Howdy!

It’s hard to believe the fall semester is almost over already! So far the 2015-2016 school year has been a busy one. Between Gig ‘Em Week, classes Aggie Athletics, numerous student organization and campus-wide events your student had plenty to do.

Your student may have recently been home for Thanksgiving, and is already back on campus and preparing for the end of their first semester. As students gear up for finals and winter break, we know it is important to support them as they finish their first semester in Aggieland!

The Aggie Connection is a publication for families of first year students at Texas A&M University. Inside you will find helpful tips and information for supporting your student’s success. This is the last Aggie Connection in the series for your student’s first year. If you don’t already receive our monthly Aggie Family Newsletter, which is sent via e-mail each month you can sign up at http://parents.tamu.edu/newsletter.

As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at 979.845.5826 or send us an email at aggiefamilies@tamu.edu.

We are looking for your advice!
Help out future Aggie Families!

Please help welcome our incoming families by submitting your best advice for new Aggie Families to Ginny Whited at ginnynao@tamu.edu. This advice will be shared at the New Student Conference.

Thanks & Gig’Em!
In preparation for winter break, residence halls close for graduating students on Saturday, December 19th at 12:00 pm, all other students should be out of the halls 24 hours after the last exam, but no later than 5:30 pm Thursday, December 17. Halls will reopen on Thursday, January 14th, 2016 at 8:00 am.

Students returning to the halls for the spring semester must follow the express check out process covered in their closing hall meetings and prepare their room accordingly given their style of hall. Failure to do so may result in an assessment of charges. Residents with approved room changes must complete the room change process and checkout with an RA prior to leaving for the break. All belongings must be removed from the student’s present room and moved to their new room/hall prior to checking out. Residence hall staff will be inspecting all rooms to ensure the buildings are secure, appliances are unplugged, and that all guidelines have been followed.

Mail service will NOT be available during the break. Students expecting important mail and/or packages (travel tickets, money orders, job information, etc.) need to ensure they make other arrangements prior to leaving for winter break. Due to the change in delivery policy at the College Station Post Office, mail and packages will NOT be able to be forwarded over the break. It will be held and available for pickup once the halls open and the student returns.

Students not returning to the halls for the Spring semester must check out with a Resident Advisor (RA) within 24 hours of the last university final exam and turn in their room key before leaving for winter break. Failure to do so may result in an assessment of charges. Residents not returning after the break must cancel their housing contract with the Housing Assignments Office, located in the A-3 Lounge either in person or by email at housing@tamu.edu. Simply telling the residence hall staff or Student Business Services will not cancel your student’s residence hall contract. Please refer to the residence hall contract for specific deposit forfeiture and room charges associated with canceling your contract. Residents who decide over the winter break that they will not return to the residence halls for the spring semester must cancel their housing with the Housing Assignments Office in writing by email or by fax and must make arrangements to remove personal belongings from the residence hall.

Storage of belongings in rooms during the break is at the student’s own risk. The University is not responsible for items stolen or damaged during winter break. If you have any further questions, contact the Department of Residence Life at 979.845.4744.

### On Campus Housing Preparations
- Pay all bills before leaving or have them forwarded.
- If your student desires to have mail forwarded while gone, fill out a change of address card a few weeks before leaving or contact the post office to have them hold mail, which they will do for up to 30 days.
- Notify apartment manager of absence during the winter break.
- Discuss plans for the break with roommate and agree on what needs to be done before leaving.
- Take your valuables home with you (laptops, Xbox, Playstation, flat-screens, etc.)
- Take pictures of the serial numbers on your valuables with your phone camera so you have them with you if you need to report something stolen.
- Secure/Store away items usually kept outside such as lawn mowers, BBQ grills, furniture, and bicycles.
- For security purposes, put lights on a timer while gone and alternate them to mimic actual usage.
- Windows – shut them, latch them, lock them, and close all blinds.
- Report any suspicious activity to your police department. If you see something, say something!

  College Station Police Department: 979.764.3600
  Bryan Police Department: 979.361.3888
  University Police Department: 979.845.2345

### Off Campus Housing Preparations
It may seem like just yesterday you dropped off your student here in Aggieland. However, in one short semester your student has become accustomed to newfound freedom and responsibility. With winter break quickly approaching, it is time to start preparing for their arrival. You and your student may face some challenges as they return home for the break. Sometimes families find that their student’s return home can be as difficult as their departure.

It is natural for families to adjust to the departure of their child. After one child leaves home it may mean readjusting focus to other children and activities, parents making changes.

- Acknowledge that your student’s habits may have changed. Talk to them about these changes before the visit.
- Discuss expectations for the visit. If you are planning an event in which you expect your student to participate, let them know ahead of time when it’s scheduled and how long it will take.
- Talk to your student about “home rules” and what adjustments you can make now that they are in college. Start with the rules in place when your student left (curfews, use of family car, laundry, meals, etc.) and discuss with your student appropriate updates now that they are more independent.
- Prepare your family. Visits can be an adjustment to everyone, especially other children at home who have just adjusted to a sibling being away.
- Don’t let yourself be taken advantage of by catering to your student. Acknowledging independence can free parents of taking care of every need, such as laundry, cooking meals, etc.
- Be prepared that your student may choose to make alternative plans during their break. Some students choose to stay in College Station, or plan trips with their friends. Make sure you ask your student their plans so you aren’t surprised!

Additionally, some students say their families do not recognize how much college has changed them. Your student may have changed in subtle ways that might not be obvious to you, but are of major importance to your student. Given these changes, both with students away at school and families at home, it is no wonder visits home can require some adjustment. In fact, your family may wish to keep some things in mind as you plan for the upcoming extended break. Listed to the left are some ways to ensure your student’s visit home is a positive experience for the whole family. Enjoy your student’s visit by preparing.

**Tips For A Smooth Visit**

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- Discuss expectations for the visit. If you are planning an event in which you expect your student to participate, let them know ahead of time when it’s scheduled and how long it will take.
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- Prepare your family. Visits can be an adjustment to everyone, especially other children at home who have just adjusted to a sibling being away.
- Don’t let yourself be taken advantage of by catering to your student. Acknowledging independence can free parents of taking care of every need, such as laundry, cooking meals, etc.
- Be prepared that your student may choose to make alternative plans during their break. Some students choose to stay in College Station, or plan trips with their friends. Make sure you ask your student their plans so you aren’t surprised!
Texas A&M Information Technology has a number of resources for family members. Information on Parent Access for bill payments, the Howdy web portal, signing up for Code Maroon Alerts, and frequently asked IT questions can be found at http://it.tamu.edu/IT_for_Parents.php. This website serves as a great resource for family members of Texas A&M University students.

Texas A&M provides an option for parents to receive access to their student’s class schedule, grades, and verification of enrollment online. In order for you to access this information your student will need to grant you permission by setting up a parent password, which can be done at https://howdy.tamu.edu. Your student will be able to grant you access to two accounts: Bill Payment Suite (allows parents to view billing history and make payments on their student’s behalf) and the Howdy web portal (allows parents to access academic records, tax forms, financial aid, and other services).

To preserve account integrity, Texas A&M Information Technology locks NetID accounts when suspicious activity, such as concurrent logins, is detected. Concurrent logins are a sign of account compromise and indicate that multiple people are using the same account. Sharing passwords can cause concurrent logins, and is against the Student Rules for Responsible Computing.

End-of-the-semester stress combined with cooler temperatures often leaves many students with colds, coughs, or the flu. To have the best chance of avoiding sickness, your student should:

- **Get a flu shot**: Students can set up an appointment to get their flu shot with Student Health Services (SHS) online at http://shs.tamu.edu or by calling the SHS Appointment Line at (979)458-8250. Flu shots are now available at SHS for $20, but prices and availability are subject to change without notice.
- **Wash** hands as often as possible and use antibacterial hand sanitizer.
- **Sleep**: It is recommended that adults get 7-9 hours of sleep each night; many students do not get this amount.
- **Exercise**: Whether it is a group aerobics class at the Rec Center, or simply taking a walk for relaxation, experts recommend at least 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week.
- **Eat healthy**: Eat nutritious and balanced meals. A diet based on a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and dairy products provides the best nutrition. Visit www.choosemyplate.gov for more information and tips on how to eat healthy on a daily basis.
- **Limit alcohol** consumption and avoid use of tobacco products.

If your student does get sick and needs medication, SHS offers over the counter medications for Texas A&M students. The pharmacy is located on the first floor of the health center in Beutel, and is open Monday through Friday, 8 am-5 pm.
Your student is nearing the end of their first semester and will soon experience their first round of final projects and exams at Texas A&M University. This can often be a stressful time for students who are still adjusting to the rigorous academics at Texas A&M University and the new level of responsibility in preparing for these projects and exams. As a family member of an Aggie, you have the important role of being a supporter and encourager during this stressful time. Luckily, you are not the only one wanting to help your student succeed! Below is information on some of the academic support resources available to Texas A&M students. Please share this information with your Aggie, and encourage them to take advantage of all the FREE help available to them!

One key to managing final exams is proper time management. The last day of classes at Texas A&M is Wednesday, December 9. Thursday is termed “reading day,” in which there are no classes so students can prepare for exams. Many students feel overwhelmed, and rather than using the reading day to study, they will use this “downtime” to focus on socializing. To help your student avoid this common pitfall, encourage him or her to begin devising an exam study schedule well in advance. The fall final exam schedule is posted online at: http://registrar.tamu.edu/general/finalschedule.aspx.

Academic Success Center
The Academic Success Center’s mission is to help all Aggies enhance their academic performance. The Center’s holistic approach helps students identify roadblocks to academic success and ensures that all students have access to comprehensive resources. Students admitted to Texas A&M are among the best in Texas, the United States, and the world. Still, talented students sometimes find college-level academics challenging and stressful. The Academic Success Center strives to help each student achieve the highest possible academic potential. If your student’s grades do not seem to reflect their academic ability, you might want to discuss their study habits and maybe even remind them of services on campus, such as the Academic Success Center.

What the Academic Success Center Does:
Each Aggie is different, so programs are designed to identify and address individual needs. The Academic Success Center will help students develop an individualized success plan.

- **Initial Assessment**
  Various learning skills assessments are used to identify study skills that need attention.

- **Academic Coaching**
  Scholastic performance specialists (Academic Coaches) meet with each student and develop an action plan. When needed, students will be referred to academic support services such as supplemental instruction (SI), tutoring, or the University Writing Center, as well as student resources such as the Student Counseling Service. Academic Coaches work with individuals to help them realize their action plans and chart their progress.

- **Programs**
  The Center specialists provide workshops and other events to get students information they need to succeed. Students learn about topics such as time management, test prep, study skills, and more.

- **Tutoring & Supplemental Instruction**
  These peer-led programs offer academic assistance in courses that are often found difficult by students.

- **Transfer Student Program**
  The Transfer Student Program (TSP) is designed to help incoming transfer students learn more about the resources at TAMU, make connections with other transfer students, faculty and staff, and actively encourages engagement on all levels of the university. TSP does this through one-on-one peer mentoring, academic programs and study groups, small group study events, and much more.

All of the Center’s services are provided at no additional cost to students. For more information about the Academic Success Center, visit http://successcenter.tamu.edu/.

Here are some additional tips to pass along to your student:

- **Plan a study schedule.** Studying for an hour each day until the exam is more effective than studying several hours the night before.
- **Take breaks when studying.**
- **Take care of yourself:** nutrition and rest are essential for mental functioning!
- **Utilize academic support resources such as professor’s office hours, SI classes, drop-in tutoring, the Writing Center, and the Academic Success Center.**

What Else Works?
The number one priority set by Texas A&M for its students is academic success; however, research has shown that a student’s involvement in co-curricular activities may enhance their academic performance and their connection to the institution. A challenge many first-year students encounter is the struggle to find the balance between classroom and out-of-classroom involvement activities. At Texas A&M, we are committed to helping students find this balance. After their first semester many students may have already identified opportunities to get involved both on and off campus. If your student has not found something yet, it is never too late! Below you will find information about encouraging your student to get involved and the benefits of that involvement.

**Encouraging Your Student to Get Involved:**
As there are multiple opportunities for involvement, some students find themselves overwhelmed by the possibilities. As a family member of a current student, please encourage your student to utilize the available resources to help him or her get involved. Your support could make a difference in your student’s decision to step out and get involved.

The Department of Student Activities offers a variety of involvement resources on their web site, [http://studentactivities.tamu.edu](http://studentactivities.tamu.edu) to help students make the most of their involvement at Texas A&M University. Additionally, students can visit the Department of Student Activities in Room 125 of the Koldus Student Services Building to speak with a staff member about involvement opportunities.

Students can also attend the Spring MSC Open House on Sunday, January 24th from 1-4pm in the MSC. Student organizations will have tables set up with information about their organizations. The groups that choose to participate in the Spring Open House are typically the ones who are taking new members for the spring semester.

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**December:**
- 10th, Reading day, no classes.
- 11th, 14th-16th, Final Examinations for all students.
- 18th, Commencement and Commissioning.
- 24th- 31st, Faculty and Staff Holiday. University Closed.

**January:**
- 1st, Faculty and Staff Holiday. University Closed.
- 18th, Martin Luther King Jr. Day. University Closed.
- 19th, First day of spring semester classes.