

The Campus Link

A newsletter for parents & families

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Lend support by listening  
Being a Sounding Board  
for Your Student

It's sometimes hard for parents to balance serving as a sounding board to assist with a decision-making process versus making a decision for their student. Many parents believe they have to make tough decisions for their student, when, in reality, it serves students better when they make decisions with their parents' support and assistance.

Students have some big decisions to make during their college years. Some examples of these decisions include:

- determining a **major course of study**.
- considering **summer job/internship** options.
- whether or not to **transfer to a different college** or university.
- **where to live** on campus or if they should move off campus.
- whether or not to **continue dating** a significant other.
- thinking about **joining or quitting** an athletic team or musical/artistic pursuit.
- exploring **graduate courses** of study versus getting a job immediately after graduation.

While it's likely that most students will utilize and value their peers' thoughts on these decisions, some will also call home looking for help from parents. It's often easiest and quickest to just offer advice, rather than listening to a student's thought process surrounding the pros and cons of a particular decision. It's also easy to devalue significant influences for them, at times forgetting what it's like to be their age.

Helping Students Make Their Own Decisions

As a parent, one of the greatest lessons you can teach your student is how to make a tough decision on his or her own. Of course, most individuals will always consider others' opinions. Those who are healthiest, however, have the ability to weigh those opinions in comparison to their own.

When your student does call home to process a decision, consider asking a lot of questions, rather than answering them. Here are some questions you can ask to help your student come to his or her own conclusion:

- If you had to make this decision right now, what would it be? Why?
- How do you think you will feel about this decision four months from now? How about four years from now?
- What factors are pushing you toward this decision?
- What do you hope to gain from making this decision? Is there anything you stand to lose?
- How will this decision impact you (or you as parents!) financially?
- How will this decision impact you physically, mentally and spiritually?
- How does this decision help you further your personal goals?



## Prescription Drugs Available Online — Without a Prescription!

How do college students access supplies of Oxycontin, Librium, Valium, Vicodin, Adderall, Ritalin and Xanax when they don't have a prescription? Increasingly, they're turning to the Internet.

That's where 185 Web sites were recently found selling prescription drugs, according to a new "You've Got Drugs" White Paper from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse. And 89 percent of the sites don't require a prescription!

Of those that do require a prescription, many accept faxed copies, a practice which, according to Join Together Online (July 14, 2006), opens the process up to forgery and illegally using the same scrip multiple times.

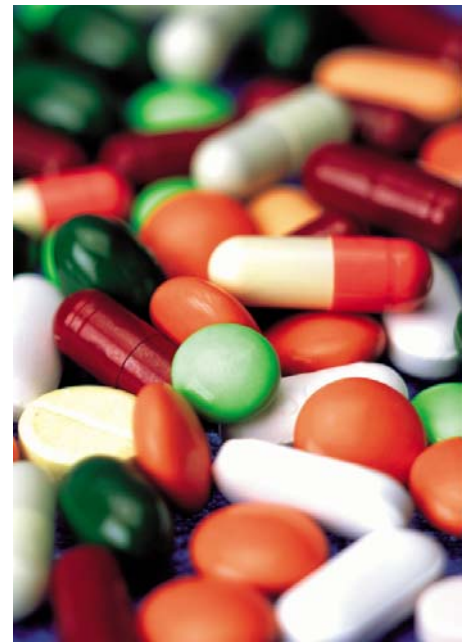
And 30 percent of the sites that don't require a prescription boast about that fact, according to CASA. "Online consultations" are offered by 60 percent and the other 10 percent don't mention anything about prescriptions.

Students are turning to illegally obtained prescription drugs as unsafe study aids. By popping pills, they believe they'll be able to stay up all night studying or finishing projects. Yet, the dangers of taking unprescribed pills are great.

The 2004 version of this White Paper research found 157 prescription drug Web sites. Yet the problem persists. "Despite three years of CASA reports, Congressional hearings and increased attention in the press to the abuse of controlled prescription drugs, these drugs continue to be as easy to buy over the Internet as candy," said Bo Dietl, a researcher on the project.

As a parent of a college student, this can be nerve-wracking to hear. Unfortunately, the use and abuse of prescription meds is rampant on some college campuses. Increased national attention continues to be placed on this issue. You can help by educating your student on the dangers of unnecessarily taking prescription medications, as well as reassuring them that no grade point average or level of success is worth taking these medications without the supervision of a qualified professional.

*Sources: The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University News Release, June 19, 2006, [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org); Join Together Online, July 14, 2006, [www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org).*



Valium and Xanax are the most frequently sold prescription drugs, available on 84 percent of the Web sites.

## Creating a Study Space

Finding and creating a comfy and healthy place to study on a college campus takes some creativity. It's important to remember that not everyone finds studying at a desk comfortable or productive. No matter where students decide to hit the books, their study space should be:

- Free of clutter.
- Stocked with pens, pencils, a calculator and anything else needed to complete assignments without interruption.
- Adequately lit with no shadows or glare.
- Comfortable, but not too comfortable that they fall asleep.
- Free of distractions that are annoying to them, such as aromas or sounds.



## Spring Break Travel Planning is Underway

Students are preparing to pack their bags! Chances are, your student has already had conversations with peers about spring break plans. Students' itineraries will include everything from relaxing at home or working as many hours as they can to make extra cash, to volunteering in a remote country or vacationing in a sunny destination. What are your student's plans?

### Beach Time

If your student has plans to travel to the beach, don't be surprised. Every year, thousands of college-age students swarm sunny destinations for a chance to have fun with friends. According to the Travel Channel Web site (<http://travel.discovery.com>), the top 10 spring break destinations are:

1. Panama City, Florida
2. Cancun, Mexico
3. South Padre Island, Texas
4. Lake Havasu, Arizona
5. Jamaica
6. Mazatlan, Mexico
7. Daytona Beach, Florida
8. Key West, Florida
9. Rosarito Beach, Mexico
10. The Bahamas

### Alternative Spring Breaks

It's important to know that not every student spends spring break partying on the beach. While these sunny destinations are popular for many, so are alternative trips. These trips offer opportunities to conduct service work or to immerse oneself in another culture. Here are just three — of many — resources to get the conversation started:

**Cross-Cultural Solutions**  
[www.crossculturalsolutions.org](http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org)

Volunteer abroad for one week in Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Peru or Russia by working side-by-side with local people and making meaningful contributions.

**MTV's and United Way's Alternative Spring Break 2007**

[www.mtv.com/thinkmtv/asb/2007/](http://www.mtv.com/thinkmtv/asb/2007/)  
Volunteer to provide hurricane relief by working in Gulf Coast communities. Or, visit the Web site to find out ways to make a difference in a local community or region. Volunteers can even create their own alternative spring break experiences!



**Habitat for Humanity**  
[www.habitat.org/](http://www.habitat.org/)

Volunteer with four other friends or as part of an organized group to spend a week building a house for a family in need. Habitat for Humanity builds all over the world!

Most colleges and universities sponsor alternative spring break trips. These trips are usually organized by individual academic departments, a community service office, student groups or the student affairs staff. Suggest that your student talk with folks on his or her campus to find out what opportunities are available. It's likely that he or she will need to apply to participate and sometimes the application process can be intensive.

No matter what plans your student has for spring break, remind him or her to stay safe, supply you with contact information and have fun. And help students remember that getting the most out of college does not have to include spring break travel. Students can also broaden their horizons right in their own backyard.

## Computer Workstation Tips

As we all spend increasing hours at our computers, ergonomic issues become even more important. Here are a few things for you and your student to keep in mind as you stay healthy in this technological age:

- Make sure the top of your monitor is at or just below eye level.
- Keep your head and neck balanced and in line with your torso.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Keep elbows close to your body and supported.
- Support your lower back.
- Have wrists and hands in line with your forearms.
- Make adequate room for your keyboard and mouse.
- Keep your feet flat on the floor.

By getting into better ergonomic habits, you and your student can continue Instant Messaging and e-mailing without pain and discomfort.

For a detailed checklist that you can use to assess your computer workstation, go to [www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/checklist.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/checklist.html).

Source: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/)

### Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS)

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, nearly 80 percent of those working at a computer for more than two hours a day suffer from the symptoms of Computer Vision Syndrome. Symptoms include:

- headaches
- loss of focus
- burning/tired eyes
- double/blurred vision
- neck and shoulder pains



## Summer Possibilities Abound

Many students will be talking with advisers, professors and peers throughout the semester about how to get the most out of summer break. Some will take classes, while others will choose to get academic credit in an internship or volunteer for an organization. If your student is interested in spending his or her summer in an academic-related internship, job or volunteer position, there are plenty of resources available to help make this happen!

The process of deciding what to do can be challenging for students. Sometimes, they end up so overwhelmed with the possibilities that they procrastinate. Often, this results in missed deadlines and opportunities. Encourage your student to start the decision process early.

The first stop your student can make is the campus career development office. Typically, the office will have access to internship listings in every field. The staff can also offer students guidance on what types of experiences will help them gain the best professional experience and where

to go to get more information.

If your student is interested in doing some research on his or her own, the Internet is invaluable! Here are some Web sites to begin gathering ideas:

- **Idealist.org: Action without Borders** ([www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)): features jobs, internships and volunteer opportunities in 165 countries, primarily in the nonprofit sector. In addition to offering internship and job listings, Idealist features information and advice for careers in the nonprofit sector.
- **Intern Web** ([www.internweb.com](http://www.internweb.com)): a free service that lists internships in a variety of fields and for students at all levels.
- **Book Jobs** ([www.bookjobs.com](http://www.bookjobs.com)): offers listings for jobs and internships in the field of publishing. The searchable database, created by the Association of American Publishers, includes opportunities for college students and graduates at every level of their studies.
- **GreenBiz: Environmental Jobs** ([www.greenbiz.com](http://www.greenbiz.com)): offers a database of jobs and internships in the environmental field for all levels of professional and educational experience.
- **Hill Zoo** ([www.hillzoo.com](http://www.hillzoo.com)): lists a variety of internships and jobs available on Capitol Hill and around Washington, D.C., as well as resources for finding housing or part-time jobs. Students who want to work in Congress should contact their senator or representative directly, as most have internship programs.

Students need to be encouraged to go after what they want out of their summer experience. The opportunities are out there for those who seek them! Students should never be afraid to contact organizations directly, even if they are not advertising open positions. It's likely that they will contact your student if a position becomes available ... and sometimes even create an opportunity for those who are persistent.

*Special note: Allison Chandler, a current senior at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., contributed to this list of resources.*

*LISTENING continued from page 1*

- How will you handle the ramifications of making this decision?

If you can't spend the time to have a detailed conversation right when your student calls, assure him or her that you want to assist in the decision-making process. Let your student know that it's not a good time (i.e., you are making dinner or ready to head out the door with your student's sibling) and set up another time to chat. Your student will appreciate your honesty and commitment to provide your undivided attention. Plus, you'll be less likely to get agitated and short-tempered, especially if the decision is one with which you might not necessarily agree.

Having these types of conversations also helps the parent/student relationship continue to mature. As students get older and graduate from college, they begin looking to their parents more as peers. Knowing they can come to you for assistance with decisions not only will teach them valuable lessons, but will also continue to forge a meaningful network of family support.

## Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here's some things your student may be experiencing:

- Feelings of happiness/restlessness from break.
- Unwanted weight gain from the holidays.
- Winter weather blues.
- Not many social activities scheduled.
- Possible roommate changes.
- Renewed interest in classes.
- Resolve to do better academically.