

November 23, 2010

At 8:05 a.m. on Saturday morning, the four holiday buses roared away from the Student Union Building. It had taken about a half hour for 200 sleepy Vandals to load their gear under the buses and get settled in for a few hours of sleep and travel home for Thanksgiving. The Student Affairs staff members helped the bus drivers load the buses and answered last minute travel questions. It is one of our satisfying vacation rituals. They wave goodbye and we wave goodbye....and everyone is happy.

We also collect funny stories associated with the bus boarding process. This year, one student arrived at the loading area riding a skate board...with a duffle bag over one shoulder and a suitcase in another hand. We gave him a round of applause and many style points. Another student was asked about her intended destination so that we could direct her to the correct bus. She gave me a confused look and had to look at her luggage tag on her bag before she could give us an answer. I hope that she made it to her home...wherever it was! I asked another, "where are you going?" and she simply said "home". I had to ask another question so that I could get her to the right bus.

Sometimes getting on "the right bus" is one of life's greatest challenges and a secret of success.

I trust that they are home with you now.

Students were ready to leave for a vacation. They were tired. Once fall semester begins, this time frame becomes the longest period of academic activity of the year without at least a long weekend break.

You may have high expectations about having quality time with your Vandal. Don't expect too much as the glow of this reunion may dim by Thanksgiving dinner. This may, in fact, be a difficult time when your Vandal is tired and trying to figure out how to fit into a family that has changed since they were last home. Also, you may be disappointed to see your Vandal going out the door to see high school friends rather than having "family time". I hope that your vacation will meet your expectations.

Here is some advice:

- Create an event at your house for your Vandal and their high school friends. You will get to see your Vandal's friends who probably quit eating out of your refrigerator several months ago, and you can listen to their conversation while you are serving pizza.
- Create some one-on-one time with your Vandal by taking them to lunch or breakfast. It is hard to have a conversation about campus life in the midst of Thanksgiving meal preparation or other family activity. It is unlikely that your Vandal will talk with you about important issues with siblings or other family around. Give them some undivided attention.
- Ask open ended questions so that you don't get yes/no answers. Here are a few conversation starters....tell me about some good things that have happened during the semester....tell me about some of the hard parts of the semester... how do you think you are doing? ... how do you feel about your major?...tell me about your friends.

- Try to get them healthy and rested. They need to be ready to finish strong. They will return to a very demanding and exhausting end of the semester. Nag them about taking care of themselves in the next few weeks.
- On a related issue...let sleeping Vandals lie.

The University of Idaho will be open early this week but will be closed on Thursday and Friday.

If you want to do some Vandal Christmas shopping, you may want to go online to the UI Bookstore at www.vandalstore.com to order Vandal gear, or if you live in the Boise area, you can visit our Vandal store. It is located at 821 West Idaho Street in downtown Boise. You can't have too much Vandal gear!

It is a good week for the University to be on a reduced schedule. Winter is hitting the Palouse pretty hard. We are getting 5-6 inches of snow and the nighttime temperatures are dipping to low single digits. The weather is supposed to moderate as students return to Moscow later in the week.

Campus will be decorated for the holiday season when your Vandal returns. The University of Idaho is stunningly beautiful with fresh snow and holiday decorations. A full schedule of holiday concerts will also fill the halls with music. It will be a beautiful backdrop for end of semester activity.

Here is what your Vandals will experience when they return. They will have two weeks of regular classroom activity and then "Dead Week". "Dead Week" is the last week of classes where final projects and term papers are submitted. It is also preparation week for final examinations that will take place during the week of December 13th through December 17th. No regular classes are held during final exam week. This will be the culmination of a semester's worth of work and growth.

It has been a very good semester thus far.

I wish you and your family a Happy Thanksgiving and safe travels.

Sincerely,

Bruce M. Pitman

Vice Provost for Student Affairs/Dean of Students