

Parent Involvement: Finding a Healthy Balance

It was not that long ago when college students would place their once-weekly phone calls home from a pay phone in the hallway of their residence hall, complete with static-filled connections and competition from hallmates for premium phone time. Today, there are many options for keeping in touch with your student, including calling, e-mailing, text-messaging, or chatting through instant-messaging.

Whether you are a first-time Badger parent, just starting to navigate your new role, or a seasoned parent of a continuing student, there are some important questions to consider before you pull out the cell phone or answer an e-mail from your student: How much should I stay in touch? What's the best way to stay involved? How should I communicate? What is my role when there's a problem?

The Parent Program asked university staff and those with personal expertise—the parents who have experienced the first year—for advice. Although every family is unique, some of the tips within this article, as well as in the accompanying parent advice column, can help you maintain a comfortable pattern of interaction with your college student.

First and foremost, you're doing the right thing by wanting to stay involved and in touch, says Wren Singer, director of UW–Madison's Center for the First-Year Experience. UW–Madison believes that parents play an important role in helping their student make the most of his or her Wisconsin Experience.

While it's natural to want to help your son or daughter through every bump in the road, especially during the early months on campus, keep in mind that learning to live independently is one of the most important things your student experiences in college. Rather than giving directions or picking up the phone to solve a problem, parents can be a mentor, dispensing wisdom and encouragement, while also allowing students the freedom to act on their own.

"Ask questions and stay involved," Singer says. "Try to encourage your student's success and put him or her in touch with those who can help, but without doing it all."

Think of it as drawing a distinction between "intervening" in your student's affairs and "coaching" him or her through their new experiences, advises Cal Bergman, associate director of residence life for

academic initiatives in University Housing.

"A sign of intervening is when parents are doing things for their student, or doing things because they think they will get better, quicker results," he says. "Coaching parents support their student behind the scenes to be the main actor on the stage and, most importantly, help teach their student important life skills."

As the semester goes on, you may identify a pattern of communication that works best for you and your student. Some students and parents talk every day, which can be perfectly healthy. But for many families, Singer suggests that one to two times per week can be a good way to catch up on news without becoming overly involved. E-mail and text-messaging also offer good ways to communicate, provided that your student is comfortable with the level of contact.

Many UW–Madison students use sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, but hold off before signing up and "friending" your student. Although you might see it as an innovative way to stay in touch, your student may feel that you've invaded his or her digital "turf."

Striking a balance means having enough contact to demonstrate to your student that you care, but not so much that you're becoming intrusive, advises Rob Sepich, student relations manager for University Health Services. You may pick up subtle signals from your student if you overstep.

"When students know that you are available for support and coaching, they are likely to ask for it," he says. "But when they feel checked up on, they are more likely to build barriers."

Also keep in mind that not hearing from your student for several days is often a very good sign. Students who are busy getting acclimated and forging a life at the university might be less inclined to call home. Feeling in the dark can mean that your son or



A recent survey of technology use among UW–Madison students found that 93 percent own a cell phone.

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Parent Involvement *(continued)*

daughter is learning to manage on his or her own—“which is a very positive thing,” Sepich says.

Parents can play an important role in helping students maintain personal health and balance by encouraging a healthy diet, exercise, sufficient sleep, spirituality and meditation, and a balance of work and play. Also, keep in mind that the university has easily accessible resources for nearly all of the common problems students face. Encourage your student to take responsibility for making connections when he or she is struggling in a class, choosing a major, enrolling for courses, experiencing health-related issues, and/or seeking research and other out-of-class learning opportunities. Even if a particular resource or opportunity is located on a different part of campus, nearly all information is available on the university’s Web site, by phone, or by e-mail.

Some students can experience deeper and more serious problems. In these situations, parents can be critical in helping to find assistance or resources for their student. If you notice in conversations or e-mail exchanges that your student is showing signs of ex-

treme or out-of-character behavior prolonged during more than a week, ask questions and try to learn more about what specifically may be affecting him or her.

In many cases, the problem may be something simple, such as a bad grade, an intense academic period, or a relationship issue, says Singer. But, in some cases, it may be something more. You can also play an important role in detecting a mental health issue, eating disorder, substance abuse problem, or serious health problem.

Federal privacy laws prevent UW–Madison staff members from directly discussing issues related to a student with his or her parents. For advice on handling these situations, contact the Parent Program.

Lastly, don’t forget that students appreciate being kept in the loop about what’s going on at home—let them know of any new news as it is happening. Students also enjoy receiving things from their families periodically during the semester, especially during stressful periods. For ideas of unique ways you can let your student know that you care, see the “Send a Smile” article included in this newsletter.

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Been There, Done That

In a recent survey, UW–Madison parents who have been through the first year offered their best advice to first-year parents. Below is a sampling of what they said.

- “Be there. Students will have a lot of questions and encounter many stressful situations during their first year. They need your support and understanding. They will survive, but the process becomes more manageable with your help.”
- “Send cards, notes, and care packages. Stay connected by e-mail and phone calls. Although they crave independence, they appreciate keeping in touch with family.”
- “Appreciate the “young adults” they have become. Enjoy and support their independence. And learn to text-message. You will need it!”
- “Even though UW–Madison is a big school, don’t feel your child will get lost in the shuffle. We have had quick helpful responses from staff at UW. So don’t be afraid to e-mail questions or concerns you may have.”
- “Encourage your child to meet new people, seek out new views and new experiences. You’ll be pleased with how confident your young adult will become.”
- “Be supportive, let them know you are there to help and guide them, but let them make the decisions. Guide them to seek out and ask questions on campus. Encourage them to get involved, their lives will blossom.”
- “Make sure you give them enough room to breathe. It is important to be a caring and concerned parent, but make sure you are allowing them to make mistakes and fix those mistakes on their own. They are adults now, encourage them to be independent and empower them to do things on their own rather than rely on you.”
- “As much as your child may be homesick at first, and want to come home, make them stay at school for a while. By this time, they will be participating in freshman activities, and starting to feel more at ease with their new ‘home.’”



UW–Madison Urges “Safety 24/7” This Fall

Taking care of personal safety isn’t something to think about only at nighttime or after class, but an important part of life all of the time.

That’s the message to students from the Offices of the Dean of Students at the start of the 2008–09 academic year. In a special effort to raise awareness of—and educate students about—safety issues, the university has launched a new Web site, <http://www.safeu.wisc.edu>.

Encourage your student to log on to the site to learn about a wide range of information about personal safety, off-campus living, sexual assault and domestic violence prevention, and emergency preparedness tips.

For more information about campus safety, contact the Parent Program.

Is Your Student Signed Up for WiscAlerts–Text?

More than 12,000 students, faculty, and staff are signed up for WiscAlerts–Text. Is your student among them?

WiscAlerts–Text, UW–Madison’s new emergency text-messaging service, was first launched at the end of spring semester. Students who have not yet enrolled can do so by logging into the My UW portal and looking for the WiscAlerts logo. Registration is simple and takes just a few moments. The service is free, but users will be responsible for normal short-messaging service charges from cellular providers.

The service is open to students, faculty, and staff only. Parents who have registered with the Parent Program will receive a Parent Notice in the event of a critical campus incident.

Study Abroad

In today’s global economy, a study-abroad experience can be a defining element on a student’s resume. Far from being a vacation, study abroad is a transforming experience that offers excellent academic content and resources while helping students grow. Companies increasingly are seeking college graduates with knowledge

of a foreign language, diverse experiences, and the ability to work with people from a variety of cultures. Sometimes a study-abroad experience can be the determining factor in a job search, because it demonstrates that a student went above and beyond the expectations of his or her education. The distinction of living in a foreign country for a session, semester, or year can be an invaluable asset to career planning.

As students encounter new situations and adjust to life in another country, they develop self-sufficiency and confidence. While some study-abroad programs have language requirements, several English-speaking programs help students to acquire a new language and receive significant cultural immersion. Weekend trips to different cities, traveling before or after a program, the daily experiences of living in another culture—all of these elements offer valuable lessons. A study-abroad experience is a time of challenge, growth, and adventure.

Many financial aid opportunities for study-abroad programs require careful planning, research, and commitment. Students should inquire about loans and scholarships as they apply to specific programs, allowing them to identify merit and need-based funding options. Encourage your student to attend a financial information session for prospective study-abroad participants or to meet with the international academic programs financial specialist.

For more information about study abroad, visit www.studyabroad.wisc.edu.

Transportation: Home for Thanksgiving

This year Thanksgiving falls on Thursday, November 27. Please note that classes will be held on Wednesday, November 26. Your student should plan on attending classes on Wednesday, unless his or her instructor announces that class has been cancelled. Here are some transportation options for traveling home:

Traveling by bus

- The Better Bus LLC offers students direct service from UW–Madison to the Twin Cities. www.betterbus.com

- Jefferson Bus Lines offers services from the Memorial Union to the Twin Cities via La Crosse, Winona, and Rochester. www.jeffersonlines.com
- Greyhound Bus Lines services the Twin Cities, including the Minneapolis–St. Paul Airport, as well as the Chicago area. It picks students up at the Memorial Union and the Madison Bus Depot. www.greyhound.com
- Mad-Bus transports from Madison to the Twin Cities. www.mad-bus.com
- Mega Bus offers low-cost fares from Madison to Minneapolis and to Chicago. www.megabus.com
- Van Galder Bus Company picks up at the Memorial Union and makes stops in Janesville, Beloit, Rockford, the Chicago Amtrak Station, Midway Airport, and O’Hare. www.coachusa.com/vangalder
- Badger Bus picks up at two locations on campus, in front of the Memorial Union and at the Madison Bus Depot. The Badger Bus makes five stops before ending its route at the Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee. www.badgerbus.com



Traveling by air

- The Dane County Regional Airport is about seven miles from campus and services Delta Connection, Continental Express, Midwest Connect, American Eagle, United Express, and Northwest Airlines. Students can easily get to the airport via taxi.
- For expanded flight options, consider flying out of Milwaukee Mitchell International





Airport, Chicago O'Hare Airport, Chicago Midway Airport, or the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport. All are accessible by bus.

Staying in Madison

University Residence Halls remain open for students staying in Madison during Thanksgiving recess. The Residence Dining Halls have a limited schedule, posted in advance.

University Residence Halls and Academic Success

Many students are already taking advantage of the academic initiatives offered by the University Residence Halls. In fact, nearly half of all residence-hall students are enrolled in class sections linked to their residence halls; about one-third of new residence-hall students are assigned to a Cross-College Advising Service (CCAS) academic advisor who holds office hours in their neighborhoods; and more than 1,000 residence-hall students are living in a residential learning community that offers faculty leadership.

Don't worry if your student hasn't gotten started yet. Students living in residence halls can still take advantage of plenty of opportunities designed to boost their academic success:

- Cross-College Advising Service academic advising offices are staffed in five residence-hall locations. Students should contact 608/264-2227 to schedule an appointment.
- Students can search the Class Connections database from a ResNet connection (within University Residence Halls) to find other students who are living with them and taking the same classes.
- On-site tutoring in math, chemistry, and economics, as well as Writing Center instruction, is available.

For more information about academic initiatives offered in University Residence Halls, visit <http://www.housing.wisc.edu/Academics/>.

Housing Options for Next Year

As early as October and November, your student may begin to feel pressure from his or her friends about where to live next year. Often, this happens because—beginning in November—many

campus-area property owners begin advertising fall 2009 vacancies. Many students mistakenly think that if they don't make a decision in November, there will be "nothing left." That is simply not true. Encourage your student to take his or her time in making this important decision. Below are some factors to keep in mind.

Consider staying on campus. There are many benefits to living in the University Residence Halls. Returning students have the privilege of choosing which hall, floor, and room they will live in. In addition to the academic initiatives, University Residence Halls offer dining facilities featuring fresh, nutritious meals as well as resume-boosting employment opportunities. Also included in the room rate are high-speed internet connections, cable TV with premium channels, and all utilities. Information about selecting rooms for 2009–10 is advertised in late fall, along with Open Houses that offer students a chance to visit other buildings and learn about different residence hall communities, explore single-room options, and meet the staff. Even though the process starts before winter break, Housing contracts are not due until the spring semester, allowing plenty of time to make a decision.

Students who choose to live off campus should take their time before signing a lease. Although some housing units are advertised as early as November, the greatest selection and choice exists December through February. Students who sign leases early are more likely to overpay and find themselves in unfavorable roommate situations. As a reminder, a lease is a binding legal contract. The Campus Area Housing (CAH) Listing Service features an online, consolidated, and searchable listing of campus-area rentals. These include privately owned apartments and houses, roommate searches and sublets, private residence halls, co-ops, and rooms in private homes or rooming houses. The CAH Web site includes frequently asked questions, average rent prices, and links to other important housing-related resources. Visit www.campusareahousing.wisc.edu for more information.

Did you know?

The WE CONSERVE program is UW–Madison's initiative to reduce the energy consumption on campus and promote grassroots efforts to educate and motivate the community to make smart energy choices. Members of WE CONSERVE have the opportunity to work closely with student organizations, facilitate education, create marketing strategies, and participate in event planning.

To learn more, visit www.conserve.wisc.edu.



The First-Year Experience

First-Year Parents' Weekend

We look forward to seeing many of you return to campus Friday–Sunday, November 14–16, for First-Year Parents' Weekend (FPW), hosted by the



Wisconsin Alumni Association. During the event-filled weekend, be sure to join UW–Madison deans, directors, and Parent Program staff for an hors d'oeuvre reception beginning at 4:30 p.m. on Friday, following a question-and-answer session with Chancellor Carolyn "Biddy" Martin. At the reception, you can connect with other first-year parents and talk with UW–Madison staff while enjoying refreshments and entertainment.

Please visit the Web site www.uwalumni.com/fpw for a comprehensive list of events during FPW. The registration deadline is Oct. 31. For questions or more information, contact the Wisconsin Alumni Association at (888) WIS-ALUM (toll-free) or fpw@uwalumni.com.

Homesickness

Starting college represents a major transition. Students are leaving all that's familiar and often living in a new city, surrounded by new people. This transition often brings with it a strong range of emotions—one minute there is excitement and enjoyment, and the next, there is anxiety and loneliness. Most students feel homesick at some point during their first year; for some, it comes early in their first semester, for others, it occurs later on. As a parent, it is difficult to know that your student is feeling down. Your first inclination may be to try to "fix" things from home, or even to hop in the car or on a plane to be by your son or daughter's side. In most cases, the best thing you can do for your student is to be a coach when this happens. Help your student to help himself or herself. Here are some tips for doing so.

- Actively listen and be reassuring. Let your student know that he or she is not alone in feeling this way. Many students, including those who are outgoing and confident, struggle with this adjustment—they just may not be talking about it. Let your student know that you love him or

her, know that things will get better, and that he or she will succeed at college.

- If living in University Housing, encourage your student to seek out his or her House Fellow. House Fellows (or Resident Assistants, as they are referred to on other campuses) are upper-class students who have training and experience in supporting students who are homesick. House Fellows have recently been in your student's shoes and can relate to what your student is feeling. They can also point your student toward important campus services, upcoming events, and opportunities for being more involved in campus life.
- Encourage your student to make friends and get involved. Joining an organization, volunteering, or getting a job are great ways to meet others and begin to feel connected to campus outside of the classroom. The options, however, can be overwhelming. To narrow down the choices, it may help to encourage your student to continue with something familiar, such as a hobby or an interest from high school. Ask him or her what sparks an interest. The continuity of something familiar in a new environment can be helpful in easing the transition.
- If you do not see progress after a short while, encourage your student to contact the University Health Services Counseling Center. UHS provides an excellent and confidential resource. For urgent mental-health concerns, UHS offers 24-hour crisis intervention services by calling 608/265-5600.

For additional information about this topic, please contact the Parent Program.



New Student Leaders lead the crowd in singing "Varsity" at the Chancellor's Convocation for New Students, a Wisconsin Welcome event held at the Kohl Center in August. In the background, left to right, are Dean of Students Lori Berquam, undergraduates Kim Roberts and Eli Judge, and Chancellor Carolyn "Biddy" Martin.



April 2009 is Visit Your Student Month!

UW-Madison, the Greater Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Business Improvement District, and the University Book Store are collaborating to designate April 2009 as Visit Your Student Month for parents and families.

We invite your entire family to visit your student and experience campus and the surrounding community at your convenience during the month of April. From arts and theater, to academic programming, to sporting events, we will showcase a variety of event options, offering something for everyone. Check the Parent Program Web site for more details later this fall.

Send a Smile!

You can let your student know you care in many different ways. Students appreciate hearing from home throughout the semester, so cards, letters, photos, and homemade treats are always appreciated. The Parent Program Web site features a "Send a Smile" link that offers easy access for ordering food, gift baskets, and other unique gifts from campus departments and local businesses. You can celebrate special occasions with personalized cakes, ice cream, and giant chocolate-chip cookie hearts. Congratulate your student on receiving a great test score or an internship by sending UW merchandise. Or relieve stress during finals with a massage from a professional therapist at University Health Services. Coming soon: free e-postcards!

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