

# Penn State Families & Parents as Partners

Orientation Edition Spring 2012

On the web:  
[berks.psu.edu/parentsfamilies.htm](http://berks.psu.edu/parentsfamilies.htm)

## Important Contacts for you and your student

On the web: [berks.psu.edu](http://berks.psu.edu)

### Parent Services

Sandra Reichel: 610-396-6076

### Clubs and Organizations

Andrea Pfaff: 610-396-6076

### Commuter Services

Pete Coleman: 610-396-6072

### Financial Aid

Judy Rile: 610-396-6070

### Housing and Food Service

Kathy Ashby: 610-396-6353

### Information Technology

Help Desk: 610-396-6195

### Living Off-campus

Andrea Pfaff: 610-396-6076

### Residence Life

Daniel T. Brown: 610-396-6290

### Tuition/Bursar

Tina Scornavacchi: 610-396-6043



<b>Jan. 9</b>	First Day of Class!
<b>Jan. 16</b>	MLK Day; No Class
<b>Mar. 3-10</b>	Spring Break; Residence Halls closed
<b>Apr. 9-14</b>	Spring Week Activities!
<b>Apr. 27</b>	Last day of class
<b>May 1-4</b>	Final Exam Period
<b>May 5</b>	Commencement; Residence Halls close for summer break

## Beginning College About Finding Balance



Beginning college is a time of significant transition for all students, who must adjust to a very different academic pace and often need to develop a new group of friends. Students living away from home must also adapt to a new living situation while students commuting from home must

learn to renegotiate their family roles and obligations. In the course of lifetime, there are few occasions where a person must adapt to change in so many aspects of their life at the same time.

While it is almost a guarantee that students will stumble a bit during their first year, fortunately most endure the transitions and successfully continue on through their academic career. In fact, it is often those challenges that provide students with the greatest opportunities for their individual growth and maturity.

So, how can you, as an avid student supporter, provide the best assistance to your student as s/he experiences his/her first year? A crucial aspect is for you to find an appropriate balance between your involvement and your student's autonomy. Occasionally, family members lean toward one extreme or another. A family member who is too involved will intercept every challenge that the student faces and directly intervene with his/her student's concerns. If the student has roommate troubles, a parent may contact a staff member and insist the student be moved or directly call the roommate and "set the roommate straight". Another over-involved family member may call the student's instructors to find

*(See Balance on page 2)*



*Striking a balance with your student during the first year may not be a circus act, but will contribute largely to student success.*

## Privacy, Student Records and You

You may have heard at some point or another about the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) which makes a good deal of your student's academic information private, even though you may be paying the bill.

Good news awaits though, as your student can consent to release information to you. A common way to do so is for students to allow families to access academic or tuition information through the internet on E-lion.

To participate, the family member must have a PSU or Friends of PSU account (available for free), and the student must enter that account information in a section of their E-lion account called "Parent/Other Access." More information is at [elion.psu.edu](http://elion.psu.edu).



### Are you a member of Facebook?

Sign up to join the Penn State Berks Parents and Family Association group! To find us, enter "Penn State Berks Parents and Family Association" in the search box.

# Striking a Balance for Student Success

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out if the student is attending class or contact the University President if his/her student failed to make the varsity team. While the involved loved ones may now feel better about the situation, the student only learns to rely on family to address problems and doesn't learn how to problem solve. Essentially, the caring family member is stunting that student's maturity.

A family member who provides too much autonomy may drop off the student on arrival day believing that because the student is now in college, s/he is now an adult with solid decision-making skills and social maturity. That loved one may chat briefly on the phone but never get a sense of what's going on for the student. How are the student's classes? Is s/he attending class? Who are the student's friends? What does the student do to socialize? On occasion, family members who are striving to give their students' complete autonomy are shocked when they later learn that their student has not attended class all semester or was cited for several University violations.

The formula for striking the best balance of involvement and autonomy varies with each student and his/her unique qualities and experiences. When talking with your student:

**Ask about academics;** what is happening in the classroom, what assignments are due and when, how is your student performing on the papers and tests? Expect to hear some specifics. A student who only says "class is fine" may not be attending class.

**Ask about new friends;** what are their names? Where are they from? What do they do for fun? If your student is only affiliating with high school friends, your student is missing a great opportunity to connect with other new people and, in all likelihood, your student will have a harder time adjusting to college. If your student references a person who is "different," encourage your student to broaden his/her experiences by getting to know that "different" person.

**Ask about social events;** what does your student do in the evenings and on weekends? Does your student attend campus sponsored events or go out with friends? If your student says there are no activities on campus, you may want to check the campus calendar as there are events scheduled just about every day of the semester.

**Ask about your student's involvement;** Is s/he involved with any clubs or athletic organizations? Find out when the events occur and consider attending one of your student's sporting events or performances.

**Ask about stressors;** what is your student most worried about. Often family members will assume that college is a great, fun experience and fail to recognize the intensity of stress felt by students struggling with academics, financial issues, or other concerns. If your student shares a problem or challenge s/he is facing:

**Serve as a "coach"** and help them explore possible ways to address the issues. Although it is a shift in your role as well, strive NOT to tell them what to do. Now is the time for your student to learn how to make effective decisions. Help your student literally plan out their next step

**Encourage your student** to utilize the campus resources designed to support them. Help them learn how to be resourceful. If you don't know where to start, encourage your student to speak with someone they feel comfortable with, review their student handbook, look at the Berks Website, and/or call the Campus operator at 610-396-6000.

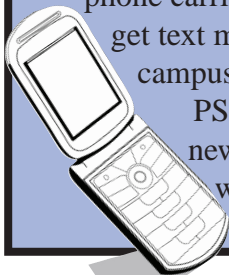


*Orientation Leaders aim to help students find a balance on campus from move-in through the first semester.*

## Be the First to Know About Weather Delays and Cancellations!

As a service to students, families and supporters, faculty and staff, Penn State allows anyone to register for free text message updates (text message charges from your cell phone carrier apply). Sign up for PSUTXT service to get text messages in the event of weather delays or campus closures. Sign up at [live.psu.edu/psutxt](http://live.psu.edu/psutxt).

PSU Live is a great source to keep up on the news around the campus and the University as well. Register for e-mail updates at [live.psu.edu](http://live.psu.edu).



If you are struggling with providing assistance for your student or feel that they are not getting the assistance they need:

**Seek to learn the appropriate resources** and then re-direct your student to those resources. Make contact with the College and recognize the staff at the College have a great deal of experience and training in addressing student issues and are very capable of assisting your student as well as providing you with guidance on ways to support your student.

Throughout the next few years, not only will your student be growing and maturing, but you will also experience a few growing pains as your relationship with your student shifts from a parent-child dynamic to a parent-adult type of interaction.