

The Campus Link

A newsletter for parents & families

September 2007



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**Belonging: A Potent Force in Students' Lives**

As your student acclimates to campus, there's a powerful force at work. He/she wants to belong to something, whether it's a group, a community or a cause. This can lead many students to make great choices about how to spend their time and who to hang out with. Yet, it can also lead some students astray.

Your student might find a variety of ways to belong, including:

- finding a group of hallmates to have dinner with most nights.
- pledging a fraternity or sorority.
- attending a hall council or student government meeting to see what the issues are.
- inviting others over to play video games in his/her room.
- participating in risky drinking behavior because she/he is invited out by other students.
- joining a campus organization that he/she is interested in.
- attending a program sponsored by her/his RA.
- accepting an invitation to watch "Grey's Anatomy" with new friends.
- doing someone else's academic work for them because it's a way to be accepted.
- finding a workout partner.
- participating in vandalism or other negative behaviors because that's what the people he/she is spending time with tend to do.
- doing community service with others.

Talk with your student about finding his/her sense of belonging. Many times, you may be able to tell, just by virtue of the people and events he/she discusses. Positive belonging is a glorious thing, something that we all need to experience. And negative belonging can be rectified through communication and care.

## A Family Weekend Checklist

Some practical things to discuss before you visit for Family Weekend:

- ☑ When do things begin and end?
- ☑ Is your student expecting that you'll bring certain things home with you (e.g., summer clothes)? If so, you'll want to save space in the car!
- ☑ Where will you stay? Are siblings allowed to stay in the halls if they're of a certain age?
- ☑ What kind of accessibility is available for those needing special accommodations?

Thinking ahead can make the visit more enjoyable for all!

## 52nd Annual NU Family Weekend Oct. 19-21, 2007

Mark your calendars & RSVP now!  
[www.niagara.edu/cao/Family\\_weekend.htm](http://www.niagara.edu/cao/Family_weekend.htm)

The weekend is a great opportunity for families to enjoy spending time on campus and in our surrounding community.

Some events of Family Weekend 2007 include:

- Casino Night and prize auction for chances at great prizes.
- brunch with members of Niagara University's upper administration.
- a shuttle to Old Fort Niagara in Youngstown, N.Y., to experience some of Western New York's history while visiting one of the popular tourist attractions in the Niagara area.
- the feature event, "It's A Small World" dinner on Saturday night. Enjoy an international buffet, activities for all of your family, and a variety of ethnic dances.
- the Eucharistic liturgy at Alumni Chapel.

## Planning for Niagara University's Family Weekend

The invitation to campus has been issued: it's Family Weekend time! As you assess how to make this visit happen, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Talk With Your Student First.** See what he/she is thinking about the weekend and how you can share one another's time. It's best to talk it out before you arrive so there are no expectations going unsaid.
- **Make Reservations Now!** If you haven't already done so, find a place to stay, as things book up quickly. You might even ask your student to make dinner reservations if there's a place she/he would like to take you.



- **Check the Schedule.** There are many things happening on campus so, plan your time together. Express an interest if there's something that you or other family members would really like to do.
- **Keep Siblings in Mind.** Will there be enough to keep them occupied in a positive way? Do they have other commitments back home? Does your college student crave time with just you? Balance all of your family needs/wants to see what's doable.
- **See What Your Student Would Like to Do.** Chances are that your student is excited to show you the campus in his/her own way! Ask what he/she would like to show you, what he/she would like to do and what he/she is looking forward

to. By letting him/her take the lead, you give him/her an opportunity to practice planning and decision making, while showing you his/her turf.

- **Carve out the Kind of Time You Need.** Family Weekend is about campus happenings and is filled with lots of people. If you're craving intimate one-on-one time with your student, make sure that you let that be known. Maybe you can grab lunch together at a quiet spot or take a walk at the local park so you have some time to talk, away from the hubbub.
- **Be Ready to Meet People!** Your student will likely want to introduce you to her/his friends, roommates, faculty, people in her/his classes, in her/his residence hall, those on her/his intramurals team ... it'll likely be a whirl of names and faces. During a quieter time with your student, ask about some of the people you've met. That will help clarify their place in her/his life — and it may help your memory a bit, too!

We're looking forward to having you with us! And, we suspect, your student is, too.

## A Key to Your Student's Success Academic Organization

It's important for students to remember that their number one priority is their academic life on campus. As they begin juggling pressures related to roommates, friends, classes, athletic commitments, family and more, a gentle reminder may help keep them on track.

Once students get off track, they quickly find themselves in a place where they can no longer offer attention to anything other than their books. Getting — and keeping — themselves organized from the beginning will help them avoid academic crunches this year.

Encourage your student to:

■ **Make a Schedule.** It may sound very basic, but completing a schedule grid will help your student map out weekly events and manage his/her time. Plus, it will help him/her keep track of academic obligations, while balancing them around other demands. Purchasing and maintaining a planner may also help your student stay organized.

■ **Designate a Study Space.** Determining a study space early on will help your student develop positive study habits from the beginning. Encourage your student to select a comfortable space with proper lighting. The space, whether in your student's room or elsewhere, should be a place free from distractions. Creating a "study sack" or something similar, where your student keeps all of his/her study supplies in one place, might also help him/her stay organized.

■ **Set Boundaries.** From the very beginning of the semester, your student should set boundaries. Maintaining personal space will ensure enough uninterrupted time to accomplish studies.

Help your student get — and stay — academically organized with these simple tips.

## Keeping Study Supplies Organized

Is your student studying somewhere other than his/her desk in his/her room? If so, create a "study sack" of sorts, where he/she keeps everything he/she might need in one place — ready to go whenever he/she needs it.

Some things to keep in a study sack include:

- Dictionary
- Thesaurus
- Highlighters
- Pens/pencils
- iPod
- Late night study snacks
- Lined paper
- Computer
- CDs/flash drive
- Post-it notes
- Language translation dictionaries and tools



## Helping Students Take Responsibility for Their Space

The truth is that the college campus is now your student's home away from home. It's important that your student recognize her/his role in respecting this environment. This means being accountable for her/his behaviors and treating the facilities with care.

Of course, there's another part of taking responsibility: holding others accountable for their actions. This is really difficult for some students to do. Unfortunately, it only takes one to ruin it for everyone — and generally, this one individual's destructive behaviors can impact a number of others.

Remind your student that she/he is a member of a team in making sure that the campus environment stays safe, positive, clean and, most importantly, a place she/he can be proud of. If she/he becomes aware of someone who is contributing negatively to the campus environment, it is her/his responsibility to do something about it. Not doing so actually contributes to the problematic behavior.

If your student is confronted with a decision about holding herself/himself — or someone else — accountable for destructive behaviors, encourage her/him to:

- Talk to the student who is demonstrating the behaviors and encourage her/him to stop or turn herself/himself in to the appropriate folks.
- Talk to her/his resident assistant or another student leader.
- Take initiative by scheduling a meeting with the appropriate professional on campus, rather than waiting to be called in.
- When necessary, report the behaviors to campus security or public safety.

Everyone has a role in maintaining a positive campus community. It's yet another arena where helping your student learn self-responsibility can give her/him skills for a lifetime.

## Support Resources Abound!

Your student has so many resources available to her/him as she/he heads off to college for the first time or returns for another year away. No matter what the need, there are professional folks available to help. Many professionals on campus are specifically trained to work with college students — their master's degree programs actually prepare them to recognize worrisome behaviors, respond to students' needs and provide programs designed to enhance students' experience outside of the classroom.

Here's a rundown of some of the folks available to assist your student (and even you, should the need arise!):



**Campus Safety** — Safety professionals are available to help maintain a safe and secure campus, provide students and families with up-to-date information and statistics, and facilitate safety-training opportunities.

**Student Life** — Student affairs folks have numerous resources to assist students. Whether it's responding to difficult student behavior, helping to resolve a conflict, or providing support in times of crisis, they are there to help.

**Residence Life** — If your student lives on campus, she/he will probably come into contact with residence life professionals. Some of these professionals actually live in the residence halls, available to assist students after normal workday hours. They work with the resident assistants in providing social and educational programs, maintaining the residence halls, and facilitating an environment conducive to personal and academic success.

**Counseling** — More and more students are coming to campus with psychological challenges. The counseling professionals on campus can provide students with resources to address their concerns.

**Career Services** — As your student begins exploring majors of study, whether or not to study abroad, summer internship opportunities, resumé creation and interview preparation, he/she may want to visit the career center, where many resources are located. These folks are available to help students with a variety of academic-related issues.

Head to the campus Web page ([www.niagara.edu](http://www.niagara.edu)) for a listing of these and other staff members available to assist your student. We listen to students and appreciate their initiative!

## Seven Ways to Support Your Student While Fostering Self-Responsibility

It's a time for transition as you and your student determine how to stay connected. Keep the lines of communication open, let mistakes be made and encourage your student to make decisions. It's all part of the process, especially in this important first month.

**Help Students Make Their Own Decisions.** When you say, "Well, what do you think you should do?" during a phone conversation, you're offering your support but, instead of jumping in with advice, you're helping your student figure out his/her own answer.

**Trust Your Student.** And let him/her know that you do. He/she will likely feel more confident, supported and able to stand up for what he/she believes as a result.

**Communicate Without Over Communicating.** Check in with each other a few times each week via e-mail or phone. However, don't feel like you need to touch base every day — there needs to be some space in between so your student can gain a sense of independence.

**Don't Solve Everything for Them.** The tendency to jump in and "take care of things" is natural. Yet, students need to start learning to do these things for themselves. So, try not to fix things — instead, ask questions like "What steps have you taken so far?" to help your student take the lead and take self-responsibility.

**Stay Involved.** Just because your student goes off to college doesn't mean she/he stops needing your input. Your involvement is essential to her/his success. Be interested, ask questions without prying too much and listen to what she/he has to say.

**Let Go a Bit.** You can't know where your student is every hour of the day — nor should you have to keep track of that. Instead of quizzing him/her about where he/she has been, ask more general questions like "Have you gone anywhere interesting lately?" or "How have you been spending your free time?" so he/she can share without feeling put on the spot.

**Keep Them in the Loop.** Even though your student is building a new life at college, it doesn't mean she/he should be cut off from what's happening back home. Share a balance of news to keep the connection strong — and to make sure your student focuses on people besides just him or herself, too!