Tuning in to What Your Student is Learning

Ask about more than just grades! Studying and striving for good grades are both important and admirable, but college has a lot more to offer besides just book learning. When you’re trying to stay connected to your student’s life while they’re away at school, ask about some other things, too. For instance...

- **Talk about books**, especially if your son or daughter is the type of person to do reading outside of what is assigned. Have you read a great book lately? Maybe your child has, too. Talking about literature is a great way to get a fuller understanding of what you have read and also about the way your student thinks.

- **Ask about their favorite professor** and what makes him/her such a good teacher. Talking about what goes on in class aside from assignments will give you a more complete picture of your child’s day-to-day experiences.

- **If your student has a job or internship**, ask what they like and don’t like about it. After they tell you what’s on their mind, give some suggestions on how to make what they dislike easier, and offer any advice you might have on what they could look for in another position either next semester or after graduation.

- **The social aspect of college is a learning experience, too.** Is your daughter in a sorority? Does your son plan campus events? Ask about them! Your student might also want to complain about a roommate or rave about a new friend, but is just looking for you to ask first.

- **Has your student still not chosen a major?** Talk about the best and worst classes he or she has taken, and work together to figure out what a good path could be. You can at least narrow it down to a few different subjects.

- **If your student is taking a class that sounds similar to one you took while you were a high school or college student**, tell him or her what you remember about the course. Depending on the nature of the material, it’s very possible that the way that particular subject is taught now is very different than the way it was taught a few decades earlier. But who knows, maybe it’s exactly the same! Talking about the similarities and differences will give you great insight into what is being taught, learned, and understood.

- **If you also went to college**, talking about your own experiences gives your student the chance to open up to you about his or her own. The most important part of keeping in tune with what your child is learning is keeping the lines of communication open and comfortable.

### The Learning Lab

Instead of grades, you can focus on learning topics such as:

- A paper or project topic your student is currently pursuing
- Something cool they just learned in lab
- An interesting classroom conversation and what made it so
- A discussion your student had with a peer, a teaching assistant or a professor
- One of the most interesting things they’ve learned in class this week
- Something your student learned about himself while working on a group project
- Research tricks that are helping him dig up great info for his next paper

There is a wealth of topics to discuss that focus on learning rather than grades. Give them a try!