

INFORMATION FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Tips for a Smooth Transition to College

As your student begins college, we want to support YOU as you support your student. Our experience has shown us that when students experience problems or have concerns, their parents are the ones they turn to, so we want to provide you with information to support their success. Many of us working at MVCC are parents of college students ourselves. We understand your feelings! Know that we, as student developmental professionals, have your student's best interests at heart. We want to support each student to find purpose and become independent.

Share with your student that support services are NOT just for students having problems. Good students also benefit from having better study skills, using tutoring to enhance their performance and seeking career counseling. The staff at MVCC can assist students in setting their educational goals and outlining the steps necessary to reach them. A clear goal increases the chances of persistence and success.

Supporting Your Student as He/She Transitions into College

One of the first things your student may need is reassurance. New college students sometimes begin to doubt whether they made the right decision about college. Your support will be helpful.

- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Be understanding and a good listener.
- Express your support.
- Ask about what they are learning.
- Show interest in their classes and experiences.
- Help them to focus on the positive and to brainstorm possible solutions if problems do occur.
- Let them know that you believe in them! Because college is so much more difficult than high school, understand that it takes time (sometimes more than one semester) to adjust.
- Understand that it may not be realistic to expect the same grades they earned in high school.

- Support your student by understanding the stress he/she feels in adjusting to a new environment and schedule.

We know that starting college is an adjustment for you and for your student. While it may be difficult, it is time to trust that you have raised your student well. An important part of college is having new experiences and being exposed to new ideas. Expect your student to explore and perhaps form new opinions.

Letting Go

College students need their parents to let go. As hard as it may be, it is time to stop doing everything for them and to let them grow by figuring things out on their own. A good rule of thumb is to try not to do anything for them that they could do themselves. It may be hard to watch them try new things on their own and perhaps even make some mistakes—but we all know what a valuable learning experience this can be. Trust them to make good decision, but also be there to support them if they make a bad decision. Become familiar with the resources we have to help students transition to college so you will be prepared to help, if asked.

If Your Student Has Problems

If your student talks with you about concerns, listen, stay calm, and try to determine if your role should be to listen and allow him/her to work things out alone—or if the situation is more serious and requires intervention.

If your student experiences academic difficulty, urge him/her to seek help at the first sign of a problem. There are many free resources available including tutoring in the Learning Center.

Another great idea is to urge your student to talk with his/her instructor. Our faculty members love to talk to students! Students also benefit from study groups, so encourage your student to set one up early with others in the class. There are also counselors and academic advisors available to talk with students about academic problems and work toward solutions.

Know that we hold students accountable and expect them to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Therefore, we do not expect, or want, parents to try to fix things for their student. There are many people at MVCC who will help and support students if they take responsibility for their decisions and behavior.

Encourage Involvement on Campus

Urge your student to get involved outside of class in student clubs and organizations such as Student Congress, Drama Club, Photography Club, Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and Criminal Justice Club, and/or intramural sports teams or varsity athletics. Our experience has shown

that the more involved your student is on campus, the more connected he/she will feel and the more likely it is that he/she will stay in college and succeed.

If Your Student Is Not Sure About a Major

If your student is undecided (which is very normal for incoming college students) offer support, but try not to pressure him/her to make a career decision immediately. Encourage exploration through coursework and through using the free career planning services in the First Year Experience office.

Work and internship experiences may also help clarify career interests and are available through the First Year Experience office.

Academic Advising is Critical

Before your student pre-schedules for classes each semester, encourage him/her to meet with an academic advisor. This ensures that all classes will apply to a specific degree or certificate and will transfer to the four-year college or university of choice. Even if your student is considering a change of major, an academic advisor can help with a selection of classes that have the best likelihood of applying to many degrees. We do not want to waste student's (or your!) time and money on unnecessary or inappropriate classes.

College vs. High School

College is much more challenging for most students than high school and requires lots of hard work and effort outside of class time. We tell our students to plan to study two hours for every hour they are in class. So if a student is enrolled in 12 credit hours, he/she needs to plan 24 hours of study time per week in addition to 12 hours spent in class. The biggest mistake we see students make is trying to work too much while they are in college. We advise that full-time college students not work more than 20 hours a week.

Enhancing Academic Skills

Sometimes students need to improve their academic skills in reading, writing, or math before they are able to take classes bearing college credit in those areas. Such classes count toward financial aid eligibility, but they won't apply to the degree or transfer to another college. Still, most students who place into these courses find them to be essential for college success and readiness for college level work. All students are required to take ED100 College Seminar in the first semester. The course is intended to increase knowledge about campus resources and academic planning. Remember too, that there is free tutoring available through the Learning Center on campus.

If Your Student has a Disability

If your student has a disability, encourage him/her to work with the Disability Services Office. Students need to contact the office well in advance of starting college, if possible, so that everything can be in place when classes begin. Disability services are free and confidential. If your student is eligible, he/she can receive free accommodations in classes without other students even being aware of the disability. Services for students with disabilities are set up very differently in college than in high school. Your student must request services and provide documentation. Instructors will not be aware of what disability the student has, only of the accommodations provided.

Seasonal Stressors in College

Expect that there will be ups and downs over the semester due to the stresses and demands of college. Some possible monthly struggles are:

September—adjusting to a new environment and new academic expectations; feeling confused/overwhelmed by new information; changing and making new friendships; desiring to fit in; possible disappointment with first test grade(s); feeling that she/he is the only one struggling.

October/November—anxiety about mid-term exams; ongoing adjustment to academic demands; stress resulting from involvement in school, work, extracurricular activities and social life; possible consideration of changing majors as enrollment for spring semester begins.

December—apprehension about finals and grades.

January—readjustment to college routine after the month-long break.

February/March—possible mid-winter “blues” as students realize there are several months left of winter and school; pressures around academic performance; concern about choosing a major; worries about belonging to a peer group; anxiety about mid-terms.

April/May—possible spring-fever making it difficult to come to school, study and/or pay attention; worry about examinations, research papers and grades.

MVCC has a staff of advisors and counselors to assist your student with career, personal, and academic concerns. The services are free and confidential.