Tuning in to What Your Student is Learning

Ask about more than just grades! Studying and striving for good grades are both important and admirable, but college has a lot more to offer besides just book learning. When you're trying to stay connected to your student's life while they're away at school, ask about some other things, too. For instance...

- **Talk about books**, especially if your son or daughter is the type of person to do reading outside of what is assigned. Have you read a great book lately? Maybe your child has, too. Talking about literature is a great way to get a fuller understanding of what you have read and also about the way your student thinks.

- **Ask about their favorite professor** and what makes him/her such a good teacher. Talking about what goes on in class aside from assignments will give you a more complete picture of your child's day-to-day experiences.

- **If your student has a job or internship, ask what they like and don't like about it.** After they tell you what's on their mind, give some suggestions on how to make what they dislike easier, and offer any advice you might have on what they could look for in another position either next semester or after graduation.

- **The social aspect of college is a learning experience, too.** Is your daughter in a sorority? Does your son plan campus events? Ask about them! Your student might also want to complain about a roommate or rave about a new friend, but is just looking for you to ask first.

- **Has your student still not chosen a major?** Talk about the best and worst classes he or she has taken, and work together to figure out what a good path could be. You can at least narrow it down to a few different subjects.

- **If your student is taking a class that sounds similar to one you took while you were a high school or college student, tell him or her what you remember about the course.** Depending on the nature of the material, it's very possible that the way that particular subject is taught now is very different than the way it was taught a few decades earlier. But who knows, maybe it's exactly the same! Talking about the similarities and differences will give you great insight into what is being taught, learned, and understood.

- **If you also went to college, talking about your own experiences gives your student the chance to open up to you about his or her own.** The most important part of keeping in tune with what your child is learning is keeping the lines of communication open and comfortable.

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**The Learning Lab**

Instead of grades, you can focus on learning topics such as:

- A paper or project topic your student is currently pursuing
- Something cool they just learned in lab
- An interesting classroom conversation and what made it so
- A discussion your student had with a peer, a teaching assistant or a professor
- One of the most interesting things they’ve learned in class this week
- Something your student learned about himself while working on a group project
- Research tricks that are helping him dig up great info for his next paper

There is a wealth of topics to discuss that focus on learning rather than grades. Give them a try!
any students don’t set foot in the campus Career Center until they’re a senior, frantic to get their resume critiqued so they can find a job. Yet, it’s wise to visit this helpful office early on – even during the first year – because career counselors can help students get on track and explore career options they may not have known about otherwise.

Jobs within Different Majors. For instance, many career offices offer helpful lists of “What You Can Do with a ____ Major.” If your student is a biology major, does she know about options beyond the lab? She can work for an environmental group, take a job in a zoo, teach, be a science writer and so much more.

Personal Career Inventories. Your student can also take a career inventory or two to identify possible interests. Many of these personal surveys can be done online, right in the career center. And the trained professionals within the office can help students go over their results and determine their next steps.

Tapping Into Campus Resources

Your student can gather career-related info from a variety of sources. So, encourage him/her to:

- Make note of and attend Career Fairs on campus.
- Attend career panels that may be sponsored by the Career Services office, student clubs or faculty members.
- Go to the Activities Fair to get a good sense of the clubs and organizations on campus.
- Check out guest lectures, who can often provide insight into the speaker’s professional field.
- Read profiles in the alumni magazine to discover what others have gone on to do after college.
- Peruse the career collection in the library.
- Visit the Career Center.

Job Prep

To prepare for filling out job applications and preparing a resume, students should be able to:

- List their last employers, complete with contact names, addresses and phone numbers.
- List their dates of employment in chronological order.
- List the accurate names and dates of awards they’ve received.
- List various community service/volunteer efforts, along with accurate dates and agency/organization names.

Having these pieces of information ready on hand will help your student be able to easily fill out an application at a moment’s notice.

Career Counselors and Peer Mentors. These caring, knowledgeable staff members want to help guide students in their career exploration. So, encourage your student to make an appointment for an informational meeting where they can get to know a career counselor, as well as what the Career Center has to offer.

A Career File. Opening a career file makes sense, too. This is a way for your student to develop a relationship with one of the career counselors and to start a personal paper trail. This file might include letters of recommendation for summer jobs/internships, inventory results, resume drafts and more. Why not start now?

Resources Aplenty. The career center is also chock full of resources! Spending an hour in this office flipping through books, magazines and journals is time well spent.

So, encourage your student to make an appointment at the career center this semester. The earlier the better, before the center gets bombarded with juniors and seniors in a frenzy. Help your student not be one of these frantic upperclassmen. Instead, he’ll be a well-informed, well-prepared student taking control of his own destiny.