

## NINE WAYS TO HELP YOUR COLLEGE STUDENT GET A FRESH START SECOND SEMESTER by College Parents of America

Returning to college for your second semester is a very different experience from heading off to college for the first time. Students heading back to school for their second semester bring their wisdom and their mistakes, their college knowledge and their new life experiences with them. Although neither the anticipation nor the worry may be as high as first semester, students recognize that the start of the second semester of college is another new beginning for them. Parents can help their college students prepare for the reality of the second semester by helping them think about it and plan a few goals before they return to school. Here are a few suggestions for your student:

### ***Recognize this as a new beginning***

Remind your student that the new semester marks a fresh start for him. He will have new classes, new professors, be in classes with new students. If his first semester was a success, he can be satisfied that he has found some successful strategies. He'll want to continue to stay focused. If his first semester was not as successful as he had hoped, he now has a chance to make some changes with a clean slate.

### ***Take advantage of confidence gained***

Everything was new at the beginning of first semester. Your student may have felt overwhelmed. Now, your student has some confidence in her ability to make friends, to navigate this new college community, to get to class, to talk to professors, to do what she needs to do to succeed. Remind her that she can capitalize on this confidence as she returns to school knowing her way around.

### ***Learn from fall semester***

Your student learned a lot during fall semester – both about college life and about himself. Remind him to review the lessons that he learned and to use that information for a successful second semester. Did his approach to studying work? Does he need to ask for more help this semester? Should he think more carefully about social choices? Was he too involved on campus or not involved enough? Some reflection will help him approach this semester with helpful lessons learned.

### ***Be prepared for mixed feelings***

It is OK, and even likely, that your student will have some mixed feelings about returning for second semester. There is less build-up and excitement than there was in the fall, so it may seem, in some ways, a bit of a let-down. This is a more thoughtful return to college. Being at home again has had its own stresses, so there may be some relief in returning to being on his own once again. Your student knows more about the realities of the work expected, so the road ahead may look longer and harder than it did in the fall. Some friends from fall semester may not return for a second semester and your student will miss them. Recognizing that there may be a

certain degree of “second semester blues” and knowing that it is a normal feeling may help your student.

### ***This is a good time to get involved on campus***

Your student may have been cautious about getting involved in too many activities during her first semester. Many students are concerned about having enough time for studying – or they are spending a great deal of time working at jobs. Second semester is a good time to try to get more involved on campus. Your student has a more realistic sense of his time, knows what activities or groups are available, may feel less overwhelmed, and has made some connections. Being involved in campus life often helps students academically. Being engaged in the college community will help your student continue to make connections and feel more satisfied with her experiences.

### ***Take advantage of the more realistic picture of college life***

With a semester of experience, your student now has a more realistic picture of what may be expected of him in college and what college life involves. He can take advantage of this new knowledge for time management and budget management. Encourage him to build study time into his schedule rather than hoping that he will find time. Encourage him to create a budget to plan his daily expenses. He is in a good position now to feel more in control of his college experiences.

### ***Think carefully about transfer options***

For many students, the second semester of college is when they consider transferring to a different school. The newness has worn off and they may feel unhappy about their experiences. For some students, a transfer to a different school may be appropriate. For many others, however, careful consideration will reveal that transferring to a new school may not be the answer. Problems may go with your student to a different school. If he is considering transferring, he should think very carefully about why he wants to change. Will it make a difference, or should he take advantage of what he already knows about his current school to change his path or direction where he is? Recognizing that many students think about transferring at this point may help put his feelings in perspective. Very careful consideration of the decision is important. Encourage him to think carefully, talk to his academic advisor, and give himself another semester before making definite plans.

### ***Think about, and talk about, goals for the semester***

New Year’s resolutions may be overrated, although many people find it helpful to think about the year ahead. Whether or not they are as formal as resolutions, your student should think about his plans and goals for the next four months. What does he hope to change? What does he hope to achieve? What will be required of him to accomplish these goals? Putting some of his goals into words – and possibly putting them on paper – will make them more real, and will serve as a reminder as the semester progresses. Thinking about what will be required to reach those goals will give your student a plan of action.

***Talk with family members about expectations***

The beginning of the second semester is a good time for parents and students to review together expectations for college. Everyone has more experience now. What has worked, and what thinking might need to be revised? Are financial expectations working? Are academic expectations being met? Is everyone satisfied with social choices? This is a good time to communicate as honestly as possible about the successes and shortcomings of the first semester. Make sure that you and your student begin this new semester with some shared expectations.

Helping your student begin the new semester with realistic expectations and goals will help you both to take advantage of the new start. Your college student will be one step closer to the maturity and independence that you want him to have. You will be more comfortable taking one more step back and watching him grow.