Working with Parents

Probably the most important thing to remember is that students are only here for 4-5 years – but they will always be the children of their parents. College personnel refer to them as “students” but the parents are hearing “my child.” Addressing that up front helps them start to see that our role is different from theirs and important for a time. There should never be a sense of us vs. them – but a strong message that we are part of the whole package called student success.

If you are talking to parents during advising conferences, it is important to explain your role and how it relates to their role. If you can create the idea of a partnership, you will find it helps them to realize that we have the same goal they do – graduation of their child. Describing their role as shifting from manager to consultant helps them visualize what will be happening (we hope) through the fall semester. Then you can make it clear what your role is and how you will respond to the students you serve.

The main thing to remember when interacting with a parent of one of your students is that the laws designate the information you may share without permission. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows you to share only directory information (phone number, address, etc.) or broad information regarding requirements – what could be found on a major sheet or in the bulletin. If there is a request from parents to have additional information, the student must sign a waiver. It is wise to require the student to sign a waiver in person – don’t trust that the email is coming from the student, or even the phone call.

If you open a student’s record and see the privacy flag, you cannot even acknowledge that the student is enrolled on campus. When there is a privacy flag, then NO information can be given about that student. It’s best to open a student’s record before you begin a conversation with someone, to know for sure the status of the student’s record.