In a 2005 article, “Wandering and Wondering: Traversing the Uneven Terrain of the Second College Year,” Molly Shaller addresses the four developmental stages of students traversing the sophomore year. She encourages institutions to consider these stages while planning student programs, environments, and student learning. I believe this information is pertinent to family members as well as to the sophomore student who “wanders and wonders” through his or her sophomore year.

Shaller intended her questions to sophomores to focus on spirituality, campus involvement, and home life; however, she found what students wanted to share pertained to three issues: how they viewed themselves, their relationships, and their academic experiences and decisions. The students exist in or move through the four stages with a focus on these issues. The four stages and a brief description of each follows.

**Random Exploration:** Most students find themselves in this stage during the first year of college. This stage is filled with exuberance, lack of self-reflection, and an acute awareness of choices needing to be made regarding majors and careers but delayed action in decision making. Most students transition from this stage to the next at the end of the freshmen year or over the summer between first and second years.

**Focused Exploration:** Students in this stage find themselves frustrated with current relationships, with themselves, and/or with their academic experiences. Additionally, these students are beginning to feel pressure to select a major as well as have a sense of a future career and life direction. During this stage, students may lose enthusiasm for classes because they cannot connect classroom topics to future goals. One student in the study described this year by saying, “I think it’s almost like a turning point in a way….It’s like you are standing on a fence.” The image of the fence is appropriate—sophomores look back at the freshman year and their childhood, and look forward to the rest of college and their careers. It can be overwhelming at times.

Shaller does suggest that students who embrace focused exploration more thoroughly move through the stage with a more comprehensive reflection. Others may rush to find answers about themselves, relationships, and academics that “fit well enough.” We should all be supportive of students who delve deeply into the focused exploration stage.

**Tentative Choices:** Students in the sophomore year begin to make choices that will impact the remainder of their college experience. According to the author, students in this stage are beginning to develop a sense of responsibility for examining their future more closely. It is the process of decision making that is most important during this stage, i.e. that the student engages in thorough focused exploration and makes decisions based on internal connections to the exploration period.

**Commitment:** At this stage, students are able to plan for their future, have a real understanding about what they want and a true sense of responsibility for their future. Shaller states that students in this stage are “either resolute in their choices or they felt such relief in making a choice that they ignored their other options.”

Understanding these stages is crucial for institutions focusing on student learning, living environments, and programming. The author suggests that we encourage students to make the sophomore year the year they take responsibility for their learning. ECU also suggests that sophomores make this “the year that makes more of them.”
Wrapping Up the Fall Semester

Your student’s second fall semester is almost over! As soon as they return from Thanksgiving break, they will begin preparation for final exams. Even though they have been here before (last year), they may still experience the stress of exams and final semester grades.

Know what to expect

Students are most likely excited about coming home for the holidays but may be feeling some anxiety concerning returning home. While students may have visited throughout the semester, this is the first time this semester a student will be home for an extended period—about 4 weeks overall.

The schedules that students are accustomed to on campus vary from typical home schedules. Will you expect your student to adjust back to the family schedule? Will students be expected to complete chores while at home? Who will be doing all the laundry that they bring home from college? Will students be expected to adhere to a curfew? Will you expect that students attend family meals? To avoid conflict, it may be best to discuss these items before the student arrives home with expectations as to what home life will be like.

As a parent, you are probably anxious to see your student’s grades for this semester. Remember—grades are not mailed home to students or parents, but students can access grades using their OneStop account.

Please see Academic Eligibility Standards on page 3.

The Career Center

Careers 201—For Parents of Second Year Students (Original article by Sally Kearsley)

Generally, during the second year of college, a student begins to explore majors and career options more seriously. Many colleges and universities require that new students take a broad range of subjects to promote this exploration. What’s your role in this step of development?

- Don’t insist upon a decision about a major or possible career choice immediately. If you sense that your student’s indecision is a barrier to positive progress, urge that he or she look for assistance in the career center. Students often have difficulty making a “final” choice because they fear they may close off options and make a wrong choice.
- Suggest that your child talk with faculty, advisor and career advisors about potential choices.
- Don’t assume that if your child chooses to major in English, history, philosophy, or some other “impractical” major that he/she will never get a job. Liberal arts studies sharpen skills which are critical to the “package” employers are seeking: strong written and oral communication skills, problem-solving skills, the ability to synthesize information, and excellent research skills.
- Suggest learning a foreign language and developing computer skills. Both of these skills can be helpful in today’s market, no matter what career field he or she chooses!
- Direct your child to family, friends, or colleagues who are in fields in which your student has an interest. “Informational interviewing” with people can be extremely helpful at this stage!
- Steer your child toward a source of information. Check out ECU’s career advisors or mentoring network of alumni in various career fields who are willing to share information about their careers. These resources are invaluable both in this exploratory stage and later as students seeking internships and jobs!
A recent request to provide an essay for a publication targeting college sophomores left me perplexed. Sadly, I have trouble naming that exceptional sophomore, and I even had trouble remembering anything exceptional about my own sophomore year (and not because it was much longer ago than I like to admit). We all savor those key moments from our freshman year: the acceptance letter, meeting roommates, finding the dining hall, and enjoying a sense of independence and freedom sitting in your first college class. My trip down memory lane also reminded me of the excitement, anxiety, and uncertainty surrounding the final year of college. But what happened in between the first night in the dorms and throwing our caps in the air? The path from matriculation to graduation is marked with important milestones, but they are often personal and therefore lack accompanying celebrations.

On the other hand, an article in Sophomore Soundings characterized the all too often less memorable sophomore year as a “slump” marked by students struggling as the excitement of college wears off, feeling isolated as attention is paid to a new incoming class of freshmen, and coping with the inevitable transition from teenager to independent and purposeful adult. Nonetheless, the sophomore year is also a time when students begin to focus in on an area of study, take a more active role in campus organizations, and even learn to find the library in an emergency. Successfully navigating this period can be eased with the development of lasting relationships cultivated through our social interactions and academic pursuits. Instrumental in this process can be professional relationships between faculty and students. College professors often serve as mentors laying a foundation for those embarking on life’s journey. They are not simply here to enter grades at the end of the term but to ensure their students understand their potential and gain the confidence to pursue their goals. Similarly, students must acknowledge the numerous opportunities college campuses offer to engage with faculty beyond the classroom. Connecting with faculty while listening to a guest lecture, attending an athletic event, or eating lunch at the dining hall should not be remembered as awkward moments of “what were they doing there!” They should be appreciated as moments reminding us that we are connected to a larger community.

As a member of the faculty at ECU, I am aware of the importance of retaining freshmen and preparing them for the challenges they face over the next few years of their academic careers. I also enjoy the annual graduation rituals signifying the culmination of the collegiate experience. And thanks to this assignment, I now understand the sophomore year as a critical moment for students considering (if not sparingly) the next steps in their journey. If faculty and students take the time to connect, student/teacher interactions will become more comfortable, classes will become more engaging, and learning will become more exciting. As this relationship evolves beyond exams, projects, and grades, moments traditionally marked by tension and intimidation will become encouraging and relevant. Such relationships will not occur with each interaction, but the potential is always there as students see faculty as individuals interested in their future aspirations and persons willing to share advice.

We are successful in retaining our students and our graduates make us proud but, we cannot afford to lose focus on those who need our guidance as they navigate the potentially confusing environment that is college life.
The Office of Student Transitions and First Year Programs provides a coordinated, comprehensive approach to enhancing first year student success, and beyond, by achieving four fundamental goals: developing a sense of belonging, collaborating with academic affairs, serving as a liaison for parent council, and maintaining a sense of progression during the first year of college and beyond. These goals are accomplished through the following functional areas: New Student Orientation, Transfer Student Orientation, Freshman Seminar (COAD 1000), Plunge Into Purple, Student Convocation, Parent Services & Diversity Outreach, Transfer Student Services, and successfully transitioning beyond the freshman year.

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**Campus Rec and Wellness—Healthy PIRATES/Peer Health**

East Carolina University’s peer health educators are a diverse group of students who are trained to teach fellow students about pertinent health issues in a positive, interactive and nonjudgmental manner. Topics range from alcohol and other drugs, smoking cessation, sexuality programming, nutrition/body image/eating disorders, stress management, and more.

Peer health educators can receive academic credit (HLTH 2500) as an elective or can join the Healthy PIRATES student organization to receive the training and participate in campus programming efforts. Look for peer health educators creatively promoting health around campus! And be sure to join the ECU Healthy PIRATES Facebook page. Interested in becoming a peer health educator? Contact Georgia Childs at 328-5172 for more information. You can also contact the Executive Committee of the Healthy PIRATES.

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**Reminder—ECU Parent Support Site**

Are you feeling like you are lost and have questions that you don’t know where to find the answers? If so, the ECU Parent Services website is just the place for you. You can also visit our Facebook page or follow us on our Twitter. Our goal is to support you and provide information you may need, engage you with other parents of ECU students, and help you with that feeling of not quite knowing which way to turn. We hope to be able to alleviate some of this by connecting you with other parents who have the same experiences as you.

In addition to our main website, ECU Parent Services also sends email communications with information pertaining to ECU, such as events, academic and school calendar events, weather advisories, links, and community activities. These emails include important information about ECU and the surrounding community as well.

If you have questions or concerns during business hours, please call our Toll-Free Helpline: 1-866-552-3957.

We look forward to supporting you. Welcome to ECU and GO PIRATES!!

Parent Services
PARENTS@ecu.edu
252-328-6847 or toll free 866-552-3957
www.ecu.edu/parents   www.facebook.com ("Like" ECU Parents)

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Ticket Info: Complementary tickets are available to ECU students, faculty and staff and are $10 for the general public. Tickets are available through the Central Ticket Office by calling 252-328-4788 or 1-800-ECU-ARTS.

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