Many students are guilty of it at one point or another: holding “I had less sleep than you did” or “I’m SO busy!” contests. This tends to be a particular phenomenon among student leaders. They swap tales of all-nighters, crammed schedules and three-page “to do” lists, almost as a badge of honor, to prove that they are in demand and working hard. Yet, this approach isn’t good for them. After all, it’s NOT a contest!

If your student seems caught up in this type of frenzy, there are a few discussion points you can tap into to help assess what is really going on. For instance:

- What drives students to do all that they do at Niagara? Interest? Fear of life after college? Competition? An inability to say “no”? By getting deep into the “why” behind their actions, you can help break it down into a healthier approach.

- What do students enjoy about certain involvements? And does the negative-speak you hear about others (i.e., complaints about the inefficiency of a student government group) indicate that maybe that’s not a healthy use of time and energy?

- Does your student feel valued by others, whether it’s you, siblings, professors, advisers or fellow students? Is he/she looking for approval or trying to meet perceived expectations?

- What are your student’s reactions when someone else talks about being so busy? Admiration? Disbelief? Empathy? Help your student examine WHY a person might have those reactions.

- Is your student “working smart” to manage time and tasks? Maybe some assistance with time management can help to juggle the many things on his/her plate.

- Does your student feel that anything is suffering because of this hectic schedule? Sleep? Grades? Making friends? Time to exercise? You might be able to help him/her look at what’s good and what might be missing.

Addressing this with busy students before they crash and burn out can help them determine how they want to spend their time and the healthiest ways to accomplish that. Involvement and experiencing all that college life at Niagara has to offer is wise; acting as if you’re in a “busy contest” is not. You can help your student see the difference.
February Celebrations to Share

February is full of celebrations that you can share with your student! For instance:

It’s Black History Month
So, why not
■ share some trivia questions (see box) to see how much you can educate one another?
■ talk about black leaders, living or deceased, that you admire and why?
■ ask what your student is learning about black history in class or through the multiple Black History Month programs happening on campus?

It’s National Hot Breakfast Month, so, why not
■ send your student an envelope filled with instant oatmeal packets?
■ make breakfast for your student one morning?
■ Give her/him $10 to take a friend out into the community and hit a pancake breakfast at the local firehouse or VFW?

It’s National Time Management Month, so, why not
■ share a time management tip that is working well for you?
■ encourage him/her to talk with an adviser, residence hall director, coach or other trusted adult if he/she is struggling with time management?
■ get a simple $5 plastic wall clock, pry off the cover and decorate the face with pictures/stickers/etc. to give your student “the gift of time”?

It’s the Chinese New Year!
The Chinese New Year for 2008 begins on Feb. 7. The Chinese calendar is close to 5,000 years old. It is made up of 12-year cycles, with each year named after an animal. People supposedly possess characteristics of the animal in the year of their birth. So, as the Year of the Rat races in, use the following chart to determine where you and your student fall in the grand scheme of things. You just might learn something about one another!

- Year of the Tiger — born in 1974
- Year of the Rabbit — born in 1975
- Year of the Dragon — born in 1976
- Year of the Snake — born in 1977
- Year of the Horse — born in 1978
- Year of the Sheep — born in 1979
- Year of the Monkey — born in 1980
- Year of the Rooster — born in 1981
- Year of the Dog — born in 1982
- Year of the Pig — born in 1983
- Year of the Rat — born in 1984
- Year of the Ox — born in 1985

(Add or subtract 12 years from any of these dates if you don’t see your birth date represented.)

Visit the Chinese Culture Center’s page at www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/zodiac/zodiac.html to learn more about the legend of these 12 animals, the characteristics of each and more.

There is always some way to connect with your student — and February offers options aplenty!
Spirituality on Campus:
The Search for Meaning and Purpose

What are students experiencing spiritually on campus these days? According to a multiyear project by the Higher Education Research Institute, today’s college students report high levels of spiritual interest and involvement. Over 112,000 U.S. undergraduate students were studied and findings point to many being actively engaged in the search for meaning and purpose. In addition, many are also very involved in religion, as students reported a significant commitment to their religious beliefs and practices. In a nutshell, here’s what the study found:

- **Spiritual Search and Religious Engagement:** College students report high levels of spirituality and idealism and espouse many spiritual and religious values and virtues.

- **Measuring Spirituality and Religiousness:** Spirituality and religiousness are multidimensional; [students] find expression in a variety of beliefs and everyday practices.

- **Political Orientation and Attitudes:** While there is a political divide on some issues between students at different levels of spirituality and religious engagement, there is also convergence on a number of social concerns and on the ideals, virtues and values that students espouse.

- **Spirituality, Religiousness and Well-Being:** While spirituality and religiousness generally relate to physical well-being, the relationships with psychological health are nuanced and complex.

- **Religious Preference:** There is a wealth of diversity in students’ religious beliefs and practices.

No matter how your student experiences spirituality, chances are that he/she is searching for meaning and purpose during his/her time on campus. You can encourage him/her to explore various spiritual avenues, whether it is attending interfaith services, checking out various campus speakers, participating in a residence hall program or talking with others on campus. In addition, try to be open about these conversations with your student, too, even if you disagree at times. It’s all part of his/her growth on the path to a more enlightened self-awareness — and life.

*Source: From the executive summary of The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose, Higher Education Research Institute, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, www.spirituality.ucla.edu (2006).*  

*From an article by Mary Ann Hanicak, Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs, John Carroll University.*

Alternative Spring Break Possibilities

The picture of a “traditional” spring break trip to a sunny destination for a week of debauchery is changing among today’s college students. More and more are choosing to participate in alternative break trips to do community service, either in far-off destinations or places right in their backyard. So, as your student looks toward the upcoming spring break, consider talking about options that could include:

- **Cross-Cultural Solutions**  
  **www.crossculturalsolutions.org**  
  During spring break 2008, students can choose from programs in five countries: Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Peru and Russia — to participate in the Insight Abroad program. They’ll work side-by-side with local people to experience another culture during the week that they are there.

- **Volunteer Match**  
  **www.volunteermatch.org**  
  Students looking for local service projects can tap into this global volunteerism clearinghouse. By plugging in their zip code and interest areas, they’ll be presented with a wealth of ways to do good, right in their campus or hometown neighborhood. What an option!

- **The Campus Community Service Offices**  
  Encourage your student to check with some of Niagara’s community service offices like NUCAP, campus ministry, student activities, and learn and serve to see if there are alternative spring break programs.

There are plenty of ways for your student to do good during spring break. With just a little bit of research, he/she might find the type of experience that is right for him/her.
Even if you and your student are living apart, you can still celebrate together in some creative ways. For instance:

- **Touch base during commercials to compare notes.**
- **Send a Super Bowl party pack to prep for the big day.**
- **Dress in your team’s colors and send each other digital photos — it’s the next best thing to being there**
- **Plan to attend a sporting event together the next time you’re in the same town — anticipation can be just as fun!**

May the best team win! And soon you can start prepping for college basketball’s March Madness!

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**FERPA, Privacy and Parents’ Rights**

**Can I See my Student’s Grades?**

Yes … and no.

Since 1974, the Family Education Rights Protection Act (usually called “FERPA”), has enabled students and their families to control third-party access to their academic records. This control is typically managed through something called a “FERPA waiver,” which traditionally has been on paper.

At Niagara University, however, FERPA has gone digital, and students can use their myNU intranet account to control, and change, who has the right to access their academic records and personally identifiable information.

Of course, certain permission is built into the law. For parents with dependent children (for tax purposes) under the age of 24, the right to see their student’s records is well established.

For parents who do not claim their child as a dependent but still want to ensure access, the myNU FERPA online form can be tailored to specifically convey permission to access grades, disciplinary, and financial records. The form can also accommodate highly specific permission; for instance, the right of a family doctor to access certain records.

However, when it comes to privacy, FERPA isn’t the only factor at Niagara. In fact, we pride ourselves in taking extra steps to protect students’ privacy, and many times, we refuse to disclose to third parties even that which FERPA would allow.

Questions about FERPA and the online FERPA form can be directed to the Niagara University FERPA officer, Mike Konopski, dean of enrollment management, at 716-286-8721 or mjk@niagara.edu.

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**Connecting Over Valentine’s Day**

Love is on many people’s minds as Valentine’s Day creeps ever closer. Your student may be one of those people, whether he/she is in a relationship or not. Uncoupled students can feel crummy while folks in couples can feel pressured. So, to make Valentine’s Day an overall celebration of friend/family/significant other/pet love, here are a few things you can do:

- **Take Care of Your Heart.** Make a pact with your student that you’re going to take advantage of the Valentine’s Day emphasis on hearts to take better care of your own hearts, whether through adding 1,000 steps a day, signing up for an aerobic activity or checking out the American Heart Association’s National Body Challenge 2008 at [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org/).

- **Get Pet Smart.** Send a photo of the family dog, with a bubble coming out of its mouth saying something like, “I fur-get how much I miss you when you’re gone!”

- **Create a “Love Collage.”** Cut out magazine pictures or family/friend photos to make a “Love Collage” for your student. This will emphasize the many different types of love that make the world richer!

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**Super Bowl Sunday!**

Even if you and your student are living apart, you can still celebrate together in some creative ways. For instance:

- **Touch base during commercials to compare notes.**
- **Send a Super Bowl party pack to prep for the big day.**
- **Dress in your team’s colors and send each other digital photos — it’s the next best thing to being there**
- **Plan to attend a sporting event together the next time you’re in the same town — anticipation can be just as fun!**

May the best team win! And soon you can start prepping for college basketball’s March Madness!