

A Parent's Role in College Student Success

Right now at stores across the country thousands of moms and dads (especially moms) are purchasing items to outfit a residence hall room for the new college freshman in their family as August rapidly approaches. Over my 22 years in higher education I have been a participant in many "Move-In Days" at the residence halls not to mention my own days as a college student. (Our next Move-In Day is scheduled for August 24th). I have seen a great range of items that students bring to college, from two bags of clothes and nothing else to a trailer full of furniture and equipment that simply won't all fit in a residence hall room.

Often it doesn't stop with what they brought with them either. The most common question we get asked on Move-In Day is "Where is the Wal-Mart in Chanute?" One tip – don't forget toilet paper and cleaning supplies. Many residence halls, especially the "suite style" like our Bideau Hall or apartment type, do not provide toilet paper and students have to clean their own bathrooms.

It is at the end of Move-In Day when reality sets in for parents. The room is ready, the paperwork is complete, the textbooks are stacked neatly on the desk, and the student is anxious to meet fellow students in the halls. Then comes the goodbye.

Watching that goodbye from a distance I can certainly tell when it is the first child to go to college vs. when it is perhaps the middle or last child. (Here's a clue, there are high-fives between the parents when they drop off the last one.) However, it is quite emotional for the parents no matter what. Dads that never cry often do and Moms, well, let's just say we have tissues available.

Just because they have left that student at college or university does not mean that their responsibilities have ended. In order for institutions of higher education to be successful we very much need the help of parents throughout the academic year to get that student through this critical first year.

NCCC devotes millions of dollars to the goal of increasing student retention and completion. We have tutors, academic coaches, early warning systems, advisors, and counseling. We host mixers and events, provide study space, free computer access, free printing, and WiFi. We have classes on study skills, reading, test taking, basic computer skills, and transition to college. And all of this means very little if there is no one supporting the student at home. That is why the parents' help is very much needed for a student to be successful.

No matter if your child is going to NCCC or another institution here are Brian's tips for being a successful parent of a college/university student:

1. Listen to them. The transition to college is incredibly rough. They must adapt to a new way of learning, a new living arrangement, a new schedule, new meals, etc. And all of this without you, the parent, to help them through on a day-to-day basis. They will need a person to talk to about this transition and support. Get unlimited texting on your cell phone. Believe me, you are going to need it. Ask them how the transition is going, what

problems they have encountered, what they like and dislike about college. Keep the dialog going.

2. Be supportive, even when you don't think you need to be. I tell parents to send this text message to their student on a random basis, "Every day you are at college you are making me proud." Send care packages from home. Do anything you can think of to show them that you want them to succeed and that you are behind them.
3. Let them change their major if they want. Nothing ends college careers faster than an unmotivated student and nothing makes them more unmotivated than not having a clear educational goal (not athletic goal - an educational goal). If they hate their major they will become unmotivated quickly. Having them get a degree in something they like is better than them living in your basement without a degree right?
4. Make sure they are connected with institutional resources. Every college or university has tutoring centers, study areas, math and writing labs, library resources, advisors, counselors and on and on. Hound your student until they sign up for these services. Often the student doesn't until the day AFTER they flunk the test and they recognize the issue. See if you can't get them to sign up earlier when help can do the most good.
5. Encourage them to go to class. I know this one sounds simple enough, but now that you are not around every day the decision on whether or not to get out of bed and go to class is almost entirely theirs. Lots of studies have tied the attendance record the freshman year to the chances that a student will one day graduate. They must develop the habit of always going to class even if the instructor doesn't take roll. Please don't let them skip class to come home early.
6. Encourage them to get involved. The students who do not make new friends often do not last long at college. This is why colleges and universities have many events and mixers the first few weeks of the semester. We need the students to form new groups to support one another. Make sure your student is getting out of their room and making friends.
7. Have them join a study group. Research shows that students that join study groups on a specific class or topic complete at a higher rate than those who go it alone. Encourage them to form or join a study group, especially for classes that are difficult for them.

The parents and the institutions can provide all of the right support and encouragement at just the right moments and in the correct amounts but that does not assure success. Ultimately it is not up to me as President, the College as a whole or to the loving and devoted parents on how successful a student is. It is up to the student. He or she has to go to class, study, get involved, and have that clear educational goal in order to get that degree. In other words, they must be motivated.

However, if your student picked the right college and you follow my tips you make it much easier for the student to choose to be motivated and complete that degree.

And don't forget the toilet paper.

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to email me at binbody@neosho.edu.