligible for or that participated in a WIC program were far more likely to never initiate or continue breastfeeding than were Hispanics or white, non-Hispanics. The study calls for a need in interventions to promote breastfeeding from a state and local level, instead of just national initiatives. This includes initiatives by health-care professionals, work environments, and the media (CDC, 2010).

A study performed by Rachel Tolbert Kimbro (2006) suggests that more and more lower-income women are having difficulties with initiation and continuation of breastfeeding because of careers outside the home. This study investigates the relationship between breastfeeding initiation and returning work, the timing of return to work as correlated with discontinuation of breastfeeding, and the length of breastfeeding for stay at home moms compared to those who hold jobs outside of the home (Kimbro, 2006). Through the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, lower income unwed parents and their children were followed for five years. In these five years, information regarding breastfeeding initiation and continuation was retrieved. This study includes various ethnic backgrounds, the type of profession that the mothers hold, and the time the mothers returned to work.

Through this study, it was determined that about 58% of these mothers would return to work within one year of the child's birth. It was found that these mothers were not less likely to initiate breastfeeding at birth. There was strong evidence that the mothers who did return to work

discontinued breastfeeding soon before or after returning to work. Mothers who were stay at home moms and who held a professional job were more likely to breastfeed for longer periods of time. The most significant information in this study includes the data on mothers who have discontinued breastfeeding. Half of the mothers in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study discontinued breastfeeding at three months and 75% discontinued by six months (Kimbrow, 2006). Further research about women in service occupations is needed to determine why they are less likely to continue breastfeeding. Additional information is also needed to determine how these mothers could combine work and breastfeeding.

The study by Rojjanasrirat and Sousa (2010) mirrors the findings of the Kimbro (2006) study. It is established that maternal employment or schooling has a negative impact of breastfeeding duration in low income women. Midwestern women who were part of the WIC program were interviewed to determine how to better serve women who plan to breastfeed and work or go back to school. The interviews determined that these women wanted to breastfeed and were knowledgeable about the benefits for the child. Many women were skeptical of the support they would receive at work when they needed to pump, and this was cited a problematic for many women. Others were overwhelmed by the prospect of trying to breastfeed and work a full time job (Rojjanasrirat and Sousa, 2010).

Rojjanasrirat and Sousa (2010) determine that the most effective way to increase breastfeeding rates among these women is to boost their confidence. This study calls for education and support as the major means for these women to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Follow up phone calls and visits should be made by healthcare professionals and resources for breast pumps and childcare should also be provided.

The southeastern United States mirrors the breastfeeding disparity in Alabama. Research by Chertok and Hoover (2009) compares breastfeeding rates in each state to the legislation regarding breastfeeding in that state. Among the southeastern United States, only Mississippi, Kentucky and Louisiana have breastfeeding legislation outside of “the right to breastfeed.” As of 2008, Alabama does not have any laws that rule breastfeeding is not indecent exposure. Employers are not required to support breastfeeding, such as, but not limited to, break to pump breast milk. Finally, Alabama mothers that breastfeed are not excused from jury duty (Chertok and Hoover, 2009). This is a significant difference from California legislation, which provides all of these rights to nursing mothers. The benefits of these pieces of legislation can be seen in California’s breastfeeding rates. In 2004, 83.8% of women in California initiated breastfeeding and 52.9% were still breastfeeding at six months (Chertok and Hoover, 2009).

Through legislation, breastfeeding awareness and education is increased, which promotes a healthier state and country. To promote breastfeeding in a positive light, this study calls for more legislation in those states that do not already recognize the many rights to breastfeeding. Likewise, legislation could help bridge the gap between low-income working women who intend to breastfeed and may discontinue because of work constraints. Finally, the study suggests collaboration among legislators and especially health care providers who have the responsibility of educating their clients (Chertok and Hoover, 2009).

## **Methods**

The articles comprising this literature review were obtained using the Cumulative Index to Allied Health Literature. All articles were found by using the words “breastfeeding in Alabama”, “discontinuing breastfeeding,” and “stopping breastfeeding.” Each article was chosen because it pertained to the subject of interest and each one was available for free PDF download.

Individuals surveyed will be those who give consent. Results will be used to present to the University an outline of behaviors or changes that can be made to better support breastfeeding mothers, whether students or employees. During one week of the semester, twenty (n=20) surveys were administered to nursing students. One set of students was chosen at random from within the nursing building and another group was a group of students attending their Pediatrics class. Both groups of students were enrolled in senior level classes. The survey was comprised of fifteen questions that outlined demographic data, number of children, beliefs about breastfeeding, and recommendations on how to make breastfeeding more accessible for women on the UAHuntsville campus.

### **Data and Results**

Table I and Table II outline the demographic data of the survey participants. Eighty percent of participants were under the age of thirty and 85% of participants identified themselves as Caucasian. Another 80% of participants indicated that they had no children, 5% indicated one child, and 15% indicated being a parent to two children. Two parents (10%) indicated breastfeeding the child/children and two parents (10%) indicated not breastfeeding the child/children.

Students showed overwhelming support of a woman's choice to breastfeed, as well as support for a woman who chose to breastfeed in public. In both categories, 100% of those surveyed indicated that they were supportive. When asked if these students would support a woman who chose to breastfeed on campus, all 20 students indicated that they would be supportive; however, only 45% of students surveyed reported that other students would also be accepting. These findings are outlined in Table III.

Table I: Demographic Information, Age and Race

<b>Age and Race</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
<b>Age</b>		
20	3	15%
21	3	15%
22	3	15%
23	3	15%
26	2	10%
28	2	10%
31	1	5%
32	1	5%
34	1	5%
37	1	5%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Race</b>		
Caucasian	17	85%
Hispanic	1	5%
Asian	1	5%
Caucasian and Native American	1	5%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Survey: Breastfeeding on a College Campus

Table II: Demographic Information, Breastfeeding

<b>Children and Personal Breastfeeding</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b># Children</b>		
0	16	80%
1	1	5%
2	3	15%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Chose to breastfeed</b>		
Yes	2	10%
No	2	10%
N/A	16	80%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Survey: Breastfeeding on a College Campus

Table III: Support of Choice

<b>Support of Choice</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Supports breastfeeding</b>		
Yes	20	100%
No	0	0%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Supports breastfeeding in public</b>		
Yes	20	100%
No	0	0%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Supports breastfeeding on campus</b>		
Yes	20	100%
No	0	0%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Other students will support breastfeeding on campus</b>		
Yes	9	45%
No	11	55%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Survey: Breastfeeding on a College Campus

Students were also asked where women should breastfeed when they are on campus. This was asked from the perspective of another woman and then how that individual student would handle this situation. More than one answer could be marked; therefore, the total numbers vary according to the question. Students also had the option to write in an answer if it was deemed appropriate. The majority of students specify that the mother should breastfeed in her car or an empty classroom. Two students further specified that the mother should be somewhere that is “private” or there should be a “specific room” for breastfeeding. Answers for this question are similar to what the individual students chose that they would do. Fifty percent indicate that they would breastfeed in a bathroom rather than in the car or an empty classroom. Two students (10%) wrote in “N/A” for where they would choose to breastfeed on campus. When asked if the University provides adequate facilities for breastfeeding mothers, 15% of students surveyed said

that facilities are adequate and 85% stated that facilities are not adequate. Results from these questions are outlined in Table VI. Percentages are rounded to the tenth.

Additionally, students were asked to state opinions on faculty members and flexibility, as well as campus facilities. Results are outlined in Table V. The students surveyed were split with 50% reporting that faculty members would allow a student to leave to breastfeed and 50% reporting that the faculty would not allow students to leave for this situation. Furthermore, students were asked to determine ways that the University could better support breastfeeding mothers on campus. One hundred percent of surveyed participants selected the option of a “private room” for breastfeeding on campus and one student indicated that moms should be allowed to “leave class and return” when breastfeeding.

Table IV: Where to Breastfeed on Campus

<b>Where to Breastfeed</b>	<b>Number of Answers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Where any woman should breastfeed</b>		
Car	11	24.4%
Bathroom	8	17.8%
Empty classroom	13	28.9%
Lobby of building	2	4.4%
Anywhere she chooses	9	20%
Other	2	4.4%
	<b>N= 45</b>	<b>99.9%</b>
<b>Where you would breastfeed</b>		
Car	9	24.3%
Bathroom	10	27%
Empty classroom	9	24.3%
Lobby of building	1	2.7%
Anywhere I choose	6	16.2%
Other	2	5.4%
	<b>N= 37</b>	<b>99.9%</b>

*Source:* Survey: Breastfeeding on a College Campus

Table V: Faculty and Campus Facilities

<b>Faculty and Facilities</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Faculty members to allow leaving class to breastfeed</b>		
Yes	10	50%
No	10	50%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Ways for UAHuntsville to support breastfeeding moms</b>		
		20
Leniency in class attendance	10	17.5%
Acceptance of breastfeeding in public	14	24.6%
Private room	20	35%
Support group	12	21%
Other	1	1.8%
	<b>N= 57</b>	<b>99.9%</b>

*Source:* Survey: Breastfeeding on a College Campus

One question on the survey was included to evaluate the students' knowledge about Alabama's breastfeeding laws. An overwhelming 90% of students surveyed determined that it is legal for women to breastfeed in public. The other 10% of students answered correctly and indicated that it is illegal for women to breastfeed in public in the state of Alabama. The results of this question can be found in Table VI. Further discussion on this topic will be included in the conclusion section of this report.

Table VI: Legally Breastfeeding in Alabama

<b>Legality</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Is it legal to breastfeed in public in the state of Alabama?	110	103
Yes	18	90%
No	2	10%
	<b>N= 20</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Survey: Breastfeeding on a College Campus

## **Limitations**

Included in this research survey, there were several limitations. Availability of time was the greatest limitation to performing this study and handing out surveys. Because of time constraints, only nursing students were surveyed. A better overview of breastfeeding perception at the University may have been obtained if students from a wider variety of majors were surveyed. Another limitation to this study includes the ethnicity of participants. As mentioned, 85% of participants identified themselves as Caucasian. Because participants were from a set class of students, only certain students were able and willing to participate. A more vibrant selection of racial ethnicities would have exposed more information about breastfeeding needs on campus. A third limitation to this project was the availability of men to participate. By the researcher's count, approximately five men participated in the survey. Because the majority of nursing majors are women, there were not many men available to participate in the survey. Again, by reaching out to other colleges and majors across campus, this factor may have revealed varying opinions of breastfeeding on this campus. One final limitation includes surveying more mothers who are currently breastfeeding or who have breastfed in the past. Although it may be difficult to solicit this information from this population, this subset of the campus population may reveal the most pertinent and helpful information for supporting breastfeeding mothers on the campus of this university.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Through this survey, many conclusions can be made. Firstly, nursing students are very supportive of a woman's right to breastfeed, as well as equally accepting of her right to breastfeed on a University's campus. Students also indicate that there are many places that a woman (or the student as an individual) may choose to breastfeeding on the UAHuntsville

campus. While these are significant findings, more significant conclusions can be drawn from other information obtained.

This study indicates that nursing students, and most likely the general public, need to be further educated about the legalities of breastfeeding in Alabama. As shown by the study from Chertok and Hoover (2009), changes in legislation in Mississippi have helped increase breastfeeding rates. Citizens, and especially nurses, need to be aware of these laws and make strides to change them for the health of the general public. Education about breastfeeding in general, as well as Alabama's laws regarding breastfeeding, proves to be an essential need on the UAHuntsville campus.

Another significant finding from this survey is the need for more support of breastfeeding women on campus. All of the students surveyed indicated that there needs to be a private room for breastfeeding mothers on this campus, and more than half of students surveyed indicated that there are not adequate facilities on campus for breastfeeding mothers. Along with a private room, making breastfeeding an acceptable site on campus is also indicated. This means that, once again, the University needs to be prepared to educate students about the importance of breastfeeding, as well as show support to breastfeeding mothers. Perhaps this is a project that the College of Nursing on campus may pursue to not only support mothers, but educate fellow students.

This study shows that although perceptions about breastfeeding on campus are mostly positive, many strides need to be taken to improve support for breastfeeding mothers. These results will be reported to the University of Alabama in Huntsville Dean of Students, as well as members of the College of Nursing faculty. Through these avenues, the University may be able to better support breastfeeding mothers on campus. Additionally, other universities may be able

to benefit from the results of this study and better support breastfeeding mothers on their campuses.

Further studies should include surveys specific to breastfeeding mothers, men, and a more ethnically diverse student population. Additionally, studies on other college campuses would be helpful in determining needs and supportive measures of breastfeeding mothers. Studies on this campus should follow up on strides and successes made to improve support, such as the creation and maintenance of a support group or the creation of a private room.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author gratefully acknowledges the support, helpfulness, and patience of Dr. Lynx Carlton McClellan of the University of Alabama in Huntsville College of Nursing. Without the mentorship of Dr. McClellan, this research proposal and project would not be possible. Additionally, the author would like to recognize the University of Alabama in Huntsville Honors Program for the opportunity to perform this study. Finally, the author would like to thank the participants of the study for their willingness to participate in the survey and this research project.

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