July 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians of the Class of 2013 and Transfer Students,

We are delighted that your daughter has chosen Bryn Mawr, and we are looking forward to her arrival. Enclosed are some notes for parents about the start of school and student health and well being. We ask that you complete and return the enclosed Student’s Guardian Information form, so that we may contact you in the manner you prefer.

Bryn Mawr is committed in both philosophy and practice to taking students seriously--as women and as scholars. There is a long tradition here of treating students as adults, beginning with the granting of self-governance to the students in 1890, long before it was seen as possible at most other institutions. Bryn Mawr’s honor system also assumes integrity and responsibility in the way students conduct themselves. In advising undergraduates, we speak directly with them about issues of concern and encourage them to take responsibility for their education. Like you, we try to strike the right balance between offering advice and allowing students to make their own choices. We strive to express confidence in their good judgment, to respect their privacy, and to earn their trust.

Parents often ask what their role is in their daughters’ lives at Bryn Mawr. As your daughters leave home, your support and understanding are crucial. Your daughters want -- and need -- to be increasingly independent, but they also need to know that help is available if they encounter difficulties.

This summer, all of us are focusing our attention on your daughter making a good start at Bryn Mawr. Once the semester begins, parents continue to play an essential role in helping students adjust to college. Especially at the beginning of the year, parents are the ones most likely to hear about anything that goes wrong. I will reiterate what you have probably heard from others about the first weeks or learned from your own experience with an older child. Don’t panic over a few unhappy phone calls. They usually just signal the normal ups and downs of adjusting to a new environment. If things do not improve, however, and you become concerned, please call or urge your daughter to speak with her dean if she has not done so already. We can only help if we know when your daughter needs our assistance. We want to support her and do what we can to ensure that her first weeks at Bryn Mawr will be good ones.

In many ways, it was easier for parents of college students to strike an appropriate balance between involvement and distance before technology made constant contact as possible as it is for many families today. Cell phones and email are wonderful when you need to reach your daughter immediately, but they also make it tempting to stay in such constant contact that it is almost as if your daughter never left home! While that may sound wonderful on those days when the
prospect of saying good-bye is painful, it can also undermine a student’s opportunity to feel that she is on her own. Your daughter needs to feel that she can handle some of life’s challenges by relying on her own judgment and experience. She will probably make some mistakes and experience some anxiety in the process—most of us did, too. But in the end, it is the only way she will develop real confidence. However ambivalent parents may be about the prospect of a daughter growing up and becoming independent, that is what most of you truly want for your children at this stage in their lives. Developing the confidence to combine healthy self-reliance with a willingness to ask for help when it is needed is crucial to true maturity and independence. You as parents and we as deans and teachers must work together to help students achieve this. It is enormously satisfying to see this growth happen in the course of four years.

Our advising relationship is with your daughter, but be assured that we will often encourage your daughter to speak with you about the problems or concerns that she brings to one of us. You can be confident that in serious situations, we will insist that your daughter contact you or ask her to let us do so. In emergency situations or when we discover that a student’s health or well-being is at serious risk, we will, of course, contact you. Accordingly, please remind your daughter to place your emergency numbers on file with the Registrar when she is prodded to do so by email and to be sure they are updated each semester.

I hope that you and your daughter have a good end of summer and that the transition to Bryn Mawr goes smoothly. We want to do everything we can to help make that possible, so please call on us and encourage your daughter to do the same.

Sincerely yours,

Karen Tidmarsh
Dean of the Undergraduate College

P.S. Remember that Parents’ Weekend is not too long after arrival day! It is scheduled for November 6-8, 2009. More information will follow and soon appear on the Parent’s gateway on the website (http://www.brynmawr.edu/gateways/parents/). That information will be updated regularly.
NOTES FOR PARENTS OF STUDENTS ENTERING IN FALL 2009

Arrival and Customs Week
Most members of the class of 2013 will be coming to campus on Wednesday, August 26 for the start of Customs Week, but some members of the class have been invited to move in earlier to participate in pre-season athletic team practices, the International Students Orientation, or the Tri-College Summer Institute (on Swarthmore’s campus this year). All new students are officially welcomed on the 26th. Arrival day and the Customs Week are designed to assist entering students as they embark on their college experience.

Customs Week involves new students in activities which help them get to know one another, the College community, its norms, and the many campus resources available to them. Understandably, parents are often concerned about getting students moved into their rooms and helping them make essential arrangements for living away from home. The residence halls open at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, August 26th. Keys are available beginning at 8:30 a.m. at the Ward building next to the gym. New students and their families travel to Bryn Mawr from all over the world. Please do not encourage students to take a “first come, first served” approach to starting off the year in a double or triple room. Assignment of spaces within a room or suite needs to be negotiated in a way that includes all the students involved. While the majority of students arrive with their families, there are also students whose parents cannot be here on moving-in day. Please extend your help and courtesy to all the members of the Class of 2013.

Parents often ask about remaining for the first days of orientation. While we appreciate and share your concern about your daughter’s transition to Bryn Mawr, we do not recommend that you stay on or near campus through Customs Week. The vast majority of parents leave campus for home just before dinner on the arrival day.

If family members do remain in the area, we expect them not to stay in the dorms. It is important for students to participate fully in the Customs orientation, so family visits should be planned around the Customs program. Customs Week assists any students prone to loneliness or homesickness by connecting them to their peers and the College community as a whole. Students are introduced to classmates, advisers, faculty, and staff members. A brief description of the Customs as well as a schedule for parents on arrival day is available at http://www.brynmawr.edu/enteringstudents/arrival_moving_in.shtml.

Access Services for Students with Disabilities
Bryn Mawr College is committed to the full participation of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of campus life and welcomes students with disabilities to the College community. The Access Services office in Canwyll House provides individualized support and reasonable accommodations for eligible students with learning, physical, or psychological disabilities. If you think your daughter may need academic adjustments in the classroom or access in the dormitory or other campus facilities, please have her contact Stephanie Bell (sbell@brynmawr.edu, 610-526-7390), Coordinator of Access Services, as soon as possible. For additional information --- including the eligibility criteria and documentation requirements --- please visit the Access Services website at http://www.brynmawr.edu/access_services/.

Drug and Alcohol Use
In the remaining weeks before your daughter leaves for college, it is important to discuss some of the challenges that she may face during her first year of college. In particular, she will need to be
prepared to make informed decisions about using alcohol or drugs. Bryn Mawr does not have sororities, fraternities, or other kinds of social clubs. It has far less alcohol and drug abuse than many other campuses do. Nevertheless, we are not immune to these problems. We are proud of the efforts of our students, faculty, and staff to address the problems posed by alcohol and drug use on campus. There is a strong campus consensus that stresses safety, responsibility, and care for fellow members of this community.

Parents play a vital role in reinforcing these values. We hope you will talk frankly with your daughter about your expectations and concerns. Useful websites for parents of students leaving for college include: http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/ and the section on Alcohol and the Law at www.lcb.state.pa.us. The interaction of alcohol with prescribed and over the counter medication is summarized at http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Medicine/medicine.htm.

Campus policies, expectations, and services related to alcohol and drug use are available for your review at the entering students’ website: http://www.brynmawr.edu/enteringstudents/AlcoholDrugPolicy.shtml and the Health Center website: http://www.brynmawr.edu/healthcenter.

**Health and Counseling Centers**

We also urge you to encourage your daughter to let us know if she has had medical or psychological problems in the past which might resurface under the stresses of adjusting to a new environment. Sometimes parents want so much for their children to have a “fresh start” as they begin college that they discourage them from seeing a counselor or local physician who can support them through the transition to college. While this is an understandable impulse, it can be a problematic one. As all medical and psychiatric information is kept confidential, it certainly does not compromise your daughter’s privacy to inform our medical professionals of your daughter’s history. In addition, professionals at the Health Center and Counseling Center can refer students to off-campus specialists in this area if that seems more appropriate or comfortable for the student.

Talking about sleep and nutritional needs is also valuable. College students tend to get far less sleep than they need. This impairs their cognitive capacities at the very time when they need them most. Just as sleep deprivation is an issue at college, so, too, are body-image concerns. We share a full-time nutritionist with Haverford, and any student may meet with her. A group for students concerned with body image and eating meets weekly, led by a counselor with expertise in this area. Please encourage your daughter to take advantage of these services if she needs them.

Health Center staff will join the Dean’s Office staff at sessions for parents on Wednesday, August 26th. The site will be included in the Customs Week Schedule. Kay Kerr, M.D., the Medical Director of Student Health Services and Reggie Jones, M.S.S., Director of Counseling Services, are available for individual appointments as well. If you and your daughter would like to make an appointment, please email Nikki Millas at nmillas@brynmawr.edu at the beginning of that week, indicating your availability on Wednesday and/or Thursday.