

December has arrived and we recently welcomed over 8,000 people who attended one of the five Christmas at Luther concerts (along with some unseasonably cold weather). I recognize that, for some parents, traveling to Luther to attend the concert was a challenge. If you were unable to attend, please know that you may experience the performance on public radio or purchase a CD of the concert through the Luther Book. I attended the Thursday evening performance, my second Christmas at Luther. I am continually impressed with the gifts and talents our students make available for us to see and hear.

What we may not realize as mere audience members is the amount of work that goes into such a performance; the same can be said for a sports team or student research project. Simply stated, students put many more hours into these experiences than the time we spend watching and enjoying their performances.

December also means the fall semester is coming quickly to a close. In my last message I offered questions to help engage your son or daughter in conversation. I hope you have had an opportunity for such a dialogue with them about the Luther community. Providing opportunities for reflection is critical to helping students deepen their learning and identify their many callings.

In early November, USA Today's education website featured an opinion piece from a first-year student at another institution. She stated, "Freshman year isn't supposed to be glamorous." Looking back to my first year in college, I trust she is onto something. She reflected on how she did not realize she might not be the only one feeling a certain way. She was delighted to learn she was not the only first-year student who felt unsettled and who had not found a niche on campus.

First-year students can sometimes find the process of finding their place exhilarating and/or confounding. With a semester just about under their belts, the coming break provides an opportunity to discover how your student's transition has gone. If a student says everything is fine, that is a cue for exploring a little more deeply. I do hope your student has gleaned some insights from this fall semester that will aid him or her in having a successful J-term and spring semester.

The first-year student whose opinion piece I mentioned above offered four tips for her first-year colleagues across the country and I share them here with you along with some personal reflections. While these tips were directed specifically to first-year students, I think they are wise recommendations for students across the college experience.

1. **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** This is a good time to ask students who they have asked for help, to discern whether they're now comfortable leaning into their experience and seeking appropriate help. Academic advisors, professors, peers, and others on campus are more than willing to help. I always tell students: Don't presume others can read your mind—if you have questions or concerns, don't hesitate to seek guidance and counsel.

2. **Don't be afraid to attend an event alone.** Has your student attended an event on campus even when none of his or her friends were interested? Attending a lecture can be daunting, but students usually find that they meet someone else who shares their interests. If they choose to not go because they think no one shares their interests, they will miss a chance to meet those who do.
3. **Acknowledge small victories.** Taking on major tasks or projects can be intimidating, and for some students the need for perfection can get in the way of momentum and success. I remember when an instructor once posed the question, "How do you eat an elephant?" Answer? "One bite at a time." How often have students sought to tackle everything at once and been so overburdened they couldn't act on anything (or with too little time at the end of the semester)? Taking on responsibilities for the first time is a solid step forward and should be acknowledged. The work doesn't stop but it does provide the impetus for success in the face of the next challenge.
4. **Achieve balance.** What is balance? It's not the same for every person, but finding the appropriate balance for oneself in relation to exercise, healthy eating, studying, and sleep is essential. The latter issue—sleep—is a critical consideration for a student's long-term health and success. When students come home from this semester, ask about sleep habits and find out if late nights can be lessened by strategic use of other times during their day, for example better use of the gaps between classes.

With J-term just around the corner a fresh opportunity awaits. How will students make adjustments following the fall semester? Can they identify areas where they did well and succeeded? Do they know where they may have made a mistake? Stepping back and identifying why a mistake happened may be more important than a glowing success.

If you are on twitter, please follow me @lutherdeanland and share your thoughts and reflections. You may also contact me via email at clandstrom@luther.edu.

I wish you a blessed Christmas and New Year's holiday.

Corey Landstrom,
vice president and dean for
student life

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corey Landstrom". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.