



a newsletter for parents & families



March 2015

Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- Low energy levels and restlessness
- Mid-semester slump and sickness
- Making plans for next year — housing, classes and financial aid
- Hidden conflicts between roommates and friends begin to arise
- Drug and alcohol use may increase
- Mid-term anxiety
- Seniors thinking about graduation
- Excitement or depression about Spring Break plans
- Pledging begins for Greek organizations
- Changing or deciding on a major

Being In Tune with Your Student

It's a busy season, as midterms, job searches, work, activities and a social life often surround your student. How can you stay in tune with your student during this hubbub? Here are some suggestions...

Know What's Up. Do you know what classes your student is taking? What activities she's involved with? The names of some of her friends? Having these kinds of details in mind can help you have more in-depth, in-tune conversations about what's going on in your student's life and the people who populate it!

Mark Dates Down. During a quick call or text, you may find that your student has an English paper due on March 20th, that she is helping to run a program on March 16th and that a friend is visiting her the weekend of March 27th. Jot these

things down on your phone or a calendar so you can provide encouragement before something happens and/or follow up once it's over.

Call During Down Time.

Instead of waiting until you're out of work or for a weekend to creep around, consider giving your student a quick call during *his* down time. That may be during your lunch break, yet you're bound to have a more relaxed conversation if he isn't rushing to get somewhere.

Don't Just Rely on the Past.

Chances are that you and your student share special memories and silly traditions. Those are oh-so-valuable! Yet just be sure that you're not solely relying on these past memory-makers to connect with your student in the present. Instead, think about new traditions you can create, too. For instance, this might be the year to send a care package from the family dog or to bombard your student with a dozen funny postcards from local hotspots or to celebrate Taco Tuesdays!

Tuning in to your college student, whether or not there is distance in the mix, is definitely doable — and very worthwhile.





Becoming Resume-Ready

It's Not Just for Seniors!

There's no need to put off the creation of a resume, no matter where your student is in his college career. Developing and then tweaking a resume annually, if not more frequently, is a smart approach because it allows students to explore their accomplishments and their goals. Plus, they'll be ready to apply as soon as that desirable job, leadership position or internship comes along!

Questions to Ask

You can help your student consider her resume by posing questions such as:

- What is your objective? (i.e. to gain an internship within a particular field, to gain a summer job, etc.)
- What jobs have you held thus far? (including summer and campus jobs)
- What leadership positions or involvements would you like to highlight to show various skills? (i.e. played soccer, publicity coordinator for hall government, volunteered with local arts council, etc.)
- What special skills might you spotlight? (i.e. speaking another language, knowing how to create a webpage, etc.)
- Do you have samples of your work to get a portfolio started? (i.e. publications, lesson plans, posters for events, etc.)
- Who would you trust to serve as a reference, should you be asked for one? (consider supervisors, coaches, advisors, teachers, etc.)

Putting all of this information, along with any samples for a possible portfolio and contact details, in one place — such as a special



computer file — can help your student stay organized, too.

Then, for help putting his resume together in a concise, professional manner, your student can visit the career services center. He doesn't have to be a senior to get help! Matter of fact, the career center *welcomes* students who want to get a jump on their career exploration process. While he's there, he can take career inventories, talk with a well-informed counselor and get valuable guidance.

Getting resume-ready... it's not just for seniors anymore!

Celebrating That First Day of Spring!

March 20th is the first day of spring this year — a great cause for celebration in many nooks of the world! Consider putting together a "Spring Has Sprung!" care package for your student that might include...

- A packaged seed & soil kit to grow herbs or flowers on the windowsill
- A Frisbee
- Those squishy marshmallow Peeps candies
- A Slinky (it looks like a "spring")
- A baseball cap for all the sun they'll be facing
- Flower-shaped post-it notes
- A stuffed baby animal like a chick or bunny
- A new book or magazine to read outside
- Trail mix to munch on during a hike with friends

When it comes to spring, the possibilities are plentiful!

Gathering Details

Half the battle when creating a resume is remembering specifics. Encourage your student to jot down details now about:

- Jobs/leadership positions held
- Timeframes
- Employer/advisor contacts

You can even help by brainstorming with her!

Digging up this info years after the fact can be frustrating. Having it all in one place makes the whole resume process much, much smoother.



Do You Qualify for College Tax Credits?

During this tax prep season, it's worth seeing if you're eligible for either of two college tax credits from the IRS. Both are available to taxpayers who pay qualifying expenses for an eligible student, but only one can be claimed for a particular student in a particular year.

According to the IRS, students will normally receive a Form 1098-T from their institution by the end of January that shows information about tuition paid or billed, along with other information. Taxpayers are encouraged to see the instructions to Form 8863 and Publication 970 for details on properly figuring allowable tax benefits.

The American Opportunity Tax Credit

- Generally yields the greater tax savings for those who are eligible, including most undergrads
- Many qualify for the maximum annual credit of \$2,500 per student
- The full credit can only be claimed by taxpayers whose modified adjusted gross income is \$80,000 or less. For married couples filing a joint return, the limit is \$160,000.
- Students can claim this credit for qualified educational expenses (tuition, fees and other related expenses, but no room and board) paid during the entire tax year for a certain number of years (four tax years per eligible student)
- The credit is available only if the student has not completed the first four years of postsecondary education before 2014

Lifetime Learning Credit

- The course of study must be either part of a post-secondary degree program or taken by the student to maintain or improve job skills

- Up to \$2,000 is available per tax return
- The amount of the credit equals 20 percent of the amount spent on eligible expenses across all students claimed on a return
- The limit on this credit applies to each tax return rather than to each student
- It doesn't provide a benefit to people who owe no tax
- Tuition and fees required for enrollment or attendance qualify, as do other fees required for the course. Additional expenses do not.

- For 2014, the full credit can be claimed by taxpayers whose modified adjusted income is \$54,000 or less. For married couples filing a joint return, the limit is \$108,000.

To help determine if you're eligible for certain educational credits or deductions, tap into the IRS's 10-minute Interactive Tax Assistant tool at www.irs.gov/uac/Am-I-Eligible-to-Claim-an-Education-Credit%3F.

Source: College Tax Credits for 2014, www.irs.gov/uac/Newsroom/Back-to-School-Reminder-for-Parents-and-Students-Check-Out-College-Tax-Credits-for-2014-and-Years-Ahead

How-to

Claim either tax credit on Form 8863, according to the IRS, whether you itemize deductions on Schedule A or claim a standard deduction.

Spring Break & St. Patrick's Day

Encouraging Smart, Safe Decision-making

Spring break can be great fun, as long as students take great care. To help them stay safe, there are some key messages to reinforce with students as they head out on their own spring break adventures...

- Don't go off with people you don't know
- Use the buddy system with friends you trust
- Don't accept drinks from people you don't know (whether they're alcoholic or not — a colorless, flavorless drug could have been slipped in)
- Don't become drugged or intoxicated so your judgment is impaired
- Never stop thinking "it could happen to me"

Some of these warnings hold true for another March rite that can turn dangerous: the out-of-control St. Patrick's Day celebration. Green beer, group gatherings, letting down their guard... this can be an awful combination, leading to poor decision-making and possible harm.

You can help by having honest conversations with your student before anything can happen. Discuss responsible decision-making, high-risk drinking, the importance of staying clear-headed, simple ways to stay safe while still having fun and more. This way, your student will enter into decisions with some clear thoughts already in mind. You can't control what he ends up doing, yet you *can* show your concern and care — and that's likely to creep across his mind when he's deciding how to act.



Dressing for Success

Interview season is officially upon us! Your student may be interviewing for summer positions, internships or full-time gigs after graduation. Whatever the case may be, here are some tips from the pros to help students dress for interview success.

For Women

- Wear well-tailored, neutral-colored skirt suits or pantsuits that fit well.
- Put a white or light-colored blouse under the suit. Make sure it's not too sheer or low-cut.
- Wear skirt suits with non-textured nude pantyhose and low-heeled shoes.
- Have skirts fall just above your knee.
- If you don't have a suit, nice pants can be paired with a button-down

shirt, a silk blouse or a fine-gauge wool sweater.

- Keep makeup to a neutral palette with slight application.
- Keep accessories to a minimum and avoid flashy jewelry.
- Wear dark shoes with a 1-1.5 inch heel without an open toe.

For Men

- Wear suits in dark or neutral colors like black, grey and navy blue.
- Go for dark, laced shoes that are polished leather.
- Stick to white or blue button-up shirts that can button all the way up.
- Put a white undershirt under the dress shirt.
- Wear ties in simple patterns or solid colors that coordinate with the suit color.



- Go with natural fabrics like wool or cotton that hold up well in any weather.
- Don't wear white socks with dress shoes and make sure your socks won't fall down.

Other Tips

- Steer clear of anything strong-smelling, such as cologne, lotion or perfume.
- Have good hygiene, including teeth-brushing, showering and wearing deodorant.
- Opt for a more conservative look instead of one that is trendy and flashy.
- Carry a leather notebook or portfolio that's big enough to hold a resume and notepad.

Sources: Georgia State University Career Services; Syms Dress to Achieve

Visual Aids

The Old Dominion University Career Management Center offers some visual ideas about dressing for success on their Pinterest board at www.pinterest.com/oducmc/dress-for-success-college-version. You can also find ideas from Georgia State University at www.pinterest.com/connect2ucs.

Behind-the-Scenes Leadership Opportunities

Is your student a bit late to the party, having held back from any leadership involvements? The good thing to know is, it's never too late! There are plenty of leadership opportunities — and many of them are behind-the-scenes, which may be just right for students dipping their toes in the leadership waters.

For instance...

- Helping with lights or sound during a variety show, concert or theatrical event
- Doing graphic design for an emerging club trying to make a splash
- Being the social media mastermind for an organization trying to connect with students in multiple ways
- Using organizational and computer skills to help a group put together an end-of-the-year report
- Adding analytical skills into the mix as a club is developing their budget for the coming year

Encourage your student to connect with a leadership opportunity before the year is done. That way, she'll be ahead of the game regarding involvement when the new term begins in the fall!