

Dear Family,

My name is Dr. Donna Lang and I am the Associate Vice President for Academic Operations. I opened with “Dear Family” as I want you to know that I truly consider you part of my extended family. I am honored to be a part of the Texas A&M Galveston community and have the opportunity to work with your student!



You may hear us talking about our “Student Success Initiative”. As part of this initiative, in this message I would like to provide a few tools to assist in connecting with your student’s experience. Maybe the first one is to break down a very traditional myth! You may have heard about “weed out” courses or maybe even “weeding out students” from programs. (I even heard this discussion with families at a baseball game last night.) No! It is our intention to help your student succeed! Now, there are many different students and each one has a different idea of success. We are continually striving to help our students find that path. So what does success look like in the first year? We define five major goals. If you consider these goals as the big picture, it will help you to have good conversations with your student. I have tried to add a bit in each area about how you might translate this. Remember, you are coaching from home. Don’t take it on but continue to ask your student for examples or ideas how they might move toward these goals:

Community formation & belonging

Community looks different to different students. Every student should feel welcome, safe, and a member of the community. For some, they will have joined 20 organizations and run for student government positions. Some may be perfectly comfortable being almost independent. (I have a good relationship with a student that is almost always alone but he feels good about his program and his relationships so he is fine!) Just check if your student feels like they are in an “ok” place. If not, please reach out to the resources in this newsletter. We have staff that will help in multiple areas. And if you want me to help them connect, shoot me an email (below).

Increased awareness of campus resources

There are a ton of services. There is no way that we can brief you or your student on all of the options and/or connections. So..... The skill is to learn to ask! Sometimes it is really hard to know what to ask. If your student indicates they have a particular need, coach them to go ask. If you are unsure of the specific resource, have them go to the Seibel Learning Center (MAIN 2nd floor), The Commons (Library), Campus Living in the residence halls, or Student Affairs (Seibel Building next to the Student Center). All of these areas can help connect students to the correct resources. And, if they don't get exactly what they need, have them go to another. This is a good life skill!

Develop skills to achieve personal & academic goals

This is pretty broad, too! At the first level, the skills can be more heavily related to personal life skills. (Good sleep habits, Good nutrition, Exercise, Attending class, you get the idea.) The student will be developing stronger academic skills. Same as above, there are lots of resources on campus. Students may not yet have a clear understanding of academic expectations. This is so much more than earning a grade. Grades are important, but the ability to become a strong independent learner is really the bigger picture! They may experience challenges or even be disappointed. Please have them talk to folks. Every class has a syllabus that will define the grade. One of the most difficult adjustments is that the university grades are much less about effort and more about productivity.

Contribute to a diverse & inclusive environment

As I mentioned earlier, you are part of my extended family. I hope your student will grow to believe that as well about every other member of this community. Aggies are loyal! But, this is also about learning to work and communicate in a diverse society. Every student on this campus will work on broad geographic jobs, communicate with multiple audiences, and supervise diverse employees or teams of people.

Build major commitment & define marketable skills

The first year can often be about figuring out who you are. This is a time for your student to really explore their major and explore options. There may be programs that they never considered. Ask them to describe a really great opportunity or program in their major area. Have them go talk to a faculty member about their area of study and then tell you about it. Have them visit a lab or a unique space on the campus.

I realize this is a lot of information. Take a deep breath if you need to. You have raised some pretty amazing young people. We are not a perfect place with perfect people, but I promise you we do care. Here is to a “successful” first semester!

Gig 'Em,

Dr. Donna Lang '88

Associate Vice President for Academic Operations

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