Freshmen Pleased with First-Year Experience

Going away to college for the first time can be an overwhelming experience. Leaving family and friends, meeting new people, finding your way around a campus and learning about yourself can feel like a lonely process. Because of these universal feelings that freshmen in college experience, the State University of New York College at Plattsburgh developed a unique way to help improve the first-year experience by launching the Whiteface Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE) as part of its First-Year Experience Program.

According to Peter Luguri, director of First-Year Programs and Retention Efforts, the early feedback has been positive. The WISE initiative placed 240 first-year students together in the Whiteface Residence Hall. These students receive extra supportive services from a “Connection Team” - their trained resident assistant, two resident mentors and a faculty mentor who work specifically on each floor of the residence hall. Also available in their residence hall is an academic guide to assist with academic advising type questions and study groups. Every Friday night, special fun programming with refreshments is offered right in Whiteface Hall. The focus of this initiative is to help students become more self-aware, self-empowered and engaged in campus life.

Here’s what some of those involved in the program have to say:

WISE is a great way for students to experience their freshman year,” said Rachel Bark, a resident mentor in Whiteface Hall and a junior majoring in childhood special education from Perry, N.Y. Dr. Jon Chatlos, assistant professor of English and faculty mentor, added “The first semester is going very well. The program is well organized. Enthusiasm is high. Our students in Whiteface are bonding effectively with the College and Community.”

“The Friday Night Events are great,” said Jessica Godbot, a freshman business major from Littleton, N.H. “The events are a great alternative to the usual things that students do on the weekends. The resident mentors and resident assistants are also a great help.”

Have you asked yourself any of the following questions?

1. “I’d like to know what Megan’s day is like. I’m a little worried about the late hours and lack of sleep. Why isn’t she ever in her room? Is she taking care of herself?”

2. “If he had buckled down and done some work, he wouldn’t be in this position. What if he’s over his head with school work?”

3. “I’m worried that she spends so much time alone. I wonder if she’s too shy to get out and meet people. Are there social activities that would appeal to her?”

4. “I’m afraid he can’t handle work and school. I’m feeling badly that I don’t have more money to help out. Could we get another loan?”

If you answered YES to any of these questions...

You’ll want to read Don’t Tell Me What to Do, Just Send Money - The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years (Johnson & Schelhas-Miller, St. Martin’s Griffin). This book covers basic college questions and situations with humorous examples and suggestions for dialogue with your student.
Standing Out in Our Communities

At SUNY Plattsburgh, we encourage the development of students in all aspects of their life. A very rewarding way to do this is to help those in need. Every winter and spring break, the Center for Service Learning and Volunteerism organizes a number of trips to communities that need assistance. Have a conversation with your student and see if this might be a way for them to contribute to a community. Planned trips for the 2006 spring semester break include working with Habitat for Humanity, Head Start, Trail Work, and Therapeutic Riding Association.

For more information, visit www.plattsburgh.edu/offices/centers/service

Director’s Message

First, I want to assure you that SUNY Plattsburgh is fully committed to providing first-year students with the challenge and support necessary for their success. The First-Year Program office is only one example of the college’s focus on the first-year experience of students. Whether it’s the Whiteface Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE), Learning Communities, Freshman Seminars, Academic Advising, Student Support Services, Residence Life, Student Activities, and many others - all are committed to assist the first-year student in his or her transition to higher education.

A significant number of SUNY Plattsburgh’s first-year students had an outstanding fall semester. I was thrilled to send 398 individualized letters to the students commending them for finishing the semester with a cumulative grade point average over 3.00. Indeed, many were above 3.50 and were named to the Dean’s List. This is approximately 40% of the entering class. Additionally, first-year students were actively engaged on the campus as measured by the Office of Residence Life’s Quality of Life Survey that was completed by most on-campus students in October. We also stand ready to support those students who want to achieve better academically in the spring semester.

As the father of two college students, I know the challenges involved for you as the parent of a first-year student. Your interest and support are crucial to your child’s success. I hope you find the information contained in this newsletter useful and I look forward to seeing you on the campus in the future.

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