



February 2006

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 winter:

February

- ➔ It's a routine month where school is finally becoming home
- ➔ Missing family and friends at home
- ➔ Missing friends who didn't return to school this semester
- ➔ Problems getting into study mode
- ➔ Cliques become stronger on floors, within groups and in communities
- ➔ Cabin fever and burnout rear their ugly heads
- ➔ Housing pressures as students try to determine where and with whom they'll live next year
- ➔ Valentine's Day depression if not in a relationship
- ➔ Job search/internship search for summer begins, sometimes causing anxiety
- ➔ Spring Break planning in full swing

When Your Student Has a Conflict —

A roommate conflict, a struggle between two friends, a misunderstanding with a professor... your student is bound to get wrapped up in conflict at some point during her collegiate career. This can be difficult to hear about as that student's parent or family member. Yet, it's all a natural, even healthy part of the developmental process.



When handled well, conflict can be a learning tool and an opportunity for growth. So, rather than shielding your student from conflict, determine what you can do when it inevitably occurs.

- **Don't jump right in.** At the first sign of conflict, try not to rush to the rescue, no matter how strong the urge. A student who can face conflict and figure it out on her own will be stronger for it. You can listen and provide guidance without solving the problem for her.
- **Provide support.** A student in the midst of conflict will likely be angry, flustered, anxious or a combination of the three. Offer support when he talks about what's going on. This can help him feel more confident as he works to resolve the conflict. It always feels better to know that someone is rooting you on!

- **Urge your student to seek help.** If a conflict appears violent or out-of-control, encourage your student to seek assistance from campus support staff immediately. This can include their Resident Assistant, their hall director, a public safety officer, someone from counseling, a coach, an advisor... the list is long of folks willing to help. These people are there to

talk through non-violent conflict, too, and offer on campus support as your student works to resolve her issues with someone else.

- **Provide perspective.** Sometimes students need someone to play devil's advocate so they can see all sides to an issue. Instead of immediately rushing to take your student's "side," offer a dose of perspective. "Have you thought about...?" can go a long way to helping them understand and, ultimately, solve conflict.
- **Applaud your student's self-responsibility.** Let your student know that you're proud of how he has chosen to work through the conflict. He's growing by taking responsibility for his actions—and his life. And your affirmation helps him know that, when faced with the next conflict, he'll be able to work it through.



The Quest for Perfection

The quest to be “perfect” is something that many students may be feeling, especially as they embark on a new semester, new classes and new student leader challenges. What are some of the traits that perfectionists may exhibit? They include:

- **Setting unrealistic or unachievable goals.** Often perfectionists set goals that are so high and unrealistic that it is almost impossible for them to be successful.
- **Fear of failure.** Perfectionists often measure their own self-worth or personal value with their failure to achieve goals.
- **Fear of messing up or making mistakes.** Because perfectionists equate their mistakes with failure, they organize their lives around avoiding mistakes and thus, often miss opportunities for learning, growth and development.
- **All-or-none thinking.** Perfectionists believe that they are worthless EVEN if they have achieved small successes or met part of their goal along the way.
- **Overemphasis on “shoulds.”** Perfectionists often live by rigid rules based upon what they believe they should do rather than considering their own needs and feelings.
- **Believing that others are easily successful.** Most perfectionists believe that they are alone in daily struggles to meet expectations; they believe that others achieve success with minimal effort.
- **Imposing perfectionist ideals on others.** Perfectionists tend to have high expectations of others and get frustrated when friends and colleagues are unable to meet those expectations. In typical perfectionist fashion, they believe

that the things that are important to them should be just as important to everyone else.

These students are stressing themselves out, trying to meet the expectations of parents, families, friends, advisors... those whose opinion is important to them. Perfectionism is also about expecting a lot out of yourself—often, too much.

What Parents & Families Can Do

To help students overcome or at least work on their perfectionist tendencies, those who care about them can try the following:

- **Encourage students to set realistic and achievable goals.** These goals should be based on the student's own wants and needs and on what has been accomplished in the past. This will allow students to achieve a greater sense of self-esteem.
- **Help students prioritize goals.** Encourage students to prioritize what activities and responsibilities are most important and help them recognize that perfection is not something they can achieve in one area (let alone four or five).
- **Ask students to experiment with their standards for success.** SUNY Potsdam's brochure on perfectionism suggests that students choose an activity and, instead of aiming toward 100 percent success, they try for 90 percent, 80 percent or even 60 percent. This activity will help students realize that the world does not end when they are not perfect.
- **Process vs. product.** Perfectionists often miss the boat on relationships because they are so

“If you are a perfectionist, it is likely that you learned early in life that other people valued you because of how much you accomplished or achieved.”

~ SUNY Potsdam's online perfectionism brochure

focused on the final outcome of a project or activity. Thus, it is important to teach students to enjoy the process of doing an activity rather than solely focusing on the end result.

- **Provide students with the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.** Ask questions! When students approach you depressed or withdrawn because they feel they have failed themselves, it is important to allow them to reflect on why they are feeling that way. Ask them, “Have you set up impossible expectations of yourself in regard to this situation?” and “What can you do to prevent this from happening in the future?”
- **Help students understand that everyone has individual priorities.** Perfectionists often expect others to buy into the perfectionist myth, too! Therefore, it is important to help students understand that each individual has their own priorities and goals.

Your care and concern go a long, long way when contending with perfectionism.

Resource: State University of New York-Potsdam, Counseling Center, www.potsdam.edu

Adapted from an article by Susan Spangler, Higher Education Consultant



Planning for a Safe Spring Break

Spring Break is right around the corner. And, if your student is traveling to mark the occasion, whether it's to another country or a neighboring state, you can offer the following reminders to make sure he/she stays safe:

- **Don't accept any drinks from unknown origins**—No one ever knows if a colorless, odorless liquid “date rape drug” like GHB or Ketamine has been slipped into the drink with ill intent. If you choose to drink, know where your drink is coming from and don't trust strangers. Better safe than sorry!
- **Use the buddy system**—In a new place, you'll stay safest if you stick together.
- **Don't do anything illegal**—The consequences are dire if you get arrested, especially in a foreign country.
- **Wear sunscreen**—If you're doing an outdoor service project or lounging on the beach, sunscreen will prevent the burn that could ruin your break. Plus, it'll save your skin in the long run.
- **Protect your eyes**—Wear sunglasses with proper UV protection and also have a hat. Too much sun can damage eyes.
- **Keep your wits about you**—Be smart with your personal safety and your property. Carry your wallet close to your body so it's difficult to pickpocket you. Don't get so intoxicated that you make bad decisions and put yourself in dangerous situations. Keep a clear head in order to keep yourself—and your friends—safe.



- **Don't go off with people you don't know**—Stick with your friends. Create a buddy system so none of you are ever alone. There are times when trusting people you don't know can end in tragedy. Please don't let that happen to you.

A safe Spring Break is very possible, as long as students stay smart!

The Pros & Cons of Cars on Campus

If your student lives on campus, one of the “driving” issues may be whether or not to have a car at school. Here are pros and cons to add to your own lists:

Pros

- ➔ Increases the student's ability to get to an off-campus job or internship or student teaching gig
- ➔ Student able to travel home more frequently and easily
- ➔ No one has to go pick up the student at the end of the year because he can drive himself and his belongings home
- ➔ Going to town for supplies or groceries is less of a hassle when you have a car
- ➔ Student can get away to study somewhere quiet or go hiking, etc.
- ➔ Opportunities for involvement in off-campus efforts, from community theatre to volunteer firefighting, increase

Cons

- ➔ The availability of parking can often be an issue on many college campuses

- ➔ Cost of gas remains high
- ➔ Getting a pass to park on campus can be competitive—and expensive
- ➔ Student may travel home too frequently and lose out on campus experiences
- ➔ The costs associated with car upkeep, including oil changes, maintenance and insurance, can eat into student's meager funds
- ➔ Students with cars are often pressured by those without to provide rides, be designated driver when others choose to drink and to loan out their cars

You'll also want to check out campus policies as they relate to cars. Are freshmen and sophomores allowed to have cars? How much does parking cost per year? Encourage your student to check the public safety or parking services website affiliated with your campus—or to stop by and ask questions in person. An informed decision is a better one when it comes to the “need vs. want” decisions associated with cars on campus.



Parenting a Commuter Student

Commuter students are juggling a lot, including making a place for themselves academically, socially and involvement-wise on campus. Campus life is not just for those students living in the residence halls! 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. Or maybe going to a car care workshop put on by the engineering department is more his speed. 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.
- ◆ **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 professors 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. This person can challenge her, support her and show her the ropes.
- ◆ **Support your student's efforts.** If he's presenting a paper at an academic symposium, try to

attend. If she's playing in the school orchestra, go to the concerts. Attend athletic events, programs he helped to coordinate, conferences he worked on... your support means a great deal, even if your student doesn't always let you know it.

- ◆ **Stay involved.** Get to know more about the campus where your student is spending a good deal of her time. Maybe meet her for lunch one day to check out different nooks and crannies, and to see the buildings where your student has classes and other activities. Read the literature that comes from campus and get on the website regularly, if possible, to check out the latest news. Consider joining the parent association or volunteering to help with another campus group, too. You are welcomed!

Commuter students are such a vital, vibrant component of campus life—and so are their families. This campus belongs to everyone.

And the Oscar Goes to...



Have a student who is a movie nut? Connect from afar as you both fill out Academy Award ballots available at www.oscar.com. Then

see who gets the most answers right when the Oscars are awarded March 5, 2006 at 8 pm EST on ABC.

