

## Learning the Language of Support

In almost every exchange with your student—whether you're talking, texting, or even Twittering—you have a chance to support and encourage his or her success in the classroom, participation in out-of-class activities, and the ability to get through those inevitable tough times.

*Badger Parent* consulted with a group of students, parents, faculty, and staff members for advice on the best ways to “learn the language” of support and encouragement so that you can be an effective mentor for your student.

To succeed academically, the group agreed, other facets of a student's life—including the transition to college, health, and state of mind—also need to be in synch. The key to promoting this kind of wellness is learning as much as you can about how your son or daughter is feeling while being open and non-judgmental.

“I think the best way for parents to support their first-year students is to be supportive listeners when needed,” says UW–Madison student Solly Kane. “Transitioning to college can be difficult, and it is helpful to know that your parents are there for you. Sometimes just listening and talking is the most effective way to be supportive.”

Keep in mind that the support a student needs most may change, depending upon the issue—and sometimes as frequently as day to day.

Christopher Lee, an assistant dean in the College of Letters and Science, says that, as a parent, you have an advantage: knowing your student as well as you do provides clues to the real issues.

“Listen carefully to your own gut,” he says. “Students are often unwilling to admit problems to their parents, even though they would like to.”

Lee advises that it's always better to frame the discussion with a question—such as, “How are you feeling about school?”—than to start by asking if something is wrong. Asking open-ended questions, rather than asserting opinions, is another way to approach the conversation, he adds.

For example, if your student says, “I'm not good at chemistry,” you could respond with, “I know you are smart and can do it. Keep trying.” This response, while supportive, has limitations. It places the student in the position of having to prove that he or she is smart by doing well.

Instead, you could ask, “What are you having trouble with?” This question is more likely to elicit useful information about what is wrong, ranging from problems with math to not attending lectures. When students are given the chance to identify the problems themselves, they are much more likely to attempt to solve them, Lee says.

Susan Brantly, professor of Scandinavian Studies and director of the Bradley Learning Community, agrees that it is important to listen and sympathize when your student calls and is homesick or frustrated about something. But, she says, it's then most helpful to encourage him or her to begin solving the problems independently.

For students living in University Housing, House Fellows or residence life staff are particularly adept at coaching students to solve problems and redirecting them to the many campus resources.

Cathy Middlecamp, distinguishing faculty associate in the chemistry department, reminds parents that a student's health can have a major impact on academic performance near the end of the semester. If your student is sending e-mails at 2 a.m. or is sounding particularly worn out during your conversations, remind him or her to pay attention to the basics, such as sleeping enough and eating well, to stay healthy.

“This is about the time of the semester that everyone gets tired and ill,” she says. “Signs of exhaustion are frequently followed by illness. Stakes are higher now when [students] get sick, in terms of making up lectures or assignments.”

Beyond mental and physical wellness, parents can encourage their student to participate in activities that supplement academic experiences, such as study abroad, undergraduate research, or leadership programs—all of which are components of the Wisconsin Experience, and some of which are unique to UW–Madison.

The key is to know which approach to take, says Kane. “It's important for students to be successful in the classroom and to be engaged in the Wisconsin



Outside of class, students study an average of three to four hours per week, per credit.

### The Parent Program is here for you.

[www.parent.wisc.edu](http://www.parent.wisc.edu)  
[parent@uwmad.wisc.edu](mailto:parent@uwmad.wisc.edu)

608-262-3977  
877-262-3977

Professional Staff:  
Nancy Sandhu  
Patti Lux-Weber

Student Interns:  
Julie Bohl  
Megan Buboltz  
Kim Mueller



## Learning the Language of Support *(continued)*

Experience," he says. "Some students may be independent enough to do both of these things on their own, while others may need more encouragement from parents. I think it's important for parents, who know their student best, to recognize whether their encouragement is going to be successful or inhibiting."

Ann Niedermeyer is the parent of a recent graduate who has gone on to a year of AmeriCorps service for a non-profit organization devoted to HIV prevention. When talking with her student, Niedermeyer says, she stressed the importance of breaking the university down into smaller communities or niches within which her daughter could find a place.

She also urged her daughter to contact and get to know her instructors during office hours outside the lecture hall. It's not easy to convince a student to approach a faculty member out of the blue, she acknowledges. But her daughter found that her

instructors were extremely open and helpful, and that the interactions provided academic support and advice on future course selections, and opened the doors to excellent opportunities as a peer mentor and for study abroad in Argentina.

In addition, Niedermeyer says, she's glad she urged her daughter to "sample" the many opportunities the university offers. Although her daughter changed her major several times during her first two years, she was introduced to a variety of fields and ultimately chose a path that would lead to a career in public health from a social services perspective.

"We basically said, 'Here's the goal, there are many different ways to reach it,'" Niedermeyer says, describing how she encouraged her daughter to explore out-of-class activities. "We talked about all of the different options. We wanted to teach her to be as independent as she could be."

*"Some students may be independent enough to do... things on their own, while others may need more encouragement from parents."*

### Wrong Grade? Here Are Steps Your Student Can Take

For many new college students, adjusting to a new set of expectations when it comes to grades can be a challenge, especially when they are used to receiving straight A's in high school. Aaron Brower, vice provost for teaching and learning, says that parents can play an important role in helping their student keep things in perspective. "The average grade first semester for new freshmen is a 'B.' The final grade point average [GPA] that a student graduates with will increase as much as a half of a grade point from their first semester," Brower says. Grades have a different meaning in college than they did in high school, he adds. When students hit the job market, Brower argues, they may find that "GPA is less important to employers than what you've done as a whole with your time while you're here."

If your student believes he or she received an incorrect grade on an assignment or an exam, the first step is to determine the cause of the error, advises Christopher Lee, an assistant dean in the College of Letters and Science. If it was a calculation error, your student should speak with the instructor. If it is a matter of partial credit or more credit, he or she should review the question(s) and

answer(s), focusing on what was asked. He or she should then determine whether or not the answer provided was complete and consider carefully any comments the grader made. If your student still believes that the grade is incorrect, or if he or she wants to know how to improve answer(s), the next step is to speak with the instructor.

If your student believes he or she received an incorrect grade for the semester, encourage him or her to review the grading policy in the course syllabus and recalculate the grade. Your student should next discuss the situation with the instructor. If your student believes that he or she was treated unfairly after speaking with the instructor, the next step is to contact the department chair.

"In all, going through this reflection process can be an extremely helpful, eye-opening experience for students," says Becky Ryan, associate director of Cross-College Advising Service. "Most students at UW-Madison are good at everything in high school, however they're not going to be good at everything in college. College is a time where students determine their strengths while gaining a sense of responsibility, knowledge of other cultures, and an appreciation for global perspectives."



## So Far, So Good for Federal Student Loans

The current credit crunch has many wondering how financial aid awards will be affected. The Office of Student Financial Aid does not anticipate that federal loans, namely Stafford student loans, will be affected by the current economic situation. Congress recently passed the ***Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loans Act of 2008***, which is providing assistance to education lenders for 2009–10 so that they may continue offering federal Stafford loans to students. If this credit crisis lasts beyond the upcoming academic year, however, the lending situation may change.

The problems in accessing credit for the upcoming year will occur with consumer loans that might be used for funding education, such as home equity loans or private, alternative educational loans. The alternative loans are not insured by the federal government, and lending agencies set their own terms. If the cost of credit goes up, lenders may increase interest charged or fees assessed, or they will suspend lending because they no longer show a profit with these types of loans. At UW–Madison, about 10 percent of students who apply for aid access alternative loans.

Knowing that, what is the best way to protect your student's ability to borrow in these challenging economic times? Sandi Cechvala, with the Office of Student Financial Aid, says, "If we had the answer for that, we'd certainly share it with all of our students. But there are two things we always suggest: pay all of your bills on time to keep a good credit score and be sure to access all of the federal loans you can before you look for other means of funding."

The process of applying for 2009–10 financial aid begins soon. The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) for 2009–10 is available online beginning January 1, 2009. Don't wait to start the process; visit [www.fafsa.ed.gov/](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/) for more information.

For further information, please contact the Office of Student Financial Aid or the Parent Program.



UW Police Department detective Carolyn Glassmaker answers questions following her presentation during one of several SOAR sessions.

## Campus Safety Resources

Downtown Madison and the campus area have experienced a string of robberies this fall. Both the city of Madison and the UW Police Department (UWPD) are devoting extensive resources to solving these cases, which may be tied to the same suspects.

A new campus safety Web site at: [www.safeu.wisc.edu](http://www.safeu.wisc.edu) provides up-to-date safety and incident information. In addition, UWPD is posting a daily log of on-campus incidents at: [www.uwpd.wisc.edu](http://www.uwpd.wisc.edu).

Increased accessibility of information is designed to raise awareness about the nature of recent incidents, says UWPD Captain Karen Soley. Awareness can translate into better crime prevention and use of campus resources.

The Offices of the Dean of Students continues to advise the campus community to use SAFE Nighttime Services, walk with friends, carry a cell phone, and to always give up valuables if confronted.

To speak with a police officer about student safety, call UWPD at 608-264-COPS.

## University Health Services Offers Free Flu Shots

University Health Services (UHS) strongly encourages flu shots for students who have chronic conditions—such as asthma, diabetes, or immune disorders—that put them at

increased risk for complications of influenza. Getting vaccinated each year helps reduce the chances of catching the flu, says UHS.

The flu virus generally circulates in Wisconsin between November and April, so UHS urges students to get their shots as early as possible. Last year, UHS vaccinated a record 7,290 students.

Vaccinations are free and don't require an appointment. Students only need to bring a student ID to UHS any weekday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Walk-in clinics will continue through January, after which flu shots will be by appointment only.

Through December, walk-in flu shot clinics will be at 1552 University Ave. Starting in January, they will be at the new UHS location: 333 East Campus Mall in the new University Square complex.

For complete details, visit [www.uhs.wisc.edu/](http://www.uhs.wisc.edu/).

## Moped Safety

Mopeds are a fast and convenient way for students to get around campus. But they also require cautious driving practices, especially as cold weather sets in. Mopeds are involved in 30 to 40 injury-producing accidents per year in the campus area.

The university recommends that students bring their mopeds home for the winter, but if they choose to drive one, encourage them to take caution. Driving a moped in the winter is much more difficult than during other seasons. As it gets colder, students should slow down, since it becomes more difficult to stop on wet pavement or snow. The UW Police Department urges students to:

- Leave additional braking distance in case of skidding.
- Drive more slowly and more carefully on wet and icy pavement.
- Use eyewear, such as goggles, glasses, or a motorcycle helmet with a visor.
- Equip your moped with a headlight.
- Test your brakes to judge stopping distances.
- Always yield to pedestrians.





- Never drive with additional riders.

And most importantly, students are reminded that a moped is a motor vehicle. Driving a moped under the influence of drugs or alcohol subjects them to the same penalties as driving a car.

For more information, visit [www.safeu.wisc.edu/protect/getting-around.html](http://www.safeu.wisc.edu/protect/getting-around.html).

## Self-Defense Training

Chimera courses, offered by the Rape Crisis Center, are a great way for female students to build confidence and stay safe. Chimera self-defense teaches verbal-assertiveness skills and physical techniques to prevent and stop harassment and assault. Courses for UW–Madison students are held at Gordon Commons, located on the southeast end of campus. The registration fee for Chimera is \$20 for students and \$35 if registering for both Chimera A and B courses. Online registration is available at the Rape Crisis Center Web site, [www.danecountyrcc.org/chimera](http://www.danecountyrcc.org/chimera), or by calling 608-251-5126.



Pedestrians walk near the new University Square complex on University Avenue.

## A Move to University Square

To make student services more accessible, the offices of the **Registrar, Bursar, Student Financial Aid**, and **University Health Services**

will soon be housed in the 250,000-square-foot UW Student Services Tower of the University Square complex, located on the 700 block of University Avenue. The site also features 350 privately owned apartments, retail space, and a new Student Services Center that will provide office space for student organizations. The move will occur throughout late 2008 and early 2009, with UHS moving in January. By the start of the spring semester, all offices will be running in their new locations.

## Stress Relief

As finals approach and the cold weather creeps in, your student may begin to feel more stressed, “down,” and restless. To balance academic demands and relieve anxiety, encourage your student to:

- Eat a balanced diet and exercise to release tension.
- Avoid “all nighters” and try to get eight hours of sleep, though four or five are better than none.
- Set reasonable short- and long-term goals and build in rewards for when the goals are met.
- Set time aside to socialize and unwind, and find time for self-reflection.
- Take a relaxation and/or stress management workshop offered by University Health Services. These sessions are designed to help students put life in balance and reduce exam anxiety.

This is also a great time to send students a card, package, or other greeting to them know you are thinking about them. Check out the “Send a Smile” link on the Parent Program Web site for ideas and package options.

## Did you know?

UW–Madison has more moped riders than nearly any other campus in the nation.

Despite using a small amount of fuel, a single moped emits as much carbon monoxide as 20 cars. This is because mopeds are not required to have a catalytic converter—a standard air-quality mechanism required of most other motorized vehicles.

# The First-Year Experience

## Winter Break: What to Expect

Students are finishing a busy first semester and preparing to head home for winter break, which spans December 21 through January 19. So, what can you expect?

- Students will be recovering from the physical and mental strains of finals week—don't be alarmed if your student's top priority is to sleep.
- Catching up with high school friends may be at the top of your student's to-do list. This is a healthy response and can affirm his or her ability to maintain long-distance friendships.
- Schedule time with your student to make sure that activities that are important to you aren't lost in the shuffle.
- Have a conversation with your student about expectations for schedules, housework, and behavior during the month. Decide whether all of the original rules of the house still apply, and also consider some extra flexibility to take into account their newfound independence and autonomy.

- Discuss first-semester academic performance with your student. As a reminder, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) stipulates that students maintain formal control over their educational records, including their final semester grades. Parents may not review the record unless their student grants approval in writing. The best way to find out about your student's final grades is to ask your student. (See the related article in this issue on grades.)
- Some students may consider leaving the university after a difficult semester. Parents can play a key role with such a critical decision by helping the student evaluate his or her options while deciding whether staying or moving on is the right decision.
- Don't be surprised to hear your son or daughter refer to Madison as "home" or discuss viewpoints or values that may be unfamiliar.

By opening the lines of communication and creating clear expectations, you will make your son or daughter's return home from UW–Madison the enjoyable and rewarding experience it should be.

## What Students Say About Winter Break

"It took me a while to adjust to the fact that my parents had not been at college with me and that some of the changes and habits that I developed, even minor ones, were a surprise. Likewise, my parents needed to consider that I had been more independent in the past few months than ever before. This is the perfect opportunity to talk about everyone's expectations!"

– Courtney

"I did not bring enough warm clothes home for winter break. Make sure to bring lots home!"

– Christie

"I realized for the first time over winter break how my relationship with my sister had changed... I was no longer her dorky little brother. Once we started seeing each other less frequently, we became closer and appreciated each other more. We still like to share stories, and I'm still surprised by the similarities between my sister's college experience and my own!"

– Andrew

"I would definitely recommend working at least a little bit, if possible. I was happy to be away from my busy school schedule for about the first week of winter break, but after that sitting on my couch got pretty boring. I picked up a few shifts at my old job and it was a good way to see people and make some money."

– Megan

"Make sure you set goals for yourself during break. Don't be too lazy and sleep all the time because that makes the transition back to classes in January harder. Make an effort to have at least one thing to do each day, whether it's working, having lunch with a friend, or doing an errand."

– Suzie

"Bring your movie collection and some books so you don't get bored."

– Michael



Students taking a break from studying use cafeteria trays to sled down Observatory Hill.



## April 2009 is Visit Your Student Month

On behalf of UW-Madison and the surrounding community, we invite you to choose a date in

April to visit your student. Attend free and low-cost events and attractions that interest you and your family, including:

- Wisconsin Film Festival: April 2-5
- Science Expeditions: April 4
- Undergraduate Symposium: April 16
- UW Band Concert: April 16-18
- Spring Football Game: April 18
- Crazylegs Classic Fun Run/Walk: April 25
- Dane County Farmers' Market: April 25

...and so much more! Visit our Web site at [www.parent.wisc.edu/visit](http://www.parent.wisc.edu/visit) for more details.

Produced by the Parent Program and University Communications.  
Funding provided by the UW Foundation.  
Photos by University Communications.



The student cappella group Redefined performed at the Parent Program reception held during First-Year Parents' Weekend on November 14-16.