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Mom

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time the kids get out of their school. During the summer, I take a couple of classes and still have free time to run the kids to swimming lessons or the park and even fit in a camping trip or two.

Hey, it ain't as easy or fun as it sounds — every student knows that.

Unlike a regular job where employees can go home at 5 o'clock, students are tied constantly to school by the umbilical cord of homework and research.

But it's all right, because the pros outweigh the cons, as far as I'm concerned.

The kids are seeing a new side of me — an enthusiastic, optimistic, persevering mother, who takes pride in her accomplishments as well as theirs.

After school, I meet Claire and Cameron at the door, hold up my artwork and say proudly, "Look what Mom drew in class today!" Then, it's their turn to show off.

We also share in special celebrations. I go to their honors ceremonies; they get hauled to mine.

And sometimes they get hauled to the Daily Nebraskan or the basement of Nelle Cochrane Woods.

While I spend an hour behind a computer or closed door, they'll entertain themselves drawing or ping-ponging — hopefully impressing and not disturbing students and professors with their antics.

Other than the stress of midterm portfolios and finals, I've found only one major flaw, the main "con" in this back-to-school game: the lack of administrative empathy for student-parents.

Before I became studentized, I worked for UNL. As an employee, I was entitled to use my sick time to stay home with a chicken-poxed child.

Now, if one of the kids is ill, I panic if Grandma can't baby-sit.

"I can't stay home with you!" I shriek, knowing I have no choice. "I've already missed three classes. One more absence and my grade will be dropped!"

It's true, but to be docked a grade because a child is sick makes no more sense than a \$20 parking ticket. Staying at home with a sick child is a parental privilege and duty.

That's one of the times my child needs me the most, and I shouldn't have to worry about how it's going to affect my grade point average.

Oh, well — I'm not the only student-parent who wants to bend or change the rule of being allowed only three absences per semester.

If UNL parents would band together, maybe we could also make UNL's holidays coincide with public schools' closures.

Guess that'd be asking too much, huh?

There is one thing I will ask — no, insist on. When the time comes for me to walk across that stage to receive my long-awaited diploma, Claire and Cameron will walk with me.

Without their support, the fulfillment of this dream wouldn't be possible.

Jill O'Brien is an art major, Arts and Entertainment reporter and a Diversions contributor



Merry Noel Douglas spends some time helping her 12-year-old daughter who will be graduating in May — one from college, the other from elementary school.

Young mother manages School, fiance, child each demanding

By Virginia Newton
Staff Reporter

dumb getting married at that age," she said.

"I got married in the Heidelberg Castle. It's everybody's fantasy — their childhood dream," she said.

Douglas said she was mesmerized by her daughter's father.

"This big old GI comes up and wants to sweep you off your feet and marry you in a castle — of course you're going to say yes," she said.

"I guess I was young and in love," she said.

Unlike a lot of pregnant teenagers, Douglas did not drop out of high school. She finished a semester early.

"It was awkward going to school and being pregnant," she said. "I had to get special permission from the military to get married while still attending school and then to continue to go to school while pregnant."

Douglas' parents were not happy with her marriage and did not share her happiness for her child.

"My parents didn't really like the marriage because they didn't like the guy I chose to marry," she said.

"My mother didn't like the pregnancy because she felt that she was too young to be a grandmother, (and) she wasn't ready,"

Being a student is a burden itself, but to be a student and responsible for a child adds extra strains on your time and ability to perform to the best of your ability.

Merry Noel Douglas, a 31-year-old elementary education major, has school to attend to, a 12-year-old daughter to care for, and a new fiance with whom to balance all of this.

Douglas, a native of West Virginia, was raised in Heidelberg, Germany where she spent most of her life.

"My father worked for the army in Heidelberg — I tend to feel that I'm from Germany because I spent most of my time there," Douglas said.

Douglas married at an early age to a military soldier and soon had a child.

"I got married when I was 17 — between the 10th and 11th grades," she said. "He was in the military; in fact, he worked under my father."

Merry's daughter Jennifer was born nine days after Merry's birthday — on New Year's Eve.

Douglas said peer pressure made her get married so young. "It was stupid, I admit it was