

APPENDIX B

Advice for Parents

1. ***Be involved.*** On the one hand, recognize that you still have an important role to play in your adult son or daughter's college education, especially as they navigate college toward their career path. Some of the students who we see struggle the most are those whose parents seem to have a completely hands-off approach to their student's college experience. Of course, life can get in the way, and sometimes there are health, financial, or family issues that prevent parents from focusing on their student's experience as much as they wish they could. In other cases, parents may feel that the need to let their child figure things out completely on their own because that's part of "growing up." To the extent possible, we recommend carving out some time on a regular basis to connect with your student. Discuss what college is like, and see how you can help. The decisions they make during college obviously do not determine their whole lives, but they do have a significant influence on how prepared students will be for the labor market, and for life more generally. Parents can help emerging adults get the most out of college.

2. ***Don't be too involved.*** On the other hand, college provides the opportunity (and need) to transition your relationship with your adult(ish) student toward the eventual adult-to-adult relationship you will have going forward. That requires you to let go of the reins a bit, and let students decide for themselves. You will continue to guide them, but not direct them as much. It also means being open to their ideas, as half-baked as they may be. Perhaps their ideas need major refinement, but they are still attempts to choose for themselves who they are to be. That process of choosing and refining is important itself!
3. ***Counsel, but don't intervene.*** Most faculty and university administrators frown upon parents contacting them directly or emailing them on behalf of their students. We understand parents' desires to continue to express their love for children in similar ways as when they were in grade school and high school (the latter of which may have been just a few months ago!). However, most professors are taken aback when parents reach out to them directly, and despite parents' good intentions, this could have a negative effect on their children's experiences in college. It is important to realize that parental involvement in college is not encouraged, nor viewed positively, as it was at earlier schooling levels. While a parent can mean well in jumping to their student's rescue, such an encounter can cause professors to view their child as dependent on parental intervention, rather than seeing the student as an independent emerging adult. Instead, we recommend talking with your emerging adult about what kinds of contact *she or he* should have with people on campus, and advising emerging adults to make these connections *solo*.
4. ***Listen and interpret (do not tell and command).*** If your student hits some difficult financial circumstances, or squanders the resources you provided, it can be hard not to take over. What your children need right now, though, is to figure their finances out for themselves. During the reorientation that students undergo during college, they may have questions, concerns, even outright

conflict with you regarding the kind of upbringing they had, and their hopes and fears about the kind of life they want to build. We recognize that parents have different ideas about their roles in their children's lives (see the parent socialization styles discussed in chapter 3).

Nevertheless, college is a middle-class system, and thus it works best when students engage their professors and take an active role in shaping their education trajectory. This is something that parents should not take over for their kids, even though college students do not have it all figured out just yet. We recommend that you talk with your kids about their finances and budget. Have those—sometimes challenging—money talks. When you do, listen more than you tell. When you do talk, think of yourself as an interpreter, a sense-maker. Help them understand their situation and their options rather than command them to make certain choices. Again, easier said than done, but at least make efforts to shift your relationship with your student in this direction.

5. ***Support and advise (do not cajole and fix).*** Students encounter a variety of setbacks during college. It is helpful when parents support them as they overcome these issues, finding ways to be resilient despite challenges. However, unlike when children were young and directly in their parents' control, parents should not step in to fix problems for their emerging adult students. Understanding how students are passing through a key developmental life stage—when they are building skills to launch adulthood—means taking a step back. Parents are helpful as advisors from afar. Instead of hovering over your students, encourage them to connect with the many sources of support they have on campus.
6. ***Try not to be an additional source of frustration.*** Though you may sometimes feel frustrated by the experiences your student has on campus, we encourage you to think of yourselves as a relief valve for your students. Be a source where they can dump

their frustrations. Then, rather than venting back to the students, we think it is best to find other adults, your friends or perhaps colleagues, whom you can share these frustrations with. When we compare students who are really struggling in college with those who are weathering the storms that college brings, we notice that college can be especially hard on students who do not seem to have anyone helping to alleviate their frustrations and confusions, and, in many cases, they struggle more when their own issues are compounded with those of their parents.

For example, a call home may involve a student saying something like this: “I cannot believe it! I got a notice from the registrar’s office that I can’t enroll in any classes because there is a hold on my account from that parking ticket I got last year. I know I paid that!!” It would be completely understandable to respond by returning the frustration, saying something like this: “That is terrible! I can’t believe how they are treating you. It’s like they don’t even know that you are there. Give me their phone number, and I’ll call them up to give them an earful.” But we recommend instead trying an approach along these lines: “Yeah, some of college can be like that. So frustrating! But lots of big systems are that way. Not everyone knows each other over there. Unlike in high school when your teachers may have eaten lunch with each other and been able to talk directly to the librarian if your library fine was preventing you from going on a field trip, you can’t assume the people at the university talk with each other. So, pick up the phone and call the parking office, or better yet—stop by on your way to work, and let them know what an issue this has caused. Try to be calm, and ask them what they can do to help you, and quickly, so that you do not miss out on the classes you want to take. Then call back the registrar’s office.” In short, help your child by encouraging them to work through their issues with campus life without compounding the frustrations they will face in any large bureaucracy like a university.

7. ***Encourage your emerging adult to connect with university faculty.*** One of the most significant experiences that students can have during college is to bond with a caring adult outside their family. There are practical reasons for this: your student will almost certainly need a recommendation letter from at least one faculty member (if not many) in order to apply for awards and scholarships, study abroad programs, jobs, or graduate school. Incoming college students often do not realize how important these recommendation letters will be for them later on, and by the time they realize (often in their last year on campus), it may be too late. The problem is not that they do not reach out at all to faculty, but that they may end up asking people to write letters about them with very little substantive knowledge of who they are.

A recommendation letter that says the faculty member has known the student from their first year on campus all the way through the last four or five years is stronger than one that says they have known them for a semester or a year. Especially strong is a letter that shows the professor knows the student not just inside but outside of the classroom, evidencing ways the student has been involved in the faculty's research or assumed leadership roles in student organizations, and the like. It takes time to build the relationships that produce those kinds of letters, so your student needs to begin working on being in touch with faculty, and faculty they truly enjoy and admire, as soon as they can. These same faculty relationships are also invaluable for other practical reasons, such as navigating the selection of a major, finding social connection across campus, and finding resources for academic success. We are no substitute for you, but we are integral to your student's success.

8. ***Recommend that your burgeoning professional gain research experience.*** Related to the last tip, research experience encompasses the most valuable set of skills your student can gain in college. Study abroad, participating in student organizations,

working—all those experiences can be valuable and necessary too. But with the rising emphasis in the US economy on analytical skills, research of any kind is sure to boost your student's marketability. Though many students take classes that involve research, it is really the research experiences outside of the classroom that give students deeper exposure to the hands-on research skills they will need after college. Encourage your student to approach professors whom they work well with to see if they have opportunities for students to contribute to their research in some way. Many faculty have research labs and projects that involve students, but many students never realize, or learn too late, just how many research opportunities college campuses offer. *Your student may have to do some searching around to find these opportunities.* If you guide them toward finding research experience, and they come back saying their professor said there were no openings in their lab, then encourage them to find someone else, even looking outside their major. We have written countless recommendation letters for medical school and law school applicants based on research experiences we had with students on a social science project. Sure, it helps if students have letters from faculty in their majors, but it makes application packets even stronger if they can demonstrate versatility and interest in research outside of their major as well. Nearly every career involves some aspect of people work, and social science research prepares students for that.

- 9. *Let your students explore a variety of career options.*** We know that some parents have been telling their friends and family for years that their kid was going to be a doctor, or a lawyer. But the statistics on this do not add up. The majority of students change majors during college. Perhaps your child is among the minority of students who will wind up in the career they had in mind when they entered. Great! But if not, and even if so, they should explore other options while they are in the protective atmosphere of college.

10. ***Be open and flexible.*** Again, easier said than done! It can be hard to let go of the deeply ingrained habit of responsibility for everything from what your children ate to when they slept. Sending your child off to college brings major changes. People often talk in our society about the “empty nest,” and that is a big social status change. But underemphasized is how your relationship with your child is also transformed once they head off to college, even if they are still living at home with you. With these challenges in mind, we encourage you to be open to the ideas your evolving college student brings to you. Being flexible to honor their changing sense of self, and their modifying understanding of their careers, is healthy for their growing ownership of learning. It is also key for your continued closeness with them. Conflict with parents during emerging adulthood is common, but some young people enter adulthood with loving relationships with their parents, while others cut off all or almost all ties to parents. Losing parents in the struggle to gain independence is one of the heaviest burdens with which we see emerging adults grapple. Being open to what your adulting child wants to tell you is the best way to ensure they will continue to tell you about their lives, and stay connected as they change.