

### **Minding the Gap: Staying on Track During Christmas Break**

The Christmas holidays can be a great time for college students to reconnect with their families and friends during the extended time at home. With more than two weeks off, students will have plenty of time to enjoy some much-needed time away from classes, books, and studying.

As they head out the dorm door to go home, remind them to lock up – they'll want to secure all possessions left in the dorm – and take home the few portable valuables they can't stand to leave behind (that laptop—for instance—to remain connected as the college squad parts ways for the holidays). Most importantly, make sure you encourage your child to depart from campus *ready* to return in January. Here are a few ways you can keep your college student on the track to success throughout the winter reprieve from all that higher learning:

#### **Spend The Break Wisely**

Eighteen days can feel like a lifetime when your child is home for the holidays. After all, it's time to enjoy grandma's cooking, a chance to have mom do the laundry like she did in high school, and even the opportunity to spend some time with the kid brother or sister for a change. But the holidays can also be a time when good habits may slip away. That's why it's important to balance all that rest and relaxation with a little discipline. Help them by creating these holiday break guidelines:

- **Keep a reasonable sleep routine.** Staying up all night – and/or sleeping all day – can make it particularly difficult for even the most driven of students to get back into a regular routine when returning to class. And since the new term starts in the New Year, there's no time to waste getting re-acclimated to academic life. Making certain your child sets a relaxed but realistic schedule can help them get some much-needed rest without getting too far off track.
- **Maintain physical exercise.** It can be tempting to plop on the sofa and binge-watch Netflix, but suggest that they throw in a morning run or a hike with friends, too. Retaining a little of the school routine will keep students physically sharp and ready to return to classes.
- **Keep that brain alert, too.** Make sure your college student doesn't spend the entire break on SnapChat and Instagram. They should save a few hours a day for stimulating conversation with friends (maybe even face to face!), some pleasure reading – even if it's just a magazine – or playing a game with family members.

#### **Have them returning and ready to do the work**

In addition to staying focused and keeping sharp while spending time at home, it's also important to make sure everything is in order when classes start back:

- **Register for spring classes.** At many institutions of higher learning, the time to register for spring semester arrived before students ever took off on winter break! For instance, at the University of West Alabama (UWA), pre-registration for spring semester was back in early November, so many students will already be set to start classes on January 8<sup>th</sup> (when school is in full swing again). It's important to make yourself aware of your student's deadlines to help them stay on top of the calendar. At UWA, the final deadline for applications for admission for spring semester is November 29, and registration is January 4.
- **Don't forget books.** Once classes are locked in, your student should go ahead and order books. By ordering early, they can take advantage of the money-saving option to buy used books. And don't forget, the cost of books may be covered by financial aid. Renting books is also a helpful

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option that may be more economical than buying. Either way, getting books in hand early ensures students are ready to hit the ground running when classes begin.

Holidays can be stressful enough without the added stress of last minute school activities and the chaos of getting back in the groove. Do everyone a favor and push your burgeoning scholar to prepare early... before the break begins. With some extra effort now – and then a little more during the break – students can return to campus prepared for classes and ready to work.

For more information about how you can help your college student succeed year-round, visit [www.uwa.edu](http://www.uwa.edu)!