



Potsdam
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

February 2011

Student Issues

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

- ▲ Difficulty getting into study mode
- ▲ Things become routine...school finally becomes home
- ▲ Missing family and friends at home, and friends who did not return to school
- ▲ Cliques become stronger within residence hall communities, student organizations and in classes
- ▲ Cabin fever and burnout
- ▲ Pressures to figure out living plans for next year as the room assignment process draws near
- ▲ Valentine's Day depression if not dating
- ▲ Vocational choice/ internship search causes anxiety
- ▲ Spring break planning underway

Positive Thinking Leads to Positive Results Helping Your Student Make the Most of Tough Times

Although forecasts predict the economy will improve this year, many college students are still worried about what their future will look like when they graduate. For this "can do" generation of students, not being able to have it all, right from the get go, can be hard to reconcile. Although most are being conscientious about how they are approaching their college education and trying to make smart decisions, it can be hard not to let the negative thinking creep in.

Encourage your student to stay positive by helping him reframe his thinking. There is so much waiting for him! Planting the seed of positivity can remind your student that the college years are meant to be enjoyed and that his life will unfold as it is meant to be.

Spending the Summer in a Positive Way

Now is the time for students to consider how they will spend their summer. For many college students, securing a summer job, especially in an arena that is related to their academic major, has been tough. But your student doesn't have to spend the summer moping on the couch. Your student can do purposeful work. Encourage him to check out campus resources to find out what

his summer options are. Internships and volunteer opportunities are out there for those who seek them!

Many of those college students who are securing opportunities these days are being smart about their options and thinking positively about outcomes. As your student looks ahead to the summer, encourage him to do these five things:

- Ask a career center staff member to help him develop a sound resume that really speaks to his skills and previous experiences.
- Keep an open mind about the types of summer experiences he can have.
- Ask other college students how they spent their summer last year to get ideas.
- Pursue as many leads as he can and keep track of the network of connections he makes.
- Be proactive in his approach, as opportunities will be highly sought after.

Above all else, encourage your student to maintain a positive mindset. No matter what, there are always skills that can be learned or honed. A seemingly dead-end job or position often turns into something never imagined!



The Realities of Distracted Driving

Too many of us are focusing on texts and phone calls, instead of keeping our eyes on the road. Just last year, nearly 5,500 people were killed and 500,000 more were injured in distracted driving-related crashes. But, these aren't statistics. They are children and parents, neighbors and friends.

Distracted driving is any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing.



There are three main types of distraction:

- **Visual** — taking your eyes off the road
- **Manual** — taking your hands off the wheel
- **Cognitive** — taking your mind off what you're doing

Other distracting activities include:

- ▲ Using a cell phone
- ▲ Eating and drinking
- ▲ Talking to passengers
- ▲ Grooming
- ▲ Reading, including maps
- ▲ Using a PDA or navigation system
- ▲ Watching a video
- ▲ Changing the radio station, CD, iPod or Mp3 player

According to Distraction.gov, younger, inexperienced drivers under 20 years old have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.

While all distractions can endanger drivers' safety, texting is the most alarming because it involves all three types of distraction.

Did You Know?

Research on distracted driving reveals some surprising facts:

- In 2008, almost 20 percent of all crashes in the year involved some type of distraction. (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration—NHTSA).
- Nearly 6,000 people died in 2008 in crashes involving a distracted driver, and more than half a million were injured. (NHTSA)
- Drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)
- Using a cell phone while driving, whether it's hand-held or hands-free, delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent. (University of Utah)

So, as your commuting student gets in the car each morning, talk with him about distracted driving. As your on-campus student catches rides with friends, talk with her about distracted driving. It's a real issue with tragic consequences. The text or call can wait. It's time to keep our eyes on the road.

Sources: Distraction.gov/stats-and-facts/; Fastlane.dot.gov, 11/16/10

On-Campus vs. Off-Campus: Things to Think About

Where will your student call home next year? It's room selection and apartment-looking season, as students determine whether they will live on- or off-campus.

To help with these decisions, here are some things to take into consideration:

- ◆ What is your student involved in? Will it still be doable to be that involved if he lives off-campus?
- ◆ What about work? If the job is on-campus, will your student be able to find parking and get to work on time?
- ◆ What about transportation? Will a car be in the equation?
- ◆ Who will your student live with?
- ◆ What about eating options? Will your student get enough nutrition if she is cooking for herself, without a meal plan?
- ◆ What about summer storage? Will that be available?
- ◆ When does a lease run? Will your student be paying for time that he won't be living there? If so, how will that be handled?
- ◆ What costs are involved with housing, transportation, food and more? How do these balance out when comparing the realities of on- and off-campus living?

Let your student know that there are plenty of people to answer his questions as he weighs the pros and cons. Where to call home is an important decision that impacts his life in many ways.

Effective Writing Skills: A Boost for All Students

Your student is likely in the throes of writing this term—from term papers for class to internship essays to summer job inquiries. Effective writing skills are quite necessary, as professors, employers and others in your student's life require writing that is clear, concise and clean.

The simple tips below can help improve writing skills, one step at a time. One caveat, though: professors and others may require specific writing styles for projects that don't exactly adhere to the general tips below. Make sure your student finds this out before plunging in.

Be Specific. Just like a reporter, communicate the “who, what, where, why, when and how” of what needs to be done. Stay objective and factual unless you've been specifically instructed to use subjective language.

Avoid the Passive Voice. Instead of writing “The program was planned by Dane,” write, “Dane planned the program.” This makes it more clear and less awkward.

Be Concise. There's no need to be long-winded. Get to the point and steer clear of too much “fluff” in your writing. You'll lose readers if you spout off too long!

Get Things Right. Take great care when spelling names, getting titles correct and other specifics. And also make sure that you do a careful proof of your work. Spell check doesn't catch everything.

Attribute the Words of Others. If you're quoting someone,

put quotes around her words and tell where you got the information. Don't take credit for words other than your own.

Know When Formal Language is Required. If you're writing an informal note, it's fine to use contractions (“don't” instead of “do not”). However, if you're writing for a more formal audience, like a scholarship search committee, be more formal with your language. Don't use contractions, steer clear of slang, don't use abbreviations or symbols, and avoid clichés.

Don't Go “And” Crazy. When you're trying to cram a lot of information into what you're writ-

ing, it's easy to insert “and” many times. However, this makes for a real run-on sentence that is poor form and hard to read. So, if you have more than two “ands” in a sentence, consider turning that long sentence into two shorter ones instead.

Make Things Match. If you're referring to one person, then don't use “they” later on. Make your tenses match throughout your writing, instead of using “did” one time and then “does” the next. And your singular/plural references should jive, too.

Sources: www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/WritingSkills.htm, www.arc.sbc.edu/writingerrors.html



7 Ways to Focus on the Heart This Valentine's Day Get Heart Smart!

As Valentine's Day rolls around, it's easy for students who aren't in relationships to feel left out. But you can help! Make this Feb. 14 about focusing on your hearts—those living, pumping mechanisms that keep us going when we treat them right—instead of flowers and stuffed animals. You and your student can start a Heart Smart challenge, whether you're communicating from afar or living in the same household. Some components of such a challenge could include:



- Both of you going to the doctor to get your heart health checked.
- Becoming aware of your resting heart rate.
- Committing to eating a heart healthy meal at least five times per week and then sharing recipes for and photos of those meals.
- Learning something new about cholesterol, nutrition, weight management and more on the American Heart Association site (www.heart.org) once a week that you can share via email or text.
- Sharing a goal that you'll walk or run a 5K in the late spring or early summer—and then getting into an exercise program that'll help you prepare! Talk about your fitness goals and accomplishments along the way.
- Tracking your heart health through the online Heart360 tool (www.heart360.org).
- Helping each other manage stress more effectively through online encouragement, de-stressing phone calls and taking walks when you're together.

This is just the tip of the healthy heart iceberg. Yet, if you and your student focus on getting heart healthy together this Valentine's season, the difference could be dramatic. It's the ultimate sign of love.



So Many Options, So Much Time!

The college years are ripe with opportunities for students to get involved. Whether they choose to pursue new hobbies or hone skills they've been developing for quite some time, the campus community will open your student's eyes to a wealth of new experiences in which they can choose to take part.

It's not unusual for students, especially those in their first year of college, to spend the fall semester getting the lay of the land. Oftentimes, students really focus their energies on joining clubs and organizations or getting involved on campus in other ways in the spring. Plus, many groups will hold election or selection processes for the following year over the next few months.

Now is a really good time for students to consider how they want to spend their out-of-class time. Do they want to try out a sport they've always wanted to play? If so, intra-



murals might be the ticket. Are they looking for a way to make a difference in the local community? Volunteering through a campus organization could work. Or maybe they want to develop a particular

leadership skill? Joining a programming or advocacy club could be the way to do so. There are so many options!

You can help your student by encouraging him to get out there and explore. Talking with student staff in the residence hall is a good place to start. You can also suggest that your student check out the following resources on campus to see all that is available:

- ▲ The student activities office for a list of clubs and organizations
- ▲ The residence life office for information about getting involved in the residence halls
- ▲ The recreation center for a list of intramural teams, club sports and fitness classes
- ▲ The community service or campus ministry office for a list of local volunteer opportunities and immersion trips
- ▲ The career center for a list of internships and practicum options
- ▲ The academic departments for academic-related opportunities such as working with youth groups, studying abroad or participating in activities led by faculty members

Students should definitely be focused on their academic work, but getting involved in co-curricular experiences is so important too. Students spend so many of their weekly hours out of the classroom. When they choose to use their time wisely, they can really round out their educational experience by developing skills that will aid them not only in their job search processes, but in their careers as well.

Honoring Black History Month

This month we honor Black History Month. You and your student can, too, by:

- Listening to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech on YouTube
- Reading a book by a black author
- Going to a gospel choir concert
- Finding out something new about the Underground Railroad and abolitionists
- Reading biographies, fast facts and timelines featuring famous Black Americans at www.biography.com/blackhistory/

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

