

Academic Success & the Career Journey

Saturday, August 27, 2016

8:30

INTRODUCTION

- My name is Christy Buchanan, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Advising, and I am very excited to be able to welcome you and your student to Wake Forest. I have worked at Wake Forest for 24 years, as Professor of Psychology and for the past four years in the Dean's office. I was a student at or an employee of four other universities before landing at Wake Forest and I feel very blessed that I landed here. I hope you will feel the same. *This is truly a special place that offers your student many exciting opportunities and a caring community.*
- Andy and I are here today to tell you about some important pieces of that caring community: the Office of Academic Advising (OAA) and the Office of Personal and Career Development (OPCD). We want to share with you the resources of our offices, our philosophy of working with your students, and some ideas of how you can partner with us to help your children have academic success during their years at Wake Forest, and leave here well prepared for success beyond their college years.
- So I will start by talking about the OAA & academic success.

OAA

- *Show our staff (on Power Point)*
- *I encourage you to go to advising.wfu.edu, to read our mission statement and to read about the services we provide. As you will see in our mission statement, The Office of Academic Advising strives to help students achieve their potential as whole persons.*
 - *So, we care about academic success ... but not in isolation. Our mission, like the College's overall, is the education and best development of the whole person.*
- What do we do specifically? How can we help your student?
 1. Back up advising about courses & course planning
 2. Helping students who experience medical or family emergencies that make it difficult to keep up with academic obligations
 - Please, please consider tuition insurance, which has to be purchased before classes start.

3. Help with credit overloads, late adds & drops, appeals for exceptions to rule (e.g., circumstances under which late adds or late drops are likely to be approved)
 - I would like to tell you something about late drops. Last day to drop a full-term class is October 4. And mid-term grades are due on Oct. 24. Not having a mid-term grade by the drop date is not a sufficient reason for permission for a late drop. Faculty are strongly encouraged – **BUT NOT REQUIRED** - to provide a grade by last day to drop, and not all will do so. If your student has any concerns re staying in or dropping a class, or has received no feedback from the professor to indicate how well she/he is learning, he/she should talk to the professor and possibly to us in OAA before Oct. 4. If your student doesn't drop before the deadline, then gets a poor grade → the response is **NOT** to quit attending class, it is to get help / boost resources for the class.
4. Provide advising for students who are struggling in classes (whether in not living up to their own standards or because objectively they are getting poor grades)
5. Reach out to students who might need help: faculty academic alert, low midterm grades (multiple Ds or even one F), low final grades
6. Handling withdrawals or readmissions

7. A place where a student can come when they don't know where else to go

Stop on this slide.

I and others in our office connect students with the broad array of supports, resources, and opportunities at WFU.

As I think you know from all you've learned about WFU up to this point – starting perhaps with literature you read about WFU or what you learned on tours of campus ... WFU is truly a community in which faculty and staff want to support and contribute to the success of each student. We believe that every student admitted to Wake Forest belongs here, and can succeed here. This is a caring community with many unique resources. We have small class sizes; many opportunities for faculty to get to know students as individuals; many opportunities for undergraduate students to be closely involved with faculty – whether through **advising** (every student paired w/ a faculty or staff adviser), through the **Faculty Fellows program** where faculty engage in informal programming and interaction in first-year residence halls, through **Living-Learning communities** (classes that are residence-hall based), or **in research labs** (they can even get paid to work in a research lab in the summer). All of these characteristics lend themselves to a community in which students can be known by and well-connected with people who will offer support and resources for success. All of these characteristics predict academic success.

But even in our relatively small, supportive, tightly knit community ... your student has an important role in his or her own success. We faculty and staff can offer resources and opportunities, but your student needs to take advantage of them. So that you know how to encourage, advise, and guide your student to academic success, I want to share with you my “top ten” list of the characteristics & behaviors of successful students. Following that I’ll give you my list of the top 10 things you can do as a parent to help the top ten for students happen.

(I imagine you’ve seen many “lists” relevant to this transition already ... but I’ve been sharing these lists for a while and they seem to be a good method of sharing the most important info, so here’s mine...)

- So - FIRST – “top ten” things successful students do:
 1. Attend class!!!! Maybe not required anymore, but still important ... spotty or poor attendance a “red flag”!!
 2. Get to know their professors
 - When I advise students, one thing I really try to drive home is how much their faculty WANT them to initiate contact. That’s the kind of place WFU is.

3. COMMUNICATE, communicate, communicate!!!

Communicate interests, needs, & concerns respectfully...and face-to-face (not just by email)

- Communicate FACE to FACE: Whether it's to clarify course requirements, assignments, or deadlines or just to get to know one another ...or whether it's to address a problem, nothing can replace face-to-face communication.
- One situation I've experienced frequently in my work with students and advisees is when they get critical feedback or an unpleasant grade, often for the first time. For academic success, it's important that the student get themselves in to see that professor, get help from their adviser, etc. There is so much help available if people know you need it. Yet students – especially if they are having doubts about whether they belong here -- often withdraw rather than ask for help. They are embarrassed or ashamed (it's SO common in my office to hear this...). Yet everyone experiences some difficulty or disappointment along the way ... we don't WANT your student to feel embarrassed or ashamed. We admire those students who reach out and ask for help and try to learn from these disappointing moments. And it's this that leads to ultimate success.

4. *Respond* to those who reach out to help

5. Space out their studying and coursework over time, rather than “cramming”
 - This can be different than high school. Procrastination more likely to have negative impact. Comment on adjustment in use of “free time”
6. Explore intellectually ... then follow their intellectual passions
 - Andy will address this more, but ... The students who are most impressive to others, including employers, at the end of the college journey – and most happy and motivated – take advantage of this unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study widely, to study – in the words of *What the Best College Students Do* - “a rich assortment of fields”. Studying widely helps your student think broadly, across disciplines, and integrate ideas ... then find, embrace, and invest in their own unique intellectual passions. This passion – and the fact that students tend to achieve best when they are passionate about their learning – is what launches students into successful careers and lives of fulfillment.
7. Take initiative / responsibility – they plan ahead, work to solve their own problems, take responsibility for their part in problems, avoid blaming others or expecting others (including parents) to solve their problems for them..

8. Expect good things to happen ... but know that success takes work, and that they will face challenges and adversity. Therefore they are prepared for challenges and stress and plan ahead for how to handle it.
- Have healthy options: exercise, sleep, eating well, yoga, meditation, time with friends, spiritual connections, reaching out to others
 - Know what cheating or plagiarism is, and have decided ahead of time that no bad grade is worth succumbing to temptations to cheat or steal
9. When they experience adversity, disappointments, or even failure, their reaction is NOT to give up, but to GET UP, brush themselves off, learn from the experience, and move on. In book *What the Best College Students Do*, this is a central theme – the best students don't expect success to always come easily – they know they will have to work for it, including persisting in the face of obstacles at times. To learn from experience, it helps to communicate with those who can help (see #3 above).

10. Get involved but not over-involved. They do something outside of the classroom that helps them connect with others of similar interests and values, that helps them develop skills in teamwork and leadership, that helps them give back to others (and thus keep their own lives and stresses in perspective), that builds “school spirit”. Getting involved in a meaningful and fun way can provide that healthy stress-relief as well as a true sense of belonging. But it’s important not to do too much, so that there is enough time to study and to sleep!

- **TOP TEN THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP**

1. Encourage your student to do these things I just talked about (e.g., attend class, communicate, space out studying, plan ahead for papers & exams – do some work every day, get involved in something, etc.)

2. Allow them to follow their interests & passions.
 - a. We at Wake Forest will be encouraging your child to explore their academic interests and passions, and we hope you will do the same – even if those interests and passions turn out to be something different than what you expected. If you want the best for your child with respect to their academic and career success as well as for their personal happiness and fulfillment – and I know you do --please find out what intellectual topics they really love, listen carefully to what they tell you, and support them in pursuing those passions. Give your child permission to find & follow the things that interest them.
3. Normalize the ups and downs of (college) life, and transitions.
 - I know that you all know ... there are ups & downs/bad times and good times (it's not ALL wonderful, and that's ok) – let your child know that.
 - College is likely to be harder than HS, grades might be worse (A full 47% of the students in this class were in the top 5% of their class... they can't all be in the top 5%)
 - It can take a semester or even a year to feel like you belong

4. Don't expect academic perfection (I cringe when I hear a parent state expectations for a 4.0!); help child see challenges, problems, mistakes – not as catastrophes – but as normal (“This too shall pass”); tell them you'd rather have them get a lower grade than to cheat or plagiarize). Encourage them to enjoy learning and to “do their best”.
5. Let your student take the lead in addressing and solving problems and making decisions –don't solve problems / make decisions FOR them
 - a. Remember that there will be challenges & disappointments. Remember in this that our joint goal is for your student to grow in his/her ability to deal with a complex world and with a variety of personal challenges. Therefore, in the vast majority of cases, it is important to encourage your student to take the initiative in gathering information that they need, in seeking out help, in problem-solving
6. (Instead of doing the problem-solving ...) Show interest, support; provide guidance, encouragement, be a sounding board
7. Listen (you heard a lot about this last night ...)
8. Once you've listened, share your values, advice, and wisdom ... don't assume your child knows your expectations & values

9. Encourage health (and legal) means of having fun, socializing, and de-stressing. Looking at this another way, don't implicitly or explicitly approve of unhealthy or illegal behavior.

a. If you view underage drinking as inevitable or "part of the fun" of college, think twice (hark back to panel on High-Risk Behaviors from yesterday).

10. Model the behaviors you want to see in your child: accept that adversity happens, be patient with & forgiving of self & others when it does, model honor & integrity, model healthy behavior & healthy ways of coping with stress ... take care of yourself!

- Tell them about **new course FYE 101** ... which will emphasize dialogue skills, self-awareness, cultural competence, mindfulness. It is not a required class, but we think it will be really worthwhile. Encourage your student to stay in it, or perhaps to add it if a space opens up. Even though it doesn't meet a requirement, it could very well help them be more successful throughout their college journey.

- PARENT COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENT and WITH US AT WFU
- As parents it is indeed important for you to keep in touch with your students, and if problems arise to encourage them to address early. You've also heard from me today:

it's important that parents not try to solve problems or make decisions for their students, or your student will not learn how to do these things competently for him/herself.

- In the event that you do want to communicate directly with our staff about your student's educational needs or progress, I need to tell you about the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act: FERPA, for short. Because your student is legally an adult, we cannot discuss or share grades or other academic matters with you unless this waiver of rights has been signed by your student! Your student can provide this permission online through a service called "proxy access" (information provided by the Registrar's office, <http://registrar.wfu.edu/academicrecords/proxyaccess/>). If your student provides you with "proxy" access, you will be able to see the exact same student information pages that he/she sees online, in real time, and using your own login. If your student designates you as a "proxy," you will receive an email from the Office of the University Registrar with instructions about setting up your proxy account.

If we have this permission on file, we can be much more open in any conversations you might wish to have with us about your child.

- **Whether your child has given FERPA permission, however, PLEASE call us in the Office of Academic Advising if you sense that there's a problem your student cannot address. That phone number is 336-758-3320. Examples of when you should call?**
 - You haven't been able to contact your student for what you consider a reasonable time period.
 - There's a significant illness or family emergency that will adversely affect class attendance or concentration,
 - You want some ideas or guidance about ways to advise your student in a particular situation.
- You can also contact me at any time by email, that email is buchanan@wfu.edu. My business phone is: 336 758 3320. For the most part, I hope you would use this office number if you need to reach me. However, if you have a situation of serious concern, a situation that is affecting your child's safety or well-being that is off hours in the evening or weekend, you can call me on my personal cell phone, which is 336 391 5996. I trust that this privilege will not be abused. If there is an emergency that you are concerned might be life threatening, you should however call our campus emergency line, which is 336-758-5911 (or just 911).

- I DO ask that you not contact faculty members. Two reasons for this: (1) they don't know whether that FERPA permission has been given, and – even more important, and at the heart of our shared mission ---(2) your student needs to be developing the skills for dealing directly with those who are setting tasks for and evaluating them. It is to your student's benefit that you let your student handle those conversations. To summarize, then, the best ways for parents to ask academic questions are:
 - First, have good open communications with your own student
 - Second, when needed, please do contact us in the Office of Academic Advising, and encourage your student to do the same!

- WRAP UP
- This is a very exciting time for you and your families. It's one of the highlights of my job to be able to help families make and celebrate such a momentous and positive transition, one that represents years of hard work, motivation, and perseverance on the part of parents and students alike. I hope this has answered some of your questions and that you leave here feeling comfortable and assured that your child is in good hands, and with some strategies in hand to help support your student's academic success.