

Ten Wise Decisions Your College Student Can Make to Improve His GPA

Posted by: College Parents of America

If your college student is struggling academically, she (and you) may be wondering how to improve her situation. You are probably encouraging her to do everything that she can to do better. Most students who are in difficulty – perhaps even on academic warning or academic probation – want to do better, but many do not know what to do. They say they'll work *harder*, but they don't necessarily know how to work *smarter*. Other students simply make the wrong decisions in an attempt to improve their situation. Talk to your student about her difficulty. Help her try to honestly analyze what has caused the problem. (This may not be an easy process.) As she begins to think about how to address her situation, encourage her to avoid many common mistakes by considering some of the following ten wise decisions to improve her GPA.

- **Take ownership of the problem.** Many students do not want to admit that their difficulty is the result of their actions. They allow themselves to become victims. They blame the professor, the subject matter, the time of the class, their fellow students, their roommate or living situation, or some other factor. If your student takes ownership of the *problem*, he will take the first step toward taking ownership of the *solution*. He will not simply hope that he gets lucky or that things will get better, he will know that he needs to take action to improve the situation.
- **Withdraw on time from a course that is not salvageable.** Sometimes students may recognize that there is one course in their current schedule which they will probably not be able to pass, or will barely pass. Some students hope things will get better, or they simply do not want to face the reality of failure, so they wait too late to withdraw from the class. Hopefully, your student will not need to withdraw from a class very often, but sometimes it is the wisest decision because it allows the student to put her energies into the courses in which she may potentially do well – and to protect her GPA. Encourage your student not to wait. If she is not sure about the deadline or process for withdrawing, she should talk to her academic advisor or advising office. She should not assume that she will be given special consideration after the deadline.
- **Use a pass/fail option if it is available.** Many schools offer students an option of taking a certain number of their courses (sometimes as many as one per semester) on a pass/fail basis. Students may choose not to receive a grade for a course, but to have it appear on their transcript as a P or F, while still getting the credit for the course. This means that the course will not affect their GPA. Be sure that your student takes advantage of this option if it is available, and does not miss the deadline for requesting the option. Again, if she is not sure of the policy, your student should consult with her advisor or advising office.
- **Get help.** Most schools offer tutoring services or other support. Students in difficulty should seek this help early and often. Your student does not need to, and should not, struggle alone. Your student might also talk with another student who is doing well in the course and who might

be willing to spend some time tutoring. Often, the best students are the students who are the first to seek tutoring help. Seeking help or tutoring is a wise, proactive step.

- **Don't forget about any Incomplete grades.** Sometimes unexpected circumstances arise at the end of a semester and a student will receive an Incomplete grade. This means that your student still needs to do something to finish the course, and he will then receive his grade. Many students forget about the work that they need to complete when they get wrapped up in the next semester's classes. At most institutions, an Incomplete grade will become an F after a certain amount of time. Your student should be sure to complete all coursework. Successfully turning an Incomplete into a quality grade can help a GPA.
- **Repeat a failed course.** If your student fails a course, she may never want to think about that course again. However, at many institutions, if a student retakes a course, the new grade may replace, or at least partially replace, the old grade. An improved grade obviously means an improved GPA.
- **Plan a reasonable schedule.** If your student has failed or withdrawn from many classes, he may recognize that he is now behind on earning credits and he may try to make up for that by enrolling for extra credits the following semester. You may encourage him to "get his money's worth" from that high tuition. However, your student needs to think carefully how many credits he can successfully carry during any one semester. Attempting to take on a load that is too heavy may be setting him up for failure. This is especially true if he has struggled in the past. Fewer credits, well done, will help him gain confidence in himself as a student as well as improve his GPA. He may then need to take summer classes, intercession classes, or perhaps complete an extra semester, but he will do it successfully with the confidence that he is improving.
- **Know herself and make her own choices.** Your student may need to resist the advice of her friends who will suggest certain courses or professors because they loved them. Every student has different needs, or needs different styles or personalities in a professor. Some students thrive on well organized lectures, while other students need active group participation. Some students love a professor's flexible, loose approach to a course, while other students need a well structured syllabus from the beginning. Your student should think carefully about what she wants and needs in a classroom experience.
- **Take different types of classes.** Your student will probably have a certain number of all-college required courses. She will also have courses that she needs for her major or minor. There will also be courses that your student will want to take simply because they interest her. As she plans her schedule, she should balance all of these types of courses. Encourage your student not to just "take the requirements" or just take courses in her major. Encourage her to take a course in her major, take one or two required courses, and take something that she loves.
- **Listen to the advice of the professionals.** Hopefully, your student will listen to some of the advice that you give her. Hopefully, your student will listen to herself as she thinks honestly about what she wants and what she needs to do to accomplish it. However, your student needs, also, to listen to the wisdom of the college professionals who want to see her succeed. She

should meet with her professors, her advisor, academic support personnel, her resident assistant or residence director, and perhaps even a counselor. Encourage her to take advantage of all of the help that is available to her as she takes charge of her education.

Making wise choices and decisions is a learning process. Your student may make mistakes. The process of making mistakes is the process of learning and growing. Try to help your college student anticipate some of the mistakes that may happen, and try to help her avoid those mistakes, however, recognize that some mistakes will be inevitable. Step back and let her try to manage her education. Although there may be difficulties along the way, you may be surprised – and you will be especially proud –when she succeeds on her own.

College Parents of America (2011) *Ten Wise Decisions Your College Student Can Make to Improve His GPA*.

Jan. 21, 2011, from College Parents of America website: <http://www.collegeparents.org/members/resources/articles/ten-wise-decisions-your-college-student-can-make-improve-his-gpa>

For more information contact careercenter@indianatech.edu

INDIANA**TECH**
Career Center