



Navigating the College Transition Journey

by Marcia Hanlon, Director of the Counseling Center



My son, a freshman at an out-of-state university, sent me a text message two weeks into the school year. He told me about the fries, pizza and cake he had for dinner that night, then ended it with, "Just thought you'd want to know." I smiled and shook my head.

My husband and I have realized that our son's approach to the transition to college has been to separate home from college. When he's at college, he's engaged fully with the people, the work and the activities there. When he's at home, he relies more on us and spends time visiting with old friends.

So when I received the text, I felt good that he was thinking about me. But I also believe that he was testing me. He was "tweaking" me, looking for a response. Yet the fact that he realized what he was eating was unhealthy, and that I would be appalled, tells me that he internalized those messages we gave him about nutrition. And I'm trusting that he is keeping in mind all of the other values messages and lessons we've taught him over the years.

Each college student blazes his or her own trail as they move from childhood to adulthood. As parents, we have to trust, be hopeful, and take a backseat on the journey.

There are probably four main ways that students transition into college life:

Some students slowly evolve. This is the ideal. They test their wings and take flight out of the nest. Sometimes they're wobbly; sometimes they fall. But they keep trying and before you know it, they're soaring.


Some students move in fits and starts. Students may enter college full of enthusiasm, but at some point reach a roadblock. The roadblock may be disappointment that reality doesn't meet the idealized expectation, or it may be a roommate conflict or a low grade on a test that discourages them. When this happens, students often lose confidence and regress to more child-like reactions and behavior. Parents can help by providing encouragement and reminding students of their abilities that got them into college, and by refraining from stepping in to solve the problems. The student's confidence will be rebuilt largely through achievements on his or her own.

Some students move from drama to drama. Students who do this often draw the most attention from parents, friends and university officials. They're the "squeaky wheel." These students are good at getting everyone worked up and believing they have to act in the interests of the

Marcia Hanlon, Director of the Counseling Center, provides a comfortable environment for students to talk about concerns such as the transition to college life.

student. But then the student sits back and lets everyone else solve the problems. The student doesn't grow. And often those around her or him may lose patience with the drama and become less receptive. Then the student feels abandoned, and at the same time has not developed skills to solve their own problems. Parents can help by being good listeners, by not over-reacting, and by encouraging the student to use his or her own skills to solve the problems or use on-campus resources.

Some students become "paralyzed" and try to hide. This student shuts down, does not believe anyone can help and often years to "go back." They want to go back to when things were easier, at home and in high school. The problem is, frankly, that there is no going back. Things have changed and everyone has moved on. In these cases, the parents have to carefully elicit from the student what it is they feel they're missing from the past, help them grieve the end of things as they were and help them handle things as they are. Along with the grieving is an opportunity to remind them of their strengths, help them figure out how to use their strengths in their life as it is now, and help them find hope and excitement for the future.

In my 20+ years of counseling with college students, I've had the privilege of being allowed into the very personal thoughts and feelings of many, many students. I've seen them through struggles, and I've witnessed so many successes. The struggles have built strength and character, and for that reason, the successes are filled with joy. The same joy I felt when I received my son's text — his choices may not have been my own, but he was thinking about what he was doing and may some day add a vegetable to his plate. (I can only hope!) 

For This Professor, Interactive Communication is Key

Toby Arquette teaches *Human Communication/Public Speaking; Interpersonal Communication; Small Group and Team Communication; Computer Technology and Communication; Organizational Communication; Cross-Cultural Communication; Communication Research Methods; and Culture, Diversity and Expression*. He is a member of the *National Communication Association and International Communication Association*.

What schools did you attend?

I earned my doctorate in communication and media studies from Northwestern University School of Communication. My master's degree in communication studies was completed at Baylor University in Texas. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from Wayne State University in Michigan.

Why did you decide to become a professor?

After having worked in the private sector in advertising and marketing, I attended law school. However, early in my law school career, I decided that my first true love was academia, especially teaching. I was fortunate enough to have had some exceptional teachers over the years who fundamentally impacted me in ways that I cannot even begin to describe. It was a desire to "pay it forward" that led me to become a teacher. I cannot imagine a career more rewarding for me. I wake up every day doing what makes me happy. I wish more people could say the same.

What is your previous teaching experience?

I have served as Assistant Professor of Communication at DePaul University and Purdue University. I was also a visiting professor of communication at Loyola University Chicago.

What do you enjoy most about teaching at AU?

Watching students develop in their academic and professional studies.

What is your teaching philosophy?

I believe that my most important role as an educator is to facilitate learning. While coverage of the core material for any class is crucial, it is even more important to benchmark my success with students by what they have



learned (e.g., knowledge and skills rather than bits of information and things).

The best manner by which I can facilitate learning by students is by utilizing an interactive teaching style that demands their participation, challenging the limits of their abilities. I would certainly agree that all my students need a firm grounding in their respective disciplines, and that lecture has its place, whether in an introduction to the basic theories or skills of being a learned adult. However, as I tell my students before exams, I am not as interested that they be able to recall non-contextualized bits of information to me. I want to see that each student is able to knowledgeably apply the information communicated to them in various contexts. For example, I want students to know which type of group collaboration support software is ideal for facilitating the type of communication needed for their team's success in the workplace. I want students to stop and think, in the future, when exposed to an emerging technology how society influenced and was influenced by that innovation. I want students to adopt a personal reflexivity informed by the theories and research in communication and media studies.

What other programs and activities are you involved with on campus?

The last 18 months have been devoted to a significant overhaul of the communication program (currently before the university Faculty Senate for approval). This revamping includes modifying the curriculum to offer specializations in journalism, public relations and corporate communications, and media


arts. I am a faculty advisor for the Lambda Pi Eta communication honors society, the Honors Program and numerous communication program internships. I have also enjoyed volunteering at AU4U student and parent orientations and special student events such as the campus Thanksgiving Dinner. I am also a member of the ad hoc Student Early Intervention Committee (formed to address student retention issues).

What advice would you give students to help them be successful?

Initially, I would suggest the usual things: attend class, complete your assigned readings, do your homework and participate in class. I would also suggest that to be successful a student should do the following:

- Become a member of campus life by joining a student organization, attending university-sponsored events and activities when possible.
- Form a long-standing study group with peers in your major.
- Get to know your professors. We teach at Aurora University because we believe in the power of individualized teaching to transform our students into well-rounded adults. Part of that process involves getting to know students on an individual level through personalized mentoring and advising over their tenure at AU.

What advice would you give parents to help support and guide their sons and daughters while they are attending the university?

Remember that your son or daughter has made it this far. That alone speaks volumes to your success as a parent. The transition from being a high school student to a well-rounded adult is often a difficult one. However, just have confidence in all the hard work you have already completed in the raising of your child. His or her admission and attendance at AU is evidence of your success. Let that evidence comfort your fears as to whether your student will be able to make it on his or her own. 

Students Make Plans for May Term

Walking along the Great Wall, visiting a Parisian museum, going behind-the-scenes at Walt Disney World and strolling along the ocean beaches in Mexico are a few activities making up May Term experiences for 2009. Beyond the activities however, is an opportunity for students to study and earn academic credit while traveling abroad.


May Term is scheduled to meet for three weeks immediately following the spring semester (May 11–30). The courses, developed by AU faculty members especially for May Term, make possible an intensive, in-depth study of stimulating topics.

For Gail Winter, May Term was an affordable option in which her daughter, Anna, could immerse herself in another culture. “Anna learned about Paris in two ways — through her course textbook and by visiting the sites the class was studying,” she said. “The professor did an excellent job teaching and recommending places for the stu-

dents to visit. As a result, Anna was able to experience many different elements of Paris. She also had to deal with the currency exchange rate and communicate in a country where she didn't know the language. May Term is a great opportunity to earn college credit and to view a culture from a unique perspective.”



May Term 2009 includes 11 undergraduate travel-study courses. There are also 15 on-campus undergraduate courses covering topics such as art theft, human biology, Chicago culture and marketing. Students living in residence halls during spring semester can remain in the residence halls during May Term free of charge. An additional bonus is that the tuition rate

for May Term is the lowest rate of the year. A complete overview of May Term is available online at www.aurora.edu/mayterm or for a brochure, contact Terri Schmutz, Director of Summer Session, at 630-844-4228 or tschmutz@aurora.edu. 

Studying Beyond My Normal Studies




Looking back on my time at AU, I see myself as having held three primary positions on campus — student, student-athlete and student worker. The student emphasis is appropriate because at AU academics are always the main priority whether I am working, playing soccer or at the library.

It's no wonder that I became interested in enhancing my academic experience as a member of the Honors Program. I'm currently working on my research project that is part of the program. The project is a reflection of my interest with a particular aspect of my double-major, which has allowed me to develop familiarity with important issues in my chosen career field.

I am a double-major in psychology and English, so I have elected to incorporate both of these subjects into my project, “The Study of Language Development and Acquisition in Children: Examining Nativist, Empiricist and Constructivist Theories.” My project involves examining these three theories of language development and acquisition in children through research and also conducting a small series of case studies with preschool-aged children. Essentially, through my project, I seek to understand which theory applies most accurately to this small group of children.


Although this project may seem overwhelming, the workload has been spread out during my junior and senior years. Students in the program also have the ability to select any educational subject of interest to them, the professor who will serve as their faculty advisor, and the overall structure and final form of the project, allowing almost endless choices for creativity.

The Honors Program will make me a more competitive candidate for graduate school. It's also given me the ability to enhance my knowledge of an important issue in both the fields of psychology and English. Through this student-based initiative, AU is giving me the opportunity to make academics a priority now and in the future. 

Aurora University Gets Out the Vote

Amy Manion, Information Services Librarian and Deputy Voting Registrar, had a busy fall season on the AU campus. She registered more than 250 students to vote prior to the November 4 election. She estimates fielding voting questions from another 250 students.

“The right to vote defines our democracy,” said Manion. “In the last few weeks leading up to the voter registration deadline, the enthusiasm and interest that Aurora University students have displayed shows that they know how precious that right is, and how important it is to exercise it.”

In addition to taking registrations at the library's information desk, Manion signed up voters in visits to classrooms, during freshman registration, and at other campus events sponsored by student groups such as the Political Science Club, Organized Action Council and the AU Student Association. Manion also invited AU students who registered with their home address to contact her for information about voting early or voting by absentee ballot. 



Aurora University Calendar

ACADEMIC SCHEDULE

November 26–30, 2008

Thanksgiving Holiday

December 15–20, 2008

Final Examinations

December 21, 2008–January 11, 2009

Winter Break

January 12, 2009

Spring Semester Classes Begin

January 19, 2009

Martin Luther King, Jr., Day

CELEBRATING ARTS AND IDEAS SERIES

November 14–15 and 19–22, 2008, 7:30 p.m.*

AU Theatre Department presents: *As You Like It*
Perry Theatre • Aurora Foundation Center

November 19, 2008, 7:00 p.m.*

Lecture: *The Business of Fancydancing: Poems, Stories, Punch Lines and Highly Biased Anecdotes*
— Featuring Sherman Alexie, Author, Poet, Screenwriter
Crimi Auditorium • Institute for Collaboration

Sunday, December 7, 2008; 7:00 p.m.*

University Chorale Christmas Concert:
Joy to the World!
Crimi Auditorium • Institute for Collaboration

January 8–February 25, 2009

Art Exhibition: Confrontation/Contemplation, Work by Mike Knierim and Carolyn Bernstein
Schingoethe Gallery • Dunham Hall

* To make reservations for these free events, please call 630-844-4924 or e-mail artsandideas@aurora.edu.

For a complete listing of all events available on campus, visit www.aurora.edu/geninfo/events.htm.

www.aurora.edu

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