

January 25, 2007

Dear Hiram College Family Members,

The second week of the spring semester has passed and I hope you and your student are having a positive start to 2007. As parents of two college students, my wife and I remember that our daughter and son found the months of January and February to include “cranky cabin fever” as a result of being trapped indoors and longing for spring. I want to assure you that this is normal for northeastern Ohio college students as well, but I also want to make a suggestion for you to consider.

We parents are accustomed to “fixing things” for our students when they tell us about their problems. It has been a part of our job. We have worked hard to make things better for them since the day they were born. We want our student to concentrate on his/her academic work, so if we can take care of something for them, we’re happy to do it and it makes us feel like we’re still useful, like we were when they were children. One reason for parents to stop fixing things for our students is highlighted in a recent *Plain Dealer* article by Evelyn Theiss. She says “our world of faster and easier is turning us [and our children] into ‘instant’ addicts.”

As I reflect on student behavior during the semester just past, I think Theiss may be on to something. While students report frustration with the volume of work expected of them, faculty report that students (in general) seem less prepared for, or less willing to engage in the kind of sustained concentration on a given topic or assignment that would yield better results. A majority of students (self-reported by students in a survey administered in mid-November) acknowledge they spend less than ten hours a week studying, yet they report to parents that they “don’t have time” to attend to the business of being a college student and they rely on family to contact the college to deal with all manner of subjects (e.g. roommate issues, parking fines, delinquent grades, course selection issues, etc.). And we parents drop everything, take time away from our jobs, and move right into “doing for” our student what she or he should be doing for him or herself.

Psychiatrist Marilyn Benoit describes the resilient and healthy young person as one who “can withstand setbacks, rise to a challenge, find new ways of solving problems, learn that hardships can be overcome.” She also urges parents to “look for opportunities to help your children have those experiences” (quoted from Evelyn Theiss article on helping children learn to be patient, *The Plain Dealer*, January 22, 2007). Therefore, I suggest that when you receive a “cranky cabin fever” call from your student, listen caringly, be the loving “coach” that only you can be, but refrain from taking over. Give your student the chance to discover what they can do for themselves.

Throughout the remainder of this semester you will receive emails with ideas, suggestions, and tips from departments across the college. I hope you will find these thought provoking and interesting, and I welcome your comments at any time.

Sincerely,

Eric Riedel
Vice President and Dean of Students

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