

**FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
**HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS**

***College Life***

Living on a college campus is like living in a small sample of a real community with the entire amenities of a community like ATM machines, recreation facilities, health services, and public safety. Some students do not have to leave campus to meet their everyday needs. They actually live in a sheltered community of like people, and this opportunity probably will never happen again in their lives. Consequently, they can live, study, and develop as mature, educated adults in a somewhat enclosed environment that has lots of opportunities to meet lifetime friends, become leaders, and emerge as scholars.

***For College Parents***

Students, who are enrolling in college and arriving on a college campus for the first time, are beginning a new adventure, and as they begin this great adventure, they change. It is an exciting time to grow, learn, and make positive transitions. Furthermore, as they progress through college, move to full adulthood, and gain independence, relationships also mature and change. In fact, roles also change, but strong family bonds do not. They will remain strong, but emerge in different ways.

***Growth and Changes***

All parents watch their children grow and change from infancy onward. Parents watch them learn to walk, speak, and ride a bicycle. They are there from the beginning of Kindergarten through graduating from high school, noting the changes in relationships with family and friends. When the students go to college, they go through a process of separating and becoming individuals, as noted by developmental psychologists. Students, who are successful in assuming behaviors of an adult and establishing their adult identities, tend to continue to experience success in life.

Consequently, parents and college-age students need to develop new adult-like relationships based on respecting, past bonds, and interests. Even though distance separates parents and their college-age children, they can still be confidantes, advisors, and supporters who offer encouragement.

### ***Communications with College Students***

In the Twenty-first Century, families can avail themselves to many more forms of communication than they did in the past. Specifically, cell phones, e-mail, texting, Skype, and other internet-based communications including social networking are ways to keep in touch. There is, however, a difference between keeping in touch and hovering. Parents and college students need to work out appropriate communication strategies and frequencies. Often, it is better for the students to call the parents as parents often catch the students when they are busy.

Emails and text messages are a great way to stay in touch. Encouraging and supportive messages from home are important to the students. Students are often undergoing some stress related assignments and examinations, and a brief cheerful message from home is helpful.

When parents communicate with their college students, they should not forget snail mail. Postcards, letters, news articles, and greeting cards are fun to receive. Additionally, a box of goodies, like grandma's special cookies, arriving just before finals is always appreciated.

### ***Visits***

Home visits are nice but they should be few and far between. Some students go home often, and those students tend to have more difficulty adjusting to campus life. Therefore, while parents need to be warm and welcoming when their students visit, parents also need to encourage them to stay at school to meet friends, finish assignments, and, in general, become acclimated to the campus. Developing new friends and relationships is important to becoming an independent individual who is successful at college. As much as possible encourage holiday visits rather than frequent weekend visits.

Also, for some students, there are strong ties with high school friends that pull on the heart strings. Those relationships become difficult for all concerned.

The students' visits home are fun and provide opportunities to recharge their energy and rekindle friendships, but everyone is different, students, parents, friends, and the community has changed. Consequently, new "house rules" need to be negotiated regarding driving, money, curfews, friends, and, in general, expectations. Whenever possible, the negotiations should happen before the students visit home, because it is hard to negotiate positively when the college student is exhausted and needs rest.

### ***Campus visits***

Parents' visits to the campus are always welcome. In deciding to make a campus visit, parents need to make sure, however, that the visit works with the students' study schedules. Therefore, weekend visits are best. Scheduling a visit during something like Homecoming is always fun. Parents, who want to stay in the college town, just need to make advanced reservations for accommodations as they are often hard to get at the last minute.

### ***Parenting and then there is Helicopter Parenting***

Parents, who are supportive and encouraging, help their children through the process of separation and individualization while the parents, who hover like helicopters, do not, and, in fact, they make letting go more difficult. Offering their college students assistance, which is productive, is much different than:

- Writing essays or typing papers;
- Denying students' behavioral transgressions;
- Arguing with roommates;
- Waking up their students with a good morning phone call; or
- Texting answers during tests.

For all parents and their college-age children, this time of separation and letting go is difficult, but it is important for all to negotiate appropriate limits of involvement that promote independence, not dependence.

## ***Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)***

When students become 18 years of age, the rights, which were their parents throughout the K-12 environment, transfer to the students, even though the parents are paying tuition. Students can share information directly with their parents or sign documentation instructing the college to do so. Neither way of sharing information, however, is mandatory. Through FERPA, students have the right to:

1. Inspect and review their college records;
2. Seek to amend their college records;
3. Control over the disclosure of information from their records; and
4. File a complaint against the college violating their FERPA rights.

## ***Living Arrangements***

First-year college students do not have a lot of choice in living arrangements. They either live in a residence hall (dorm) or at home with significant family members. Usually, the significant family members are mom or dad, but the family could be grandparents, aunts and uncles, or siblings.

Living in an on-campus residence hall or dorm is a first-year student's first encounter with college life. They make lasting friendships and build memories through living in a dorm. Additionally, the first-year students learn how to adjust and solve the problems of sharing space with roommates who might be total strangers. It is often better to have a total stranger rather than a friend from home as a roommate, because hometown friends sometimes isolate themselves from others and do not expand their friendship network.

Roommates have challenges in sharing a room. Those challenges typically relate to compromises about bed time, room décor, cleanliness, visiting hours, and quiet time for study. Roommates need to discuss the challenges openly and make compromises or rules to ensure that they have a productive year.

Residential Assistants (RAs) are usually full-time students in their junior or senior years.

RAs live with the students to ensure that everything goes well on their floor or section of the dorm. They often have floor meetings to discuss issues, rules, and ways in which the quality of dorm and college life can improve for all students. Because they are experienced students, they can provide assistance in navigating the college system and provide the first-year students with assistance.

Expectations for living in a dorm are distributed to all students in the form of dorm rules. They tell exactly how students are to behave in the dorm whether in their rooms or the rooms of others, in the dining rooms, and in all the public rooms. Again, RAs help enforce the rules which all students should follow.

Dorms have laundries for the students' use and dining halls are just a short walk from the students' dorms. The dining halls have extended meal hours, meal plans, and lots of healthy choices including special dietary plans.

Students should take advantage of everything that dorm life offers including weekend activities, study rooms, lounges, and special programs. Every college and dorm is different, but colleges build and organize on campus housing, which are mostly dorms, to provide students with lots of activity options.

While living at home does not require a lot of adjustments as the first-year students experience in dorms, students still experience lifestyle challenges regarding varied schedules, late nights, and on-campus activities. To benefit the most from college, students, who live at home, need to reach out to their fellow college students and make friends, engage in on-campus clubs and organizations, and find special interest groups with students in similar majors. Besides moving toward adulthood, college provides early networking for later life. Students living at home have to consciously work on building those networks, and not become isolated.

### ***College Organizations and Student Activities***

All colleges have opportunities for students to pursue their interests, meet other students, and participate in activities that are just plain fun. Student organizations and activities are usually posted in the college newspaper or on dorm and classroom bulletin boards, and college websites which have pages dedicated to student activities.

Some colleges, including Ferris State University, have “co-curricular” transcripts for students to identify activities to support their studies and help with future job hunting. The choices of activities include:

- **Academic Service Learning/Community Service**—Students can volunteer in the community related to their course of study or just volunteer to work with children, youth, and families, non-profit agencies, or college-organized opportunities.
- **Honor Societies and Honors Programs**—The societies and programs recognize students who demonstrate excellence in academics.
- **Student Government**—Students, who really want to impact the life on the campus, participate in student government.
- **Student Advisory Councils**—These councils are organized around programs with deans or department administrators for student representatives to share ideas about ways to improve the program.
- **Special Interest Groups and Registered Student Organizations (RSOs)**—Special interest groups span a wide range of interests and topics to meet the needs of all students. Many of these groups are organized by students.
- **Sports Clubs/Intramural Sports**—Many students are scholar-athletes, who like to continue playing their favorite sports, but are not on the college teams. Therefore, sports clubs provide perfect opportunities for students to practice their favorite sports and compete for fun.
- **International Opportunities**—College campuses are becoming more global with students attending from around the world and study abroad for their students. The college years provide great opportunities to explore the world.
- **Social Organizations**—Fraternities, sororities, and other organizations provide their members with lots of opportunities to meet other students and attend a variety of social functions. Going “Greek” is joining a sorority or

fraternity because they derive their names from the Greek alphabet. Students pledge (apply) to join a Greek organization with students or members most like themselves. The Greek organizations have grade point average requirements and most members live together in houses located near the campus.

- **Professional Organizations**—Groups, clubs, and fraternities organized around students vocational/professional interests.

### *Services on Campus for Students*

Ferris State University, like most colleges, has services that help the students become successful, realize their potential, and address their needs. Colleges provide:

- Counseling Center
- Disability Services
- Registrar
- Business Office
- Academic Advising
- Career Services
- Financial Aid Services
- Computer or Technology Help Desks
- Student Employment Office
- Mentoring
- Alumni Organization
- Service Learning/Volunteer Services
- Study Abroad
- Campus Ministries
- Student Services
- Health Services
- Recreation Center (U-Rec)
- Libraries
- First-Year Programs (FSUS 100)
- Learning/Tutoring Center
- Writing Center

### ***Finances, Money, and Funding School***

Universities and colleges have various scholarships depending on academic standing and financial need. To find out information about scholarships, students should look at the college website.

Colleges have Financial Aid Offices that address all issues related to students' financial aid needs and questions.

### ***University Rules and Regulations***

All universities have rules and regulations or codes of conduct that present expectations of student behavior which includes academic honesty, treating faculty, staff, and other students with respect, and other rules of appropriate collegiate interactions. Ferris State University presents its *Bulldog Values* on its website.

### ***Student Recreation Center/University Recreation***

College students need to stay healthy and manage stress. In addition to eating wisely and getting enough sleep, the University Recreation Center provides an excellent venue for both staying healthy and reducing stress. Students need to make visiting the University Recreation Center part of the daily routine to swim, play a game of pick-up basketball, rock climb, lift weights, or do aerobics. Healthy habits developed in college can last a lifetime.

### ***Student Success***

The pathway to college success is not difficult, but it takes planning, discipline, tenacity, and commitment. Students need to plan their course of study with their advisors and continue to meet with their advisors to make sure that they stay the course. They should maintain good attendance in their courses and study a minimum of three hours for every one hour in they spend in a class. Additionally, they should take advantage of the assistance that the college offers. Specifically, if writing is a problem, students can visit the writing center. Help is available; students just need to take advantage of it. For specifics, refer to the College of Education and Human Services Success Policy.

## **Complaint Policy**

If a student has a complaint about a grade, attendance, fairness, or a specific issue related to the class, the student must first meet with the instructor of the class. Usually, the complaints and problems are resolved at this level. If the problem cannot be solved at the meeting with the instructor, the student needs to follow the complaint process delineated in the steps below:

- Step One: Write a statement explaining the complaint and present it to the department head at a meeting.
- Step Two: If the complaint is not resolved at the departmental level, the student should present the written complaint statement to the Dean's Office. A disinterested member may be asked to review the complaint at the discretion of the Dean.
- Step Three: If the complaint continues to be unresolved, it should be presented in writing to the Dean, further information may be requested from all parties or a mediation requested. If the complaint is still not settled, the Dean will issue a decision on the complaint to all interested parties.
- Step Four: **The decision of the Dean is final.**

## **Grade Appeal Policy**

Students may appeal a course grade by following this procedure:

- Step One: The grade appeal must be made no later than the fifth working day of the semester subsequent to when the final grade was issued (excluding summer).
- Step Two: The student may appeal the grade only once.
- Step Three: The burden of proof is a student's responsibility.

- Step Four: The student must first discuss the grade in question with the instructor who gave the grade in order to clarify misunderstandings, arithmetic, etc.
- Step Five: In the event that the student and instructor are not able to resolve the issue, the student may then appeal the grade in writing to the respective instructor's department head. A copy of the appeal will be forwarded to the instructor.
- Step Six: The instructor will then respond to the appeal, in writing, to the department head.
- Step Seven: On the basis of the student's appeal and instructor's response, the department head will inform the parties in writing of his or her decision.
- Step Eight: In the event the student or instructor is still dissatisfied with the grade in question, he or she may further appeal the decision to the Dean's Office. A cover letter with copies of the original appeal, the instructor's response, and the department heads.
- Step Nine: The Dean's Office will establish an ad hoc committee composed of a representative of the Dean's Office and two faculty representatives. The committee may request additional documentation and/or call for any ad hoc members to assist in the appeal process. The committee will issue its recommendation and any other information the Dean may view as pertinent to the appeal. The Dean will then render a decision and that decision is final and binding.
- Step Ten: The appeals process must be concluded not later than the semester following the initiation of the appeal.

### ***Public Safety***

Colleges have public safety or campus police departments that maintain security and oversee the well-being of the students. Public safety has convenient phones placed around the campus for emergencies, escort services for students walking the campus late at night, and training sessions to teach the students about emergency prevention.

### ***Work-study and Working during College***

Most students work while attending college. The best work options are work-study programs, which are within the University and other University employment because they often follow the academic schedule. Most college communities, however, have job opportunities for students. The job opportunities are usually posted on the MYFSU link by August and also at the student employment office.

### ***Summer Choices***

Students have lots of options during the summer. They can stay on campus to continue their studies, do international travel, participate in a campus exchange program in the United States, complete any internship, and/or work. Whenever possible students should find work in their chosen field to build their resumes as they prepare for their careers.

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