A Life Transition for Both Students and Parents

It’s often overlooked that college is also a time of change for the parents of new college students. Just as students are adjusting to the new challenges of college life, learning of the rigorous demands necessary to be a successful college student, and being bombarded with a ton of new and unfamiliar information, parents are dealing with a lot of the same issues—although in different ways.

Among the challenges parents often encounter is utilizing all this new information in a way that will allow them to best help their children to succeed as college students...and beyond.

There is no magic formula or manual to walk parents through the steps of how to best help their children. However, being aware of some of the challenges new college students often experience can provide parents with some of the necessary “tools” that will better enable them to offer more informed support, as well as help parents to better appreciate some of the obstacles their children must learn to successfully navigate at the college level.

First Generation Students, TRiO, and Success

First Generation college students can sometimes start their college careers at an academic disadvantage. It has been well established that First Generation and Low Income student are statistically less likely to complete their degrees. The TRiO Program was established to specifically address this issue and provide First Generation and Low Income students with resources and personalized academic coaching and mentoring services from highly training education professionals, many of whom had been First Generation and Low Income students themselves. The TRiO program has a long and well documented history of helping students excel at the college level.
Some Common First Generation Student Issues

First Generation and Low Income Students….

⇒ May feel “out of the loop” when it comes to college processes and procedures (i.e., application, graduation, job or graduate school searches, etc.)

⇒ May be susceptible to doubts about their academic abilities and think they are not college material

⇒ May receive less support from their families while attending college—often due to families not understanding the demands of college work

⇒ Might also deal with added responsibility and pressure from families to be “the one who succeeds” in college

⇒ May be pressured by family and friends to return home often

⇒ May receive mixed messages about their changing identities (e.g., wanting to succeed but not wanting to be different from the rest of the family or their peers)

⇒ May find it difficult to feel integrated socially and academically

⇒ May not be aware of the resources available to them or of options available to them after graduation

⇒ May lack confidence they can pay for college as well as information about how to pay for college and obtain financial aid

General Suggestions for First Generation Students:

⇒ Get support (from the school and from family)

⇒ Talk to someone

⇒ Get involved on campus

⇒ Utilize resources

⇒ Develop and maintain a healthy and manageable balance (school, work, family, friends, etc.)

⇒ Set personal boundaries in order to focus on academics (including family and social obligations)

The Role of Parents in Providing Academic Success Support

Parents play a crucial role in providing support that can positively contribute the academic success of their children at the college level. It can be useful to think of you and your child as part of team working together to help your new college student achieve her or his academic, career, and personal life goals.

One of the primary ways to do so is to offer encouragement and support when you child needs it. It is also important not impose demands on their time. Other suggestions and tips can be found on the following page.
Tips for How Parents Can Help to Provide Academic Support

⇒ Don’t forget—you are part of the team that will help your child succeed at the college level
⇒ Look for services at the college designed to help first generation and low income students
⇒ Ask counselors and college admissions officers about tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and other kinds of support your child may need
⇒ Encourage your child to make use of support services offered at the college
⇒ Help your child find a mentor—someone to take a personal interest in his or her success
⇒ Try not to make demands that interfere with your child’s schoolwork
⇒ Be aware of the pressure: Provide encouragement without turning college into a burden or an obligation.
⇒ Rally the support of all family members, especially those who may disapprove of the path your child is taking. Negative feelings could encourage rebellious behavior or a desire to quit
⇒ Expect change: Whether your child will be far away or close by, the distractions of schoolwork and a new social life may become a priority over usual family activities
⇒ Help prepare your children for the increased academic demands they will face in college. Parents can do so by sharing their own experiences with their children or introducing them to others who have recently attended college
⇒ Parents can discuss the importance of attending class regularly, reading before class, taking thorough notes, completing all class assignments, and participating in study groups
⇒ Parents can encourage their children to meet with their professors outside of class in order to follow up on questions about course material
⇒ Parents can stress the importance of effective time management. For example, parents can provide their child with a calendar and encourage them to keep track of due dates and tasks that need to be accomplished
⇒ Parents can discuss the dangers of spending too much time online. Although the Internet can serve as a way of maintaining social connections, too much time online can prevent students from meeting their academic responsibilities