Making the Most of the Undergrad Experience

A new year gives us all pause, as we plot and plan what we want the next 12 months to look like. One context to consider involves encouraging your student to make the most of his undergrad experience.

What might this look like? Here are some areas to consider together…

**Campus Involvement.** Has your student been so nose-to-the-grindstone academically that he failed to get involved outside the classroom? Co-curricular involvements, from campus clubs to student organizations, can actually enhance a student’s classroom performance. Plus, it’s a way to learn new things, meet people with diverse interests and build those leadership skills. What involvement opportunity can your student try in the new year?

**Diverse People & Ideas.** A college campus is a great place to engage with people who are different from us and to be exposed to new ideas. This might take the form of a study abroad program, trying a new type of class, attending educational and cultural events, and more. What is your student doing to meet a variety of people? What new ways of thought is he experiencing?

**Career Options.** The campus resources regarding careers are numerous, from internships to job shadowing programs to resume critiques — and so much more! What services can your student tap into this new year to kick-start his career search before senior year rolls around?

**Community Connections.** Reaching out beyond the campus walls is a good practice for students, too. This can take the form of things like community service, attending off-campus events or knowing what’s happening in town. What type of outreach can your student try?

**Forging Relationships.** The relationships formed in college are some of the strongest in your student’s life — from friends who live on his floor to classmates to mentors to faculty and staff. Has your student sought out a mentor to provide guidance? Is he taking the opportunity to meet others beyond his small circle?

Talk with your student about ways to make the most of his undergrad experience. Being thoughtful now can help ensure that he engages meaningfully in the term to come.
Dealing with Difficult People
Tips to Share with Your Student

There are all sorts of difficult people in the world. Some may push your buttons while others may push you to the brink of distraction. Yet, when it comes down to it, difficult people are, at the base, just people. So, learning to contend with them effectively is one of the smartest things your student can do.

Some points to share with your student as she keeps difficult people in perspective:

Most people just want to be listened to. Is she practicing reflective listening when talking with individuals so that they know she is hearing and absorbing what they have to say?

People are socialized in different ways. When someone does something that she considers rude, it’s best if she considers the fact that the person may not have been socialized in the same way that she was. Our points of reference are likely different as a result of different upbringings.

We all need attention. And some people may go about garnering that attention by being difficult. Perhaps your student can turn the tides by recognizing them for positive attributes so they may not feel the need to solicit negative attention.

Too much attention can backfire. When difficult people see that they’re getting a rise out of your student, this can reinforce their negative behaviors. Encourage her to keep her reactions in check.

We all need an outlet. Dealing with difficult folks can take its toll. That’s why it’s important for your student to have a confidential sounding board at her disposal. An objective party can often help her wade through hurt feelings, anger and frustration to come up with more effective ways to manage those difficult ones.

“Difficulties mastered are opportunities won.”
— Sir Winston Churchill

Training Our Brains to Increase Intelligence

You can increase your intelligence through brain training. That’s according to recent scientific discoveries, says Dan Hurely, author of Smarter: The New Science of Building Brain Power.

Certain games and training exercises can engage our working memory — that which allows us to manipulate information we’re holding in our brains — and increase fluid intelligence or our capacity to learn new things. In turn, this can increase basic cognitive skills that help us complete many different complex tasks, according to a study from Susanne Jaeggi and Martin Buschkuehl.

Using N-back Games

N-back challenges are one way to engage your working memory. These computerized games ask users to think on their feet. A task might involve something like being read four numbers and then being asked to repeat them backwards. Persistence with these games is what helps reap the benefits.

Popular sites like Lumosity provide such games, offering an opportunity to build a personalized training program that enhances memory and attention. Other sites and apps can also be found by searching “N-back games” online.

So, if you and your student are looking to harness untapped brainpower, brain training may be the way to go.

Marketing Themselves: What Students Can Do

In today’s tight job market, you can assure your student that the skills and experience he has gained are in high demand. However, he can’t just let people guess what he has to offer—he needs to share it.

A Brand

Remind your student that his name is a brand, telling people what they’re going to get when they hire him. Is he trustworthy? Responsible? A hard worker? Smart? Innovative? Someone with a good attitude? Encourage your student to explore these questions for himself.

Students also need to understand that branding is about emphasizing what makes them stand out. What would your student say about himself? What would others say? Suggest that your student ask a few trusted friends and mentors this question. Then invite him to think about how his special features benefit others and how he can communicate those benefits.

As your student “brands” himself for the job search, he needs to think about a few things:

- How do I add value to the things I’m involved with?
- What are some characteristics that I’m proud of?
- What are my interests and passions?
- How do I make myself visible to others?
- What makes me stand out?

Transferable Skills

You can also educate your student about the importance of translating transferable skills. Part of branding himself effectively is focusing on transferable skills rather than just what he knows or has learned.

What is a transferable skill? It is a core skill that most employers value and can be taken with a student and applied to a new professional role.

Encourage your student to consider how he has demonstrated the following:

- Leadership – campus positions, job roles, committees and group projects
- Trainability – able to take direction and open to learning
- Reliability – punctual, meets deadlines, time management
- Management – administration, supervision, training
- Trustworthiness – handling confidential information
- Teamwork – collaboration, common vision, mutual goals
- Diversity – travels, immersion into diverse cultures, a second language

Ask him how he can translate these skill sets in a way that makes sense in the jobs for which he applies.

In today’s job market, employers are looking not just at what responsibilities an applicant has, but what they’ve accomplished! Employers are more results-oriented than ever before. Hands-on experiences, with supportive supervisors and mentors, can provide students with the opportunity to “sell” the results they achieved.

Ultimately, your student needs to let potential employers know who he is, what he stands for and what makes him a potential asset to their organization in order to even be considered for hire.

Examples You Can Offer…

Student Experience
- Served as a tutor
- Planned events with a group
- Designed theater sets
- Coordinated an intramurals team
- Presented research in class
- Created organization’s social network
- Organizational fundraising
- Promoted programs on campus
- Managed peer staff

Transferable Experience
- Teaching, working with diverse people
- Teamwork, event planning, multi-tasking
- Building, planning, facilitating
- Coaching, organizing, teamwork, motivation
- Public speaking, teaching
- Using new media, technological skills
- Sales, organization, outreach, cooperation
- Marketing, PR, writing
- Supervising, delegating, evaluating
Comparing “Key Happenings” with Your Student

As Martin Luther King, Jr. Day approaches this January 20, it can be a good time to talk with your student about “key happenings” in one another’s lives.

For instance, you may suspect that 9/11 or the Newtown shootings had the most profound impact on your student so far in her life. By talking, you may find that other incidents have impacted her worldview, her values and her ambitions, too.

And when you share your “key happenings,” you’re letting your student see a part of your history and heart, too.

Extend this conversation to include grandparents and other elderly family members or friends as well. An intergenerational discussion about the events that shaped our lives can be invaluable as you and your student learn more about what makes each other tick.

MLK, In His Own Words

For the full text, video and/or audio of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous speeches to share with your student, you can log on to the site www.americanrhetoric.com. You’ll find links to speeches such as:

- “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”
- “I Have a Dream”
- “A Time to Break Silence” (declaration against Vietnam War)
- Robert F. Kennedy’s remarks on the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

You can also go to YouTube for links to his speeches, a video that goes with U2’s tribute song “Pride” and more.

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: ‘What are you doing for others?’”

This quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. helps emphasize the importance of the MLK Day of Service, held each January in his honor. Find out more by going to http://mlkday.gov/.

20 Ways to Embrace Diversity

The campus environment is filled with opportunities for your student to embrace diversity, learning about herself — and others — in the process.

1. Talk with others about their backgrounds.
2. Compare the origins of your names to learn the stories involved.
3. Inform people if something they say is offensive and why.
4. Create bulletin boards that depict people of all different ages, sexual orientations, races, religions, genders and more.
5. Volunteer to help with an event devoted to support a diverse group.
6. Learn a cultural dance.
7. Watch a controversial or educational movie and discuss it afterwards.
8. Go to a museum to see a cultural exhibit.
9. Cook a cultural dish and revel in the different smells and tastes.
10. Read something by a Jewish, Spanish, LGBTQ or Native American author that is outside of your “typical” reads.
11. Celebrate various holidays, from Purim to the Vernal Equinox to Easter.
12. Work on a cultural festival that features dancing, food, facts, ceremonies and more from various countries and cultures.
13. Proudly learn more about your own cultural heritage.
14. Make plans to attend a local march, rally or protest in support of another group’s rights.
15. Put together an educational or social program that highlights diversity.
16. Advocate for the increased accessibility of campus spaces.
17. Attend a concert or theater presentation that is outside your comfort zone.
18. Ask an international student to share some of his customs, foods and photos with you.
19. Be aware of one another’s needs.
20. Be open to learning, experiencing and embracing new people and ways of doing things!