

EMPOWERING STUDENTS: CHANGING OUR VIEW ON FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

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AHEAD 2025

AGENDA

- Introductions and Pulse Check
- Societal Changes
- Antifragility
- Our Shift to 1-1 Meetings/Offering Other Supports
- Getting Buy-in
- Takeaways and Open Discussion

INTRODUCTIONS

- Jodi Rachins
- Lauren Tornatore
- UMass Lowell quick facts:
 - 17,000 total students
 - Large urban, decentralized
 - 45% first gen, minority-serving AANAPISI
- UML DS Quick facts
 - DS serves all UML students
 - Approximately 1200 students currently registered with DS (10% UG represented)



DISCLAIMER

- We respect campuses that choose greater family involvement and understand the challenges of setting boundaries. We're here to share our approach while acknowledging this process has ongoing hurdles in our daily work.
- We understand that while our work is similar, many institutions have different names for our offices. For the purposes of today, we will move forward with Disability Services.
- We are excited to spend time with you today! In the interest of time, we kindly ask that interactions occur during the designated times we have allotted.

PULSE CHECK

- If you are able, raise your hand if you want students to graduate with the following skills
- Switch to a thumbs up if you feel we have a role in developing that skill

Growth from setbacks

Developing perseverance

Taking initiative and developing self-direction

2023: 58% of hiring managers say grads are unprepared



COLLEGING/PARENTING/STUDENTING HAS CHANGED! PART 1

Later Social & Emotional Development



- Parents more involved; students not embarrassed
 - 33% set appointments for their students
 - 70% advise on finance/work (45% GenX)
- Delays: dating, close friendships, driving, working
- Overscheduled and over-supervised
 - less: independence, confidence, and managing of own time
- Arrive at college with diagnoses/school-based treatment history
 - Expectation of continuity of care -> success
 - Unfamiliar pros and peers – fears of missed warning signs
 - Grew up in an active shooter drill world

COLLEGING/PARENTING/STUDENTING HAS CHANGED! PART 2

Increased Technology & Communication

- Anxious Generation effect: social media (curated vs. internal lives)
- Students stay in constant contact with family
 - 61% students text their parents multiple times/wk
 - Track students' locations and health
- Colleges have major shift in family communication
 - HS Google Classroom, 24/7 parental access to grades and communication
 - Now students do all independently without learning how
 - Self-directed time management
 - Navigate multiple systems
 - Email management



COLLEGING/PARENTING/STUDENTING HAS CHANGED! PART 3

Shifted Cultural/Societal Norms

- College has become:
 - Increasingly expensive
 - Required for entry level positions
 - Family investment/ROI
- Students are choosing to stay close to home during college and after graduation due to increased costs of living that undermine independence.



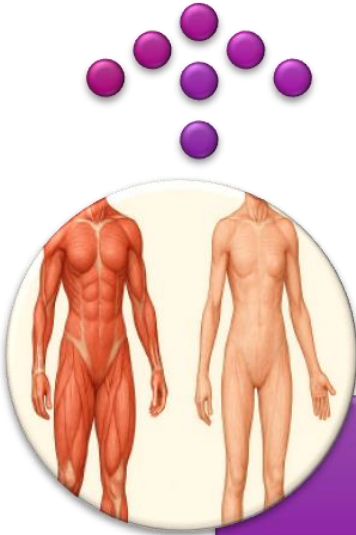
DISABILITY SUPPORT HAS SHIFTED TOO

- Many campuses have responded to these societal changes by taking on responsibility to do more and more for a student.
 - Retention, Customer Service, Life is already so hard...
- DS Work: Conversations are shifting away from barriers to access and opportunities for learning to modifications, removing discomfort and increasing success.
- Rather than complain about how things were “back in my day” we need to acknowledge this shift and put supports in place to help all members of a family transition to college effectively.

How do we do this while instilling the tools to move towards independence?



ANTIFRAGILITY



Antifragile: Improves when exposed to stress, volatility, or uncertainty.



Fragile: Breaks under pressure and never entirely recovers

Believing in students' antifragility, particularly those with disabilities, fosters resilience, adaptability, and the strength to face discomfort and take on challenges.

Adapted from *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* by Nassim Nicholas Taleb

ANTIFRAGILITY, OUR COLLEAGUES AGREE!

If we view them as **children**, rather than college students, that is likely how they will **view themselves**. Parents must take a step back (or aside).

All students have **unique** abilities and experiences that shape their academic **performance**, both positive and negative..

College is supposed to be **hard**. Assignments and work are supposed to **stretch** students past their **comfort zone** at times. Students will not always be successful with all of their work.

Accommodations are here to provide access to the experience the student **signed up for**. **Not to be exempted.**"

MAKING ANTIFRAGILITY A GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN THE DS ROLE

- We need to reframe our thinking to help students develop antifragility while honoring the family relationship and previously mentioned societal changes.
- We trust students to do all the other hard things that make up being a college student. Talking with us about their lived experiences is not more difficult than having a roommate, getting an internship, studying organic chemistry, etc. We can work with students to develop skills they can carry into adulthood rather than underestimating their capability.

PAUSE AND SIT WITH IT

What do you find...

- **S**urprising?
- **I**nteresting?
- **T**hought provoking?



ANTIFRAGILITY IN ACTION

Our reflection results:

- Not gaining more from the parent
- The strong student relationship is the most important

OUR FIRST CHANGES

- We moved our meetings to 1:1 staff/student only
- We provide intentional, separate family supports



THE RATIONALE

We found 4 factors led us to create boundaries with families:

Why was it our standard practice to be one of the few offices allowing families to book/join appointments?

Involving families came at the cost of student trust, developing rapport, and following the interactive process.

Efficiency of our Intake meetings.

Equity - for students with and without involved parents, across the office, in practice, etc.

WHAT WE CURRENTLY DO

- Family Information Sessions
- [Resources for Families page](#)
- Student-centered in all correspondence
- Student Resource Guide is provided ahead of meeting
- End of Intake Meeting Summary Option
- Other: Prospective Student Form, Peer Coaching, various campus events and education, intro video, assist K-12 professionals with the transition

Sample slide from family training

Disability Services at UML: Developing Self-Advocacy and Passing the Baton from Parent/Guardian to the Student

Jodi Rachins, M.A., LMHC, Director

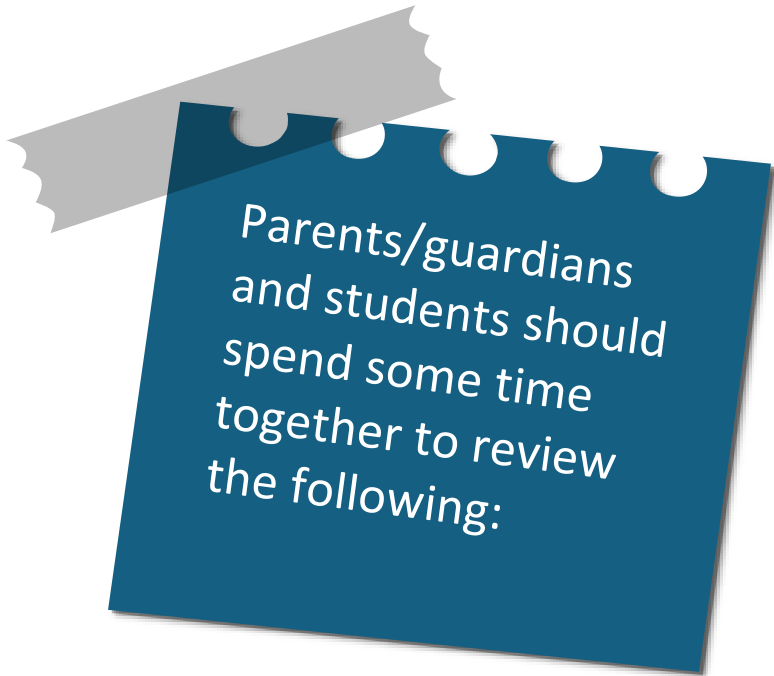
Lauren Tornatore, M.A., M.Ed./CAGS, Senior Asst. Dir.



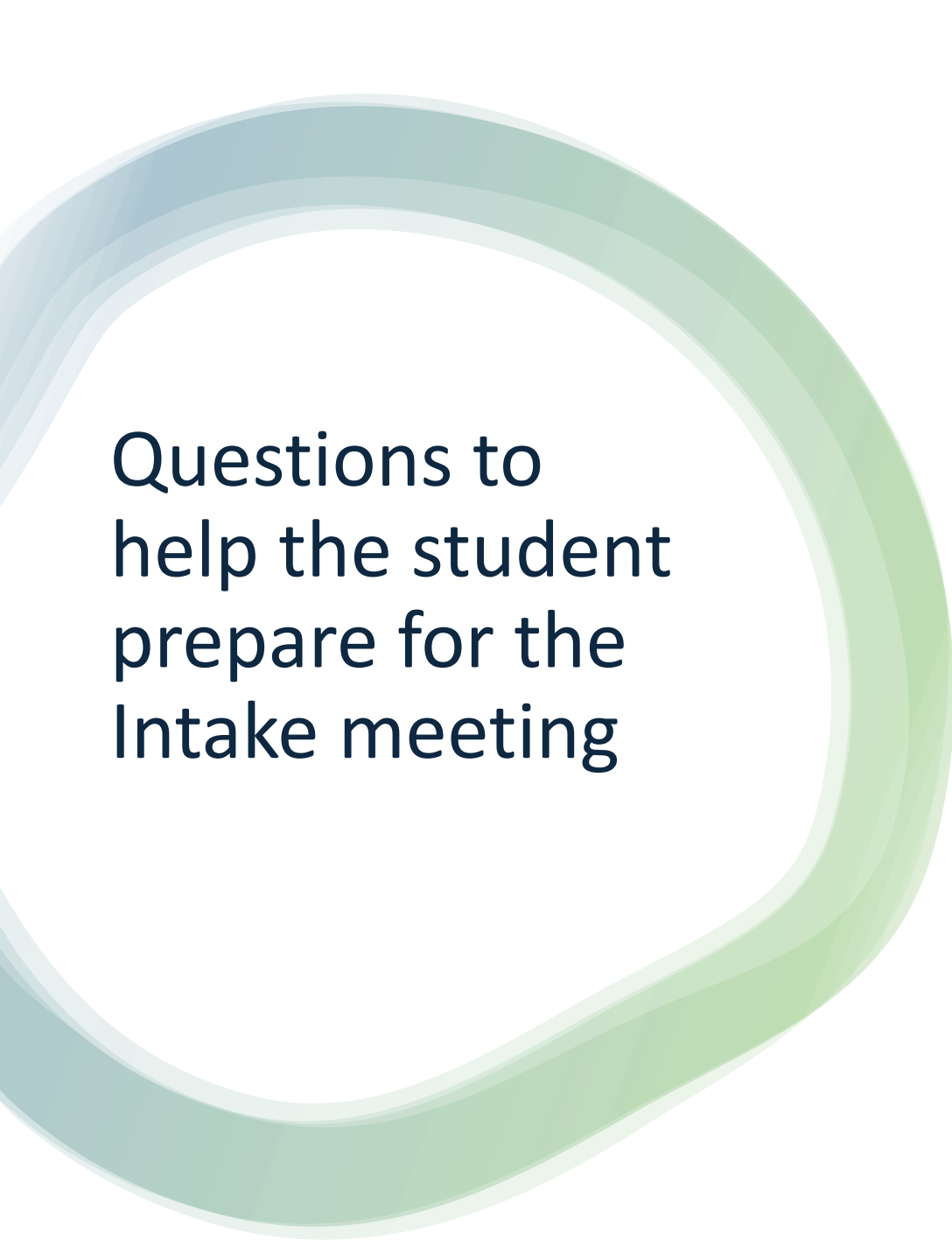
Antifragility and DS: Centering the Adult Student

- Entering college, responsibilities shift to the adult student and that can be scary, unexpected, or feel burdensome.
- Our meetings are designed to be one on one with the adult student. They are the person with the lived experience and we need to hear directly from them to best understand how we can support their educational experience.
- When others are present, students often hesitate to speak for themselves. The meeting may become transactional/adversarial rather than focused on **building a relationship**. Often, students will share things with us they are afraid to reveal in front of a parent/guardian.

DS Registration Preparation



Task	Description
Review	Review the Disability Services Office Website to understand our process and expectations.
Help	Help your student understand and obtain their documentation .
Practice	Review the documentation and have them practice talking about strengths, challenges, barriers to be addressed.
Assist	Be available for questions when your student completes the Public Accommodation Request Form (PARF).
Ensure	Ensure your student can access and regularly checks their UML email.
Help	Help prepare questions for the Intake meeting.



Questions to help the student prepare for the Intake meeting

What challenges are you [the student] currently facing or have typically experienced in an academic setting?

Academic areas to consider: taking exams, studying, classroom challenges

What strengths do you have in the academic environment?

What academic accommodations have worked for you in the past?

What academic accommodations do you feel will be helpful moving forward here at UML?

Is there anything else that you [the student] wants the DS office to know that is related to registering with our office?

Sample slide from family training

Setting Up For Success

Sample slide from family training

- Review this checklist to identify areas to work on over the summer: [Assessing College Readiness](#) (from Landmark College)

Planning out the semester:

- Review the academic calendar dates.
- Decide which type of planner will work best, input important dates ahead of time.
- Consider apps for time management and organization.
- Familiarize with Blackboard/Canvas, MyUML/SIS, Outlook/OneDrive.
- Does a reduced courseload make sense? (getting one's "sea legs" or ongoing "juggling 3 balls over 5 balls")
- We are a large, decentralized urban campus. Plan travel/meal time and look at shuttle schedule.

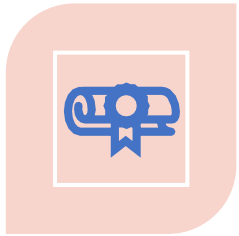
Preparing for Conversations with Faculty:

- Accommodations and information about oneself.
- If sick or missed a deadline/unprepared.
- Communication style – email, office hours, after class, private meeting, etc.

Identifying Success Team and How They Assist:

- Instructors directly (via email, office hours, after class)
- Disability Services office
- CLASS Office – Tutoring, Success Coaching, Advising, Testing Center
- Counseling
- Other Supports (Athletics, Honors, Learning Communities, Riverhawk Scholars, etc.)
- RA/RD, upper classman student, peer coach
- And of course, your family and friends!

What to start now



TOGETHER:

REVIEW DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS ON OUR WEBSITE. PICK ONE THAT WORKS BEST FOR THE STUDENT AND HELP THEM GET A COPY.



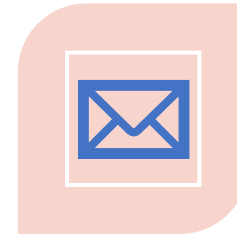
STUDENT:

FILL OUT PARF AND UPLOAD COMPLETED DOCUMENTATION.



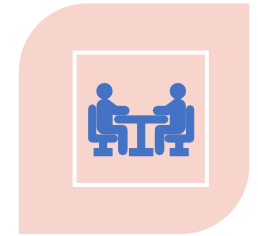
STUDENT:

CHECK UML EMAIL FOR NEXT STEPS.



STUDENT:

SCHEDULE INTAKE MEETING WHEN CONTACTED BY DS VIA UML EMAIL. THIS MEETING SHOULD TAKE PLACE OVER THE SUMMER.



TOGETHER:

CONSIDER POINTS OF DISCUSSION FOR INTAKE MEETING.
**SEE
SLIDE 13 FOR
DETAILS.*****

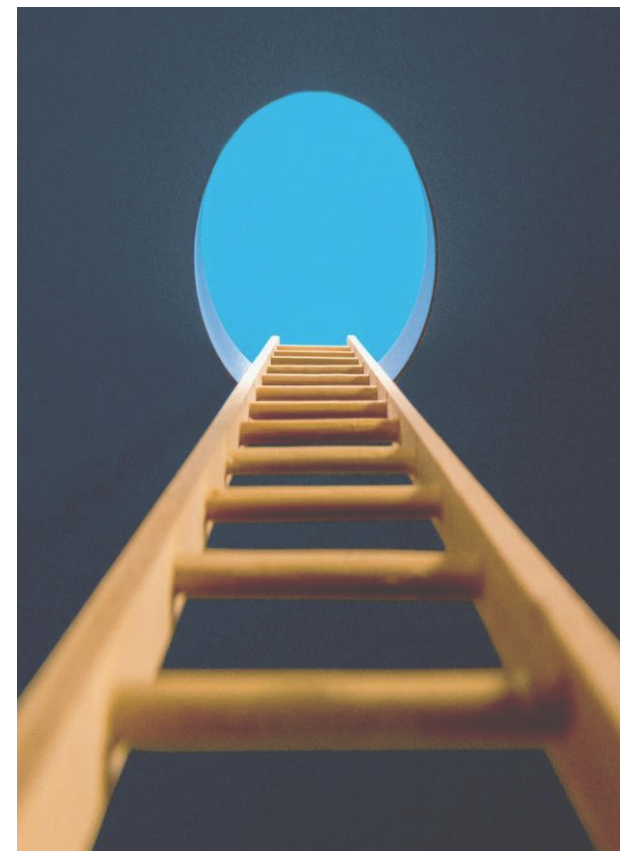
GETTING BUY-IN FROM ADMINISTRATION - PART 1

- **Making your case**

- Talk to: similar offices, faculty, & students at your institution
- Manage-Up (use data)
- Leverage unique expertise
- Contextualize the parental role in a positive, productive light

- **Prepare for Pushback**

- Being careful to say process, not blanket policy
- Consider the what-ifs... possible exceptions? (rights and access)
- Legal – adult student self-identifies & asks for accommodations
- Unknown/invisible family dynamics and equity



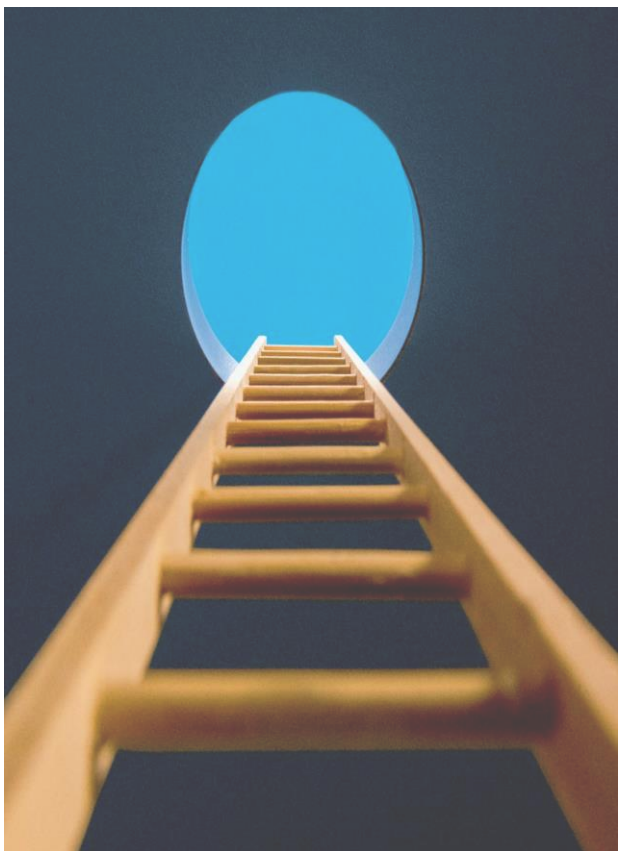
GETTING BUY-IN FROM ADMINISTRATION - PART 2

- **Set Boundaries**



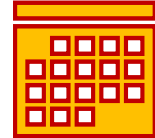
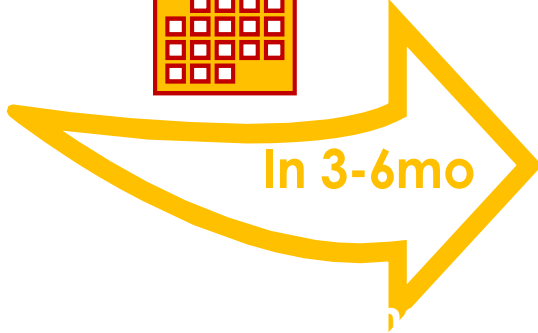


- Plan how to maintain your control when it gets heated
- Positive tone, it's not "no", it's "your role is this..."
- How draw a line once it's open?

- **Reassess Regularly**

- Make changes hard data rather than "heart" data
 - One complaint enough to consider the "why"
- Are difficult parents just a part of our role?
- What is offered to families, is it effective? Can we collaborate?
 - Data = appeased



REFLECTION WORKSHEET: A CALL TO ACTION

	  <p>ASAP</p>	  <p>In 3-6mo</p>	  <p>In 1-2yrs</p>
What I can do:			
What I need to do it:			
Expected challenges:			

We can all do hard things

TAKEAWAYS AND QUESTIONS

- We would love to hear from you! Please share any major takeaways or questions you have for us.
- We know not everyone wants to share in the large group, feel free to use the QR code to give us feedback/ask questions/or let us know if you'd like to meet to discuss things further.

Contact us:

- Jodi_Rachins@uml.edu
- Lauren_Tornatore@uml.edu



REFERENCES

Cited References

- [Inside Higher Ed: How bad are helicopter parents?](#)
- [Higher Ed Dive: Some employers are wary of Gen Z workers. What can colleges do?](#)
- [Antifragility](#)
- [Growth mindset](#)
- Jane Jarrow [open letter](#) to parents of students with disabilities
- [Assessing College Readiness](#) (from Landmark College)
- Nassim Nicholas Taleb. *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*. Random House, 2012
- Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Penguin, 2024.

Resources specific to UMass Lowell:

- [UMass Lowell Disability Services](#)
- [UML DS: Information for Families](#) *Includes our full family presentation
- [About the Umass Lowell campus community](#)

A special thanks to Chat GPT for helping us say some things better than our brains could!