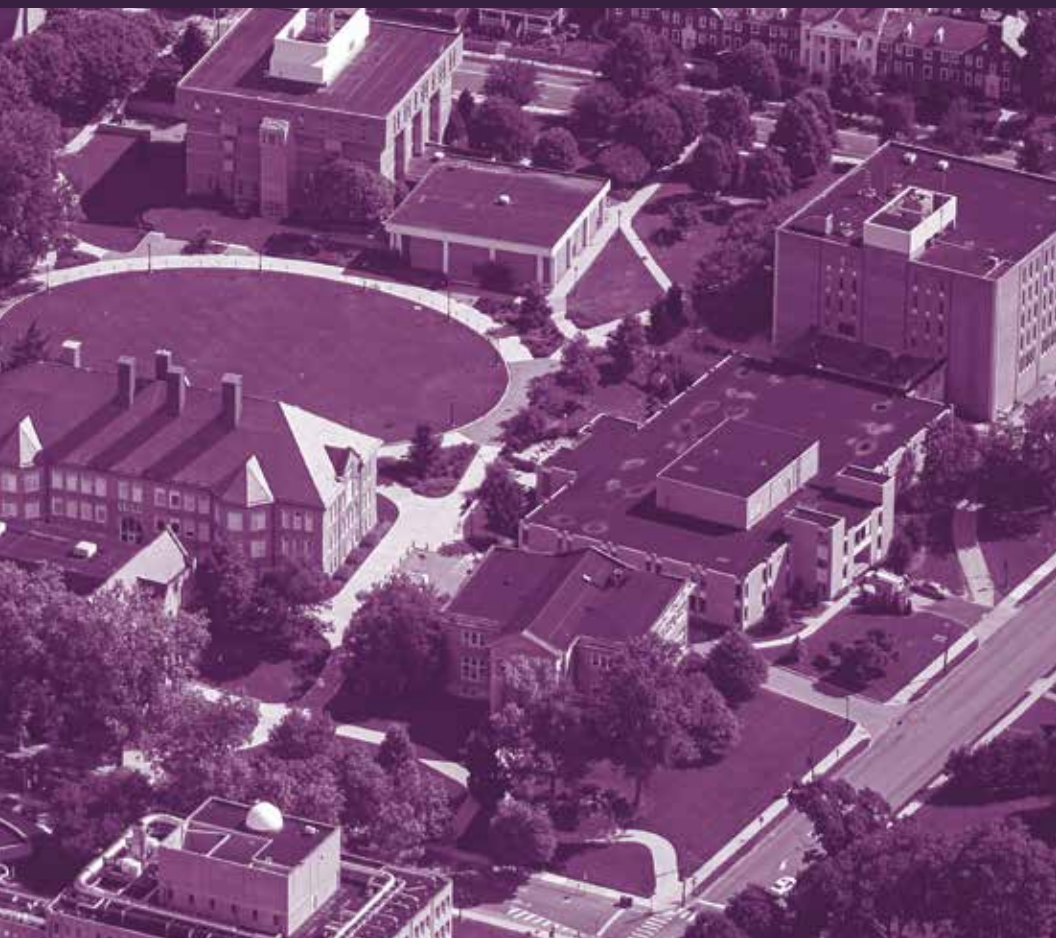


RAM FAM COMMUTER RESOURCE GUIDE

ESSENTIALS FOR WCU COMMUTER FAMILIES "Q"



WELCOME TO THE COMMUTER RAM FAM!

At West Chester University (WCU), parents and family members are trusted partners in student success. While Parent and Family Relations will be your primary point of communication on campus, Off-Campus and Commuter Services (OCCS) will provide specific resources to support you and your off-campus or commuter student in navigating the transition to and through WCU.

Did you know that nearly **70% of WCU students live off-campus or commute?** Your student will be part of the majority, but they may not feel like it during their first year on campus when most of our students live in residence. OCCS's mission is to ensure that off-campus and commuter students see themselves as **RAMS REGARDLESS**, whether they live on campus or commute from home. Your encouragement is critical to achieving our mission, and this pocket guide is designed to support you in supporting your commuter student's success.

We recognize and value your critical role in your student's life. We want this role to continue, so we are committed to partnering with you and equipping you with the skills you need to advise and coach your commuter student throughout their college career.

Please do not hesitate to contact OCCS for any reason, big or small. We are here for you and your student, and only a quick email or call away.

Rams Up!



Lexie McCarthy, Ed.D.
Director, Off-Campus and Commuter Services
Commuters@wcupa.edu

YOUR ROLE AS A COMMUTER STUDENT SUPPORTER

Many incoming commuter students see their families as trusted coaches and sources of support, which is not likely to change when they begin their WCU careers. Students need you to continue supporting their growth, development, and independence.

You can be a champion for your commuting student by:

- **Encouraging On-Campus Time:** Students who spend more time on campus are more likely to succeed and eventually graduate from college. *Encourage your student to investigate on-campus employment, participate in student organizations, attend athletic or cultural events, etc.!*
- **Revisiting and Maintaining Boundaries:** As a family unit, you need to develop a new routine and have conversations about potentially changing expectations. Sit down together as a family and discuss what will work best for your student and household.
- **Supporting Autonomy:** Support your student's autonomy by relinquishing unnecessary control and encouraging personal responsibility. When a problem arises, allow your student to learn how to fix their problems and advocate for themselves.
- **Welcoming Change:** Your student will change, and so will you. Accept these changes and try to support your student's decisions. *Be prepared for your household dynamic to shift and grow as they do.*
- **Recognizing Transition:** When students opt to commute, beginning college can often feel like a "non-event." Even though many aspects of your student's life may remain the same (their room, job, etc.), they are transitioning to a new environment that requires *support, celebration, and recognition* of change from family and friends.
- **Being Knowledgeable about Resources:** You are a powerful referral agent for your student. *Review Rammy's Resource Navigator* before challenges arise and encourage your student to utilize services. *Empower your student to self-advocate and independently address challenges.*



THIS SUMMER

Consider having informal conversations about the following:

- **Commuting** – How does your student feel about commuting? Remember you always have friends at Off-Campus and Commuter Services for support (Commuters@wcupa.edu)!
- **Campus Involvement** – How can family members support their students to have the time at school needed to get the experience they want?
- **Time Management** – How will your student manage college coursework in addition to employment and other responsibilities?
- **Travel** – How will your student get to and from campus considering parking, academic schedules, rush hours, meal planning, and carpooling options?
- **Expectations** – How will curfews/chores/caregiving responsibilities change once the semester begins?

Celebrate!

- Consider refurbishing your student's childhood bedroom to symbolize the impending change
- If your student is commuting by personal vehicle, make a big deal about getting their car inspected and oil changed
- Throw an "off to college" party or dinner the night before classes begin

AUGUST

- Have you signed up for a **Commuter Assistant**?
- What classes are you **most excited** about? **Most worried** about? *Remind your student about tutoring at the Learning Assistance and Resource Center (LARC)!*
- What **student organizations** do you hope to join this year?
- Are there **on-campus resources** you anticipate needing to use this semester?

SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER

- How is your commute going? Is there anything you need from us to make your **commute more smooth**?
- Can you tell me about your **professors** and what you're **learning**?
- Have you considered applying to any **on-campus jobs** to reduce your commute?
- Have you thought about renting a **locker** on campus?
- What are you doing to relieve **stress**?

NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

- Tell me about the **college friends** you have made so far!
- How are you doing with your **budget**?
- What is your **favorite part** about college so far?
- How can we support you through this **final push**?
- What do you need to do to **recharge and rest** over winter break?

WINTER BREAK

- How did the fall semester turn out compared to your **expectations**?
- What are your **goals** for the spring semester? (Consider one academic goal and one involvement goal)
- What will you do **differently** this semester compared to last semester?
- Do we need to revisit and or adjust any **family boundaries**?

FEBRUARY | MARCH

- Tell me about your experiences in your **major-related classes**. Is this still something you see yourself doing after graduation?
- Have you considered applying for any new **on-campus jobs** for next year?
- How are you doing with your **budget**?
- What are your plans for **Spring Break**?
- How are **mid-terms** going?

APRIL | May

- What are your plans for the **summer**?
- What can we do to support you through this **final push**?
- Have you explored the **Borough of West Chester**?
- Have you thanked your professors, peer leaders, Commuter Assistants, and academic advisors who helped you this year? **Encourage an attitude of gratitude!**

SUMMER

- What changes do you intend to make for **next semester**?
- In what ways have you **grown as an individual** this year?
- What **life lessons** have you learned as a commuter?
- How are you staying in contact with your **college friends**?



MENTAL HEALTH AND COMMUTER STUDENTS

Commuter students face different stressors than residential students. Here are some ways you can help support your student's mental health:

- Encourage your student to **get involved on campus** beyond class time. Suggest that they study, eat, exercise, and work on campus. These spaces lead to opportunities for informal interactions that may change your student's feelings about their college experience.
- Be a **sounding board**, rather than jumping to "fix" their problems. Try to listen non-judgmentally and encourage your student to self-advocate.
- Ask **open-ended questions** instead of questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no." Avoid questions like: "Did you have a good day?"
- Talk about **mental health regularly** to increase comfort around sharing challenges and addressing concerns.
- Help your student set **social goals**. For example, talk to one new person at WCU each day.
- Help your student understand when they need to seek counseling using the "Is your student in crisis?" graphic on the next page. Building resiliency is important, but **it is okay to ask for help**, and the Counseling Center can support students in crisis or distress!

IS YOUR STUDENT IN CRISIS*?

*A crisis is an emergency situation in which there is an immediate safety concern

 Crisis	 High Distress
<p>Definition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wanting to die• Wanting to harm self or others• Being recently physically or sexually assaulted, or experiencing another recent traumatic event	<p>Definition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• High stress or anxiety• Feeling overwhelmed• Feeling sad or crying• Experiencing an unexpected change• Relationship problem• Academic problem
<p>Steps to Take:</p> <p><i>If it is Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage your student to walk to the Counseling Center.• They will need to tell the front desk that they are having a "mental health crisis."• They will fill out crisis form when asked.• They will fill out paperwork on computer if asked.• If they are told that they will be seen by a counselor ASAP, they will sit in the waiting room until a counselor is ready to meet with them. <p><i>If it is any other time (e.g., evenings, weekends, holidays):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call Public Safety at 610-436-3311 or 911 or encourage your student to call.• Your student should tell the operator that they are having a "mental health crisis."• They will need to follow instructions.	<p>Steps to Take:</p> <p><i>If your student has a therapist:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact your therapist.• Wait for your therapist to respond. <p><i>If your student does not have a therapist:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage them to walk to the Counseling Center.• They will need to ask the receptionist for a walk-in appointment for that day or the next business day.• If the Counseling Center is closed, your student will have to visit the Center on the next business day.

COMMUTER RAM Fam CONTACTS

Bursar	610-436-2552
Counseling Center	610-436-2301
Financial Aid	610-436-2627
Health Center.....	610-436-2509
On-Campus Dining.....	610-436-2161
Off-Campus and Commuter Services.....	610-436-2361
Parent and Family Relations	610-436-2698
Parking Services	610-436-3345
Public Safety	610-436-3311
Registrar	610-436-3541
Student Ombuds.....	610-436-3356
Wellness Promotion.....	610-436-0730



OFF-CAMPUS AND COMMUTER SERVICES (OCCS)

is here to support and advocate for the off-campus and commuter student experience.

CONNECT WITH US TODAY AT:

- wcupa.edu/occs
- Email us at Commuters@wcupa.edu
- Visit us in Sykes Student Union 238

