

Helping Connect Your Commuter Student to Campus

Commuter students are juggling a lot, including making a place for themselves academically, socially and involvement-wise on campus. Connecting to campus life can be challenging, and if not successfully addressed, leave a commuter student feeling isolated from the rest of campus. However, campus life is not just for residential students! It's for commuters and their families, too.

You can help your student find his place and get the most out of college life by trying the following:

- **Encourage involvement.** Studies show that students who are more engaged on campus tend to stay and finish their degrees while those who feel on the fringes may not. So, encourage him to attend that rally during his lunch break or to attend an interest meeting for the school newspaper. Trying things outside the classroom can help your student feel more a part of campus life, like he belongs.
- **Don't expect to see a lot of your student.** Chances are that your student has a full plate with school, work and other involvements. So, if she doesn't come home for dinner, maybe it's because a classmate invited her to the dining hall that night. You may miss her yet it's important that she's making these campus connections, too.
- **Consider adapting current household rules.** If your student lives at home, consider collaboratively determining new household rules for him. Adapting rules related to curfew, chores, meals and visitors might afford him more freedom to stay longer on campus to study, catch dinner with a friend or feel free to bring a study group home.
- **Promote an on-campus job.** If your student currently has a job, or is looking for one, you might encourage her to consider an on-campus job. It will ensure regular engagement with staff and students; involve her in the campus communication loop; and create a natural and safe "home" for her on campus.
- **Provide a quiet, comfortable study space.** College studies require much more time and effort than high school studies ever did. So, your student may be spending several hours of study time for every hour that he is in class – that's what most profes-

sors suggest. He'll need time and space to study effectively, without interruptions.

- **Suggest that your student connect with another adult on campus.** If

your student can find an adult mentor, whether it's a coach, advisor, professor or some other campus administrator, she'll feel much more connected to campus.

- **Stay involved.** Get to know more about the campus where your student is spending a good deal of his time. Read the literature that comes from campus and check out the website. Show your support and get involved by attending events and activities that are important to him. Consider joining the parent association or volunteering to help with another campus group, too.



Commuter Students Often...

- ▲ ... find it challenging to return to campus for special activities after their class day is over.
- ▲ ...receive their daily information and campus communication through the Internet.
- ▲ ...like advance notice on everything – class assignments, group projects, programs, services, and special events – to allow them time to adjust their schedule accordingly.
- ▲ ...do not naturally feel connected to campus life, finding it challenging to be "in the know" on campus issues, activities and social life.
- ▲ ...are much more likely to have a part-time job, making it challenging to balance full-time studies and work responsibilities.
- ▲ ...always have the potential challenge of finding a parking spot, which can lead to arriving too early with no place to go; arriving late and leaving a poor impression; or, in some cases, not showing up at all, leading to a poor academic performance.