

# **Top 10 Things Every Roger Williams Family Member Should Know**

## **1. You've made a great choice in choosing RWU**

Roger Williams University is preparing students for what the world needs now. Students come from XX states and XX countries to study in one or more of our XX academic program. Your student will benefit from the opportunity to learn in a vibrant community with faculty who love to teach, advisors and staff who are committed to providing support and guidance, and a beautiful location that offers opportunities for service and internships in a friendly neighborhood.

## **2. The University, you, and your student are in partnership**

For the past 18 years or so you have likely been at the center of your student's life, and particularly their educational experience. In college that responsibility transfers to your student. Most communication from the University will be directed at your student. We encourage them to keep you appropriately informed about their life, but also encourage you to honor their adulthood and privacy while remaining connected. If after discussion with your student, you remain confused, please call the Director of Student and Family Assistance to help you.

## **3. Understand the transition of a first-year student**

The college years are a time of growth, change, and exploration. It is a time for students to gain the life skills they will need to become successful, independent adults. It is not uncommon for students who were academically confident and successful in high school to experience some self-doubt as they become surrounded with equally competent peers. They may receive "average" grades for the first time and they may experience this as a crisis. Family understanding is very important; academic struggles may not reflect lack of effort or ability but an adjustment to the academic rigor of RWU.

Family can be an essential source of support, encouragement, and advice. However, it is important for family to allow students room to fail, experience disappointments, and question their identity and beliefs. These are learning experiences that help students understand the consequences of their actions, prepare them for the 'real world,' and help them to develop a true sense of self. Resist the temptation to rush in to "save" your student when times get difficult. Show your support and concern, but trust that they have the skills and resources to work things out.

## **4. Stay Connected**

Communicate with your student via phone, e-mail, cell phones, and 'snail' mail. Students do miss home and family, although they may not express this directly to you. Sending treats and care packages, asking about their lives, and expressing pride in their accomplishments

may be valued even more now that they are away from home. Expect that your student will not respond to all of your contacts, but know that he or she appreciates hearing from you. Homecoming/Family Weekend is an excellent way to reconnect with your student.

### **5. Ask questions and Discuss Difficult Topics**

Despite the distance, you do still have a tremendous influence on your student's behavior. In college, your student will have to make their own decisions about what time to get up in the morning, when to study, when to exercise, which organizations to participate in, what to eat, whether or not to drink alcohol, how much alcohol to drink if any, and whether or not to engage in sexual relationships. While you cannot force your student to behave exactly as you would want them to, family can share their values and beliefs with their students on these topics. Studies show that family members influence their student's behavior regarding drugs, alcohol, and risky sexual behavior even after they leave for college. Provide your student with the facts on these issues, and empower them to distinguish between good and bad decisions when it comes to their behavior, health, and safety. Create an atmosphere of open communication, and your student will not only appreciate that you respect them as an adult, but they will also be more likely to turn to you for guidance.

### **6. Know Campus Resources**

Utilize the larger University website to become familiar with life at RWU. These resources provide a great deal of information about the University and its departments. Helping your student to navigate the University by referring them to the appropriate resources is one of the best ways for you to mentor your college student during this transition to adulthood. By acting as a referral source, you can demonstrate that you are interested in your student's life at RWU, and at the same time, you empower your student to solve their own problems.

### **7. Do Not Say, "These are the best years of your life"**

The first year of college can be full of indecision, insecurities, disappointments, and most of all, mistakes. It's also full of discovery, inspiration, good times, and exciting people. It may take a while for students to realize that their Hollywood-created images of what college is all about are wrong. There aren't many images that show that college is about being scared, confused, overwhelmed, and making mistakes. Students may feel these things and worry that they are not 'normal' because what they're feeling is in contrast to what they've been led to believe while growing up. Parents can help by understanding that the highs and lows of college life are a critical part of your son or daughter's development, and by providing the support and encouragement to help him or her understand this as well.

## **8. Understand FERPA (Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act)**

The privacy protection FERPA gives to students is very broad. With limited exceptions, the FERPA regulations give privacy protection to all students' "education records." Examples of student records entitled to FERPA privacy protection are grade reports, transcripts, and most disciplinary files. FERPA does not cover counseling or medical records but other policies do. If you are interested in knowing your student's grades or other information, please discuss this with your student. Specific offices must receive written permission from the student to share information with anyone other than the student. FERPA is enforced by the U.S. Department of Education. The Department maintains a FERPA website, with links to FERPA regulations.

## **9. Important learning happens outside both in and outside of the classroom**

Defining and training leaders capable of creating positive change is an important aspect of the Roger Williams experience. Equally important is the concept of participation in and responsibility to a community. Through a variety of campus wide and department specific programs and initiatives, RWU students gain valuable opportunities to test and put into practice the information they are learning in the classroom. These activities are intended to create fun, yet challenging learning opportunities that will complement the student's academic experience. National studies show that students who challenge themselves by getting involved outside of the classroom have higher rates of success in college.

Members of Student Programs and Leadership, the Intercultural Center, Spiritual Life, Health Education, the Community Partnership Center, International Student Life, Residence Life and Housing as well as academic departments faculty and staff members work with student leaders in the planning and implementation of dances, concerts, lectures, faculty-student get-togethers, and a variety of other events. Encourage your college student to connect their interests to one of these activities to take full advantage of the opportunity to enhance their skills and learning.

## **10. It's never too early to explore future plans**

The Center for Career & Professional Development provides support and encouragement to RWU students in developing, interpreting, and applying their educational experience to meet their goals.

First and second year students will benefit from programs and individual advising related to deciding on a major, developing strategies for skill building through activities and involvement, finding summer employment, and linking academic experiences with career goals. The exploration of career possibilities is developing and expanding by the junior year when students are completing internships and building off-campus experiences. As students approach their senior year and career interests begin to take shape, career counseling includes building job

search skills, preparing graduate/professional school/fellowship applications and networking with alumni.