There’s a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- Panic, fear, and cramming as finals and paper deadlines approach
- High temper as stress mounts
- The realization that some friends may not be returning next term
- Increased pressure to participate in sexual activity because of the approach of vacation and extended separation
- Financial strain due to holiday gifts and travel costs
- Religious conflicts, as he/she gets ready to return home after a period of gaining new perspectives
- Excitement/anxiety about returning home
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs

December is an incredibly stressful time for students. From academic to social pressures, they’re likely being pulled in a number of directions. Taking a look at the list of seasonal issues listed to the left will give you a clear idea about what they may be facing. Plus, this will help prepare you for any frantic calls or texts you may receive in the next few weeks!

You can also support your student by:

- Calling to check in so your student knows you care, but not requiring him to stay on the phone for long periods of time.
- Waiting to discuss important details or have thoughtful conversations until after finals are over – when possible.
- Understanding the pressure she is facing and validating her frustrations and stress levels.
- Helping him keep things in perspective (i.e. this will all be over in just a few weeks, grades aren’t everything, etc.).
- Offering to take responsibility for the things you can (i.e. picking up gifts or running last minute errands, etc.).

Overall, your student may just need a listening ear during these next few weeks. If that’s the case, let her vent, validate her feelings and remind her how much she is loved. More often than not, this is the most helpful thing you can do during this busy time of year.

De-stressing Suggestions

- Step away from the computer and take a 10-minute walk
- Chat with a friend for a few minutes to get perspective
- Get a breath of fresh air
- Listen to a few favorite tunes to shake off the “study fog”
- Laugh – watch that baby panda sneezing video on YouTube or a favorite TV comedy
When Grades Arrive...

First term grades will soon arrive. What are you expecting as far as your student’s grades are concerned? Are you prepared to have the appropriate conversations with your student about her academic performance?

When grades come in, try to keep two important things in mind:

- College is about so much more than grades.
- The grades belong to your student—they are her responsibility and if she did poorly, now it’s her choice whether or not to work even harder to pull up her overall average.

This isn’t always easy to swallow, especially if you’re the one paying the bills. But, if you can remember these two things, it might make having the conversation a little bit easier.

Other Responses

For the student who has done well:

- **Celebrate!** Getting good grades in college is tough to do, especially for first-year students and those balancing coursework with athletics, a job or other co-curricular activities. So celebrate!

- **Discuss what your student learned.** Which class was most engaging and why? What was she able to apply from classes to her life outside of classes? Will she be taking any additional courses to further explore a particular subject area?

- **Review study techniques and other preparation strategies that worked well.** What tricks did your student discover for himself? Will he be using the same strategies next term? Will he be trying anything new?

For the student who hasn’t done so well:

- **Explore the reasons for the performance.** The why behind the poor grades is what is most important. Perhaps your student is struggling with a professor and needs support in handling the situation. Or, maybe your student spent too many nights goofing off and not enough nights studying. Whatever the case, get to the root of the issue and help your student address it.

- **Seek to understand.** What’s done is done. Rather than dwelling on the negative, it’s important to focus on fixing the issues so your student can do better academically.

- **Brainstorm some strategies for improvement.** It could prove very helpful to sit down and brainstorm together. See the box above for some potential areas to discuss.

   No matter what, let your student know that you’re on her side. While getting good grades is your student’s responsibility, being confident that she has your support will make a world of difference. You’ll be less likely to get surprised with poor grades too, as you’ll be able to maintain open lines of communication—about the As and the Ds. College is all about learning. Sometimes, it’s the flops that teach the most.

Take a Look at...

- Daily study habits
- Skill sets including note-taking, writing, reading and test taking
- Room study set-up
- Class schedules
- Out-of-class involvements and responsibilities
- Whether or not a learning disability might be coming into play

Keeping Up the Pace

From now through the end of the term, students need to keep their stamina up so they can finish strong academically. Here are some simple ways they can do just that...

- **Eat healthy meals**
- **Make sleep a priority**
- **Study some every day, rather than cramming**
- **Get fresh air**
- **Say “no” to something if they’re overwhelmed**
- **Spend positive time with friends**
- **Seek help if they’re struggling**

Making academics a priority means making yourself a priority. You can help your student realize this so the remainder of the term is a healthy one.
As your student wraps up coursework and exams on campus, she may forget an important task...making arrangements for getting home for the holiday break. Oops!

Here’s how you can help:

If you need to go pick up your student:

- Ask your student when he is planning on coming home (keep in mind that this may change based on academic commitments; let your student know your level of flexibility up front).

Care Package Ideas for Finals

Your student will likely be doing a great deal of studying this month! Consider sending a thoughtful care package to let him know you are sending love and good luck vibes his way. You could include:

- Hot cocoa or tea and a festive mug
- Candy
- Homemade treats
- Vitamin C drops
- A good luck note
- New highlighters with a note: “You highlight my life!”
- A holiday decoration for the room
- A comfy pillow, slippers or sweatshirt for late-night studying
- A recorded audio clip or video offering fun tips and advice from the folks at home

Find out when would be a good time to arrive (remind him to check when he is required to be out of the halls).

Try to determine how much stuff your student plans on bringing home, so you can plan accordingly.

Stay in touch with your student throughout finals in case plans change – on your end or his.

If your student doesn’t need you to pick her up:

- Ask your student when she is coming home and how she is planning on getting there.

If she will be utilizing public transportation, remind her to check schedules before she leaves in case there are any last minute changes. Also, gently remind her to be safe.

If she will be driving herself or driving with friends, remind her to be careful and make smart decisions based on weather (if this is a concern). Let her know how you can help, if you can, and remind her that safety is more important than rushing home.

No matter how your student is planning on getting home, this is a great opportunity for you to provide support as he makes these decisions for himself. He’ll learn a great deal by taking responsibility for his travels. But don’t be afraid to offer suggestions if he asks for help too.

What better way to spend time with your student than doing some good this holiday season? There are plentiful options…

- Make and deliver cookies to old teachers, along with a note about how college is going
- Help make and/or deliver holiday meals
- Donate old blankets and towels to local animal shelters
- Staff a gift-wrapping booth for an organization you believe in
- Adopt a family
- Head out with young friends, siblings, nieces/nephews to all pick out a toy to donate to Toys for Tots
- Do the same for a local book-collection drive, too
- Shovel out a neighbor
- Visit veterans at a local vet hospital
- Usher at a holiday concert
- Babysit for friends so the adults can get out to do some holiday errands

Who knows? An activity you try this year could become a lovely holiday tradition.
Career Readiness During Break

When it comes to career readiness, there are certain things your student can do during break to become better prepared. Here are some tips to pass along…

**Talk with Alumni.** See if the campus alumni association has a network of alums in your neck of the woods. Contact one who works in a field you find interesting, and ask if you can shadow her and/or meet up for a conversation. Chances are this person will love working with a current student!

**Work on a Portfolio.** Gathering relevant items in one place takes doing, so what better way to wile away a winter’s day? Having a solid portfolio (either an electronic one or a physical one – gain guidance from the career office) in place now will increase confidence for the job search ahead.

**Volunteer.** Is there a way to gain some experience and network in a field of interest through volunteering? Check it out. It might be volunteering to help a teacher, working with a Scout troop, helping seniors with computer skills at the library and more. This is a great way to do good while also meeting connected people.

**Get Your Ducks in a Row.** Developing a draft of your resume now means you can visit the career services office to finalize it as soon as you get back to campus. Putting in requests for people to serve as references now means you’ll be ahead of the game. Get these details in place now to make the term ahead much smoother.

Putting in a bit of time now can greatly help your student’s career-oriented cause.

5 Ways to Keep the Mind Primed and Ready

Yes, the holiday break is a time to relax and kick back with family and friends. That doesn’t mean your student’s brainpower needs to suffer, though! There are simple, interesting ways he can keep his mind primed and ready for the upcoming term.

For instance, you might encourage him to…

**Work on Puzzles.** He can do a crossword puzzle with his granddad, attempt to answer the NPR Puzzlemaster’s Sunday puzzle, or play Balderdash or Boggle with friends. Engaging in word games, logic puzzles and more is fun while also being brain-beneficial.

**Talk about What He is Learning.** Recalling some of the key things he learned in classes this term and sharing them with others is part of the college experience. By verbalizing what he has learned, the information is bound to stick with him even more!

**Read a Book for Pleasure.** Engaging with multiple characters and plot arcs will help keep the synapses firing on all cylinders! Plus, it just feels good.

**Learn Something New.** It might happen during a conversation with a cousin who is studying nursing, while listening to the news or when hearing about a friend’s experiences studying abroad. Soak in new information, search on the computer for more about a topic and stay curious!

**Have a Fresh Experience.** We tend to learn when we’re in uncertain circumstances. So, why not encourage your student to attend a concert featuring music he hasn’t heard before? Or he could attend a cultural/spiritual holiday celebration, a book reading at the local library or an Indian cooking class. There are so many interesting things happening during the holidays! And maybe you can experience some of them together.

Keeping the brain limber during the holiday break will help your student be ready to dig into the new term well-prepared.