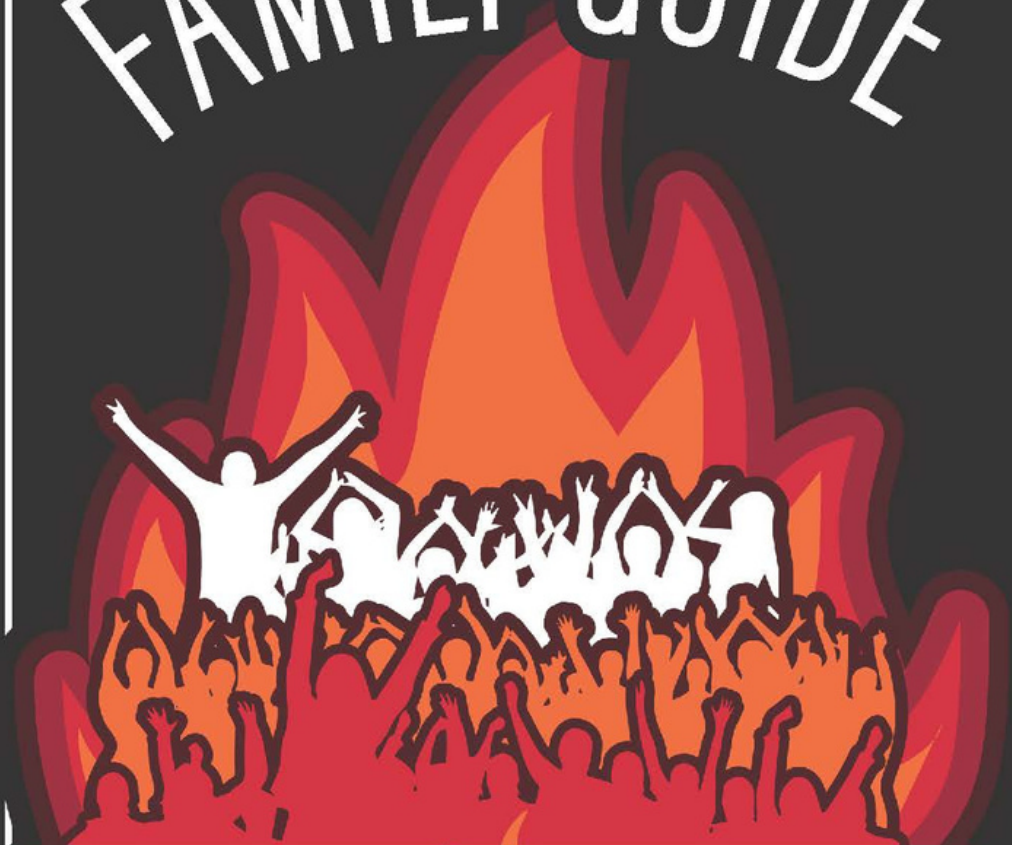


VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

# FAMILY GUIDE



# SPARK



2022



## **Dear Class of 2026 Families,**

I am delighted to have this opportunity to welcome you and your students to Valdosta State University! In the Division of Student Affairs, we know the vital role parents and family members play in the lives of students. We also acknowledge the sacrifices you have made – and the emotional adjustment it takes – to send your student to a new home-away-from-home. We truly believe your student will have the best VSU experience if we are partners with you and your family. This booklet is designed to make the transition just a little bit easier for you and your student.

When students come to college, they often experience challenges that may overwhelm or confuse them as they make new friends, adjust to new academic and behavioral expectations, and encounter periods of growth, self-reflection, and independence. By partnering with parents and family members, we are able to offer a unique, student-centered experience as students progress through the University and ultimately move on to productive personal and professional lives. As you finish unpacking their new home away from home, please have those last conversations with them about how to optimize their experience here and what pitfalls to avoid. Encourage them to get involved on campus and take their VSU experience into their hands!

Additionally, we encourage you to visit the campus often. Attend athletic and arts events. Participate in Family Weekend. Make Valdosta State University your home-away-from-home as well.

Once again, thank you for choosing Valdosta State University. We look forward to working with you to give your student a truly memorable VSU experience.

Go Blazers!



Dr. Vincent Miller




# VALDOSTA STATE



Valdosta State was founded In 1906 by a group of local legislators and concerned civic leaders, who worked for the passage of legislation to establish a college, which was named the South Georgia State Normal College.





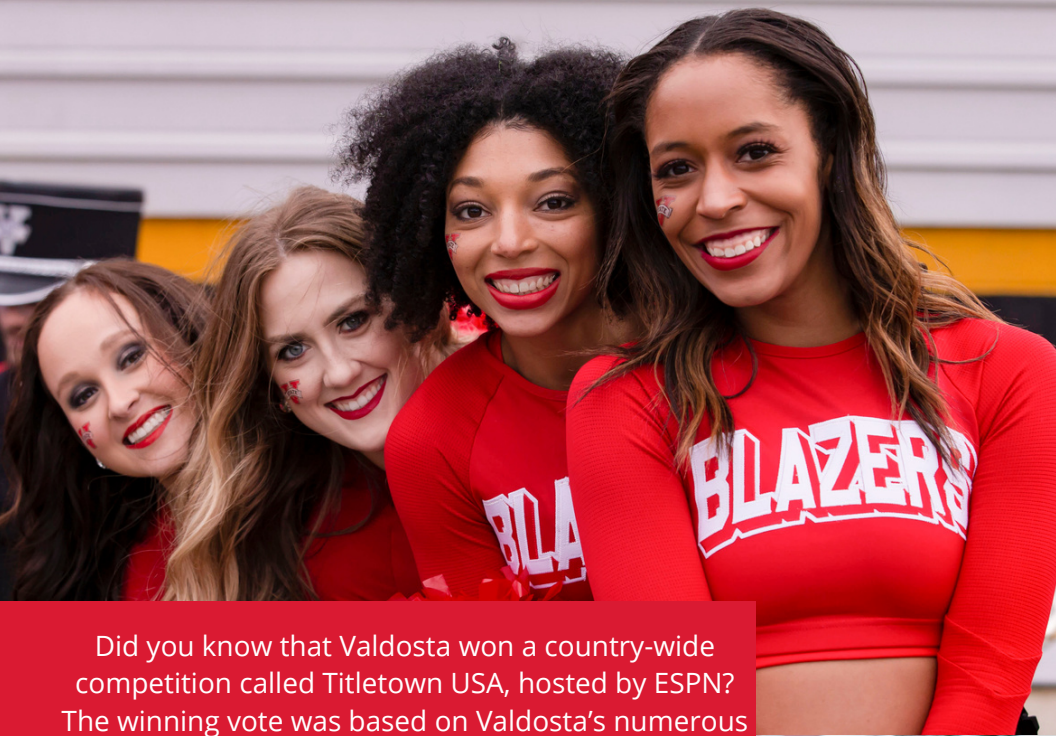


Want to learn about the happening  
events on campus, check out  
BlazerLink!  
[valdosta.presence.io](http://valdosta.presence.io)

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Did you know that Valdosta won a country-wide competition called Titletown USA, hosted by ESPN? The winning vote was based on Valdosta's numerous national, conference, and division titles in multiple sports.



# Important Academic Dates

First Day of Classes.....	Aug. 15th
Last Day to Register for Classes.....	Aug. 18th
Labor Day Holiday.....	Sept. 5th
Midterms Start.....	Oct. 6th
Fall Break.....	Oct. 10th & 11th
Last Day to Withdraw: Full Term... Classes	Oct. 13th
Spring Registration Starts.....	Oct. 31st
Thanksgiving Holiday.....	Nov. 24th & 25th
Last Day of Classes.....	Dec. 5th
Finals Week.....	Dec. 6th-9th


**For more academic dates: [bit.ly/3yQP9Pt](https://bit.ly/3yQP9Pt)**

Scan me!



We are one of only two American Sign Language Programs in the State of Georgia.





There are over 120 student organizations to get involved in!

# Ways to Get Involved

## **Join an Organization**

**229.333.5674**

Students can get involved in over 120 student organizations here at VSU. If you do not find one you like you can always start another club! You can find the list of organizations on BlazerLink!

## **Intramurals**

**229.333.5480**

Intramural sports are designed to provide an opportunity for all students, faculty, and staff to participate in organized recreational activities

## **Athletic Events**

There are nine different NCAA D2 sports teams here at VSU! There is always a way to cheer on your Blazers! You can always find their schedule on the Athletic's website.

## **Fraternity & Sorority Life**

**[greeklife@valdosta.edu](mailto:greeklife@valdosta.edu)**

VSU is home to 20 Greek-lettered organizations. These organizations are categorized by councils which include the College Panhellenic Council, Interfraternity Council, Multicultural Greek Council, and National Pan-Hellenic Council. Through membership in a Greek organization, you'll gain lifelong friends, leadership and personal development, participate in diversity and inclusion programming, and have opportunities to serve the campus and community through various community service and philanthropic activities. CPC and IFC participate in a formal fall recruitment process each year. NPHC and MGC participate in an individual intake process unique to each chapter or entity. If you would like more information on a specific chapter log onto Blazerlink and find the organization in which you are most interested.

## **On-Campus Job**

**229.333.5942**

Access Blazing Careers to view on- and off-campus jobs and internship opportunities. Connect with multiple employers across the nation seeking to recruit our talented, innovative Blazers. Register to attend in-person and virtual career fairs, events, workshops, and informational sessions.

# Life on Campus

Campus life can help ease your student's transition to college and help them build a community from the start. That might mean utilizing resources or services offered by VSU or connecting with other new students. You play an important role helping your student set realistic expectations for the semester and navigating the ups and downs of their new college environment.

## Key Campus Events

### SPARK

**August 8-11th**

SPARK is an extended orientation event that introduces new students to our campus community through a number of activities and programs so they can become familiar with the university's variety of resources, meet new people, and make new friends.

### Fall Explosion

**August 15-26th**

Fall Explosion takes place every year during the first few weeks of the Fall Semester. It is a fun time packed full of exciting special events, cookouts, community service projects, and much more. It is an opportunity for students to meet and make new friends and learn more about getting involved on campus and in our community.

### The Happening

**August 25th**

The Happening Information Fair, held every fall on the VSU front lawn, is an opportunity for students to have fun in South Georgia outdoors while learning more about what the university and our community have to offer.

### Family Weekend

**September 9-10th**

Family Weekend is an annual opportunity for students and their families to connect and together discover the wonder of Valdosta State.

### Homecoming

**October 13th-15th**

Homecoming not only acknowledges alumni but allows them, along with current students, to show school spirit and reflect on the good times and memories made at the school. With competition, fun & school Spirit!

### Lighting of the Palms

**November 29th**

Valdosta State University hosted its annual Holiday Celebration and Lighting of the Palms Wednesday evening on the Front Lawn.



VSU started out as a women's college who specialized in education. That is still our top major today!

# Academic Support

## Office of First-Year Programs

**229.245.4378**

The Office of First-Year Programs is here to assist with your transition to VSU and college!

They offer multiple opportunities designed to support your academic success: peer mentoring, courses, programming, and online resources. You can participate in one or more of these experiences to best meet your needs.

## Academic Support Center

**229.333.7570**

The Academic Support Center is here to help all students be successful in classes here at VSU. They offer tutoring, workshops, PAL (Peer Alliance Learning) Program, study tips, and more!

## University Advising & Student Transitions

**229.245.4378**

Advising is an essential component of a student's successful academic life. At VSU, you'll be placed with a professional academic advisor specific to your college starting your first semester. Your advisor will work with you throughout your college career to ensure that you remain on track, complete courses required to obtain your degree, connect to campus resources, and discover your academic and career interests.

## Access Office

**229.245.2498 - 229-375-5871 Video Phone**

The Mission of the Access Office is to serve as leaders in removing physical, educational, and other barriers and creating an inclusive and diverse environment by collaborating with and motivating students, faculty, staff, and the community so that they can ensure that all VSU classrooms, events, and experiences are seamlessly accessible to all.



## Student Health Services

**229.333.5886**

The mission of Student Health is to provide optimum health care in a convenient location for undergraduate and graduate students in a compassionate, confidential manner. You can see a doctor, get a prescription refilled, and get updated on immunizations!

## Counseling Center

**229.333.5940**

The VSU Counseling Center acts as a holistic resource to the campus and community, empowering individuals for success in academic, professional, and personal pursuits. Each of our counselors is professionally trained and licensed, and all have a genuine passion for working with college students.

## Health & Wellness Promotions

**229.219.3191**

The Mission of the Access Office is to serve as leaders in removing physical, educational, and other barriers and creating an inclusive and diverse environment by collaborating with and motivating students, faculty, staff, and the community so that they can ensure that all VSU classrooms, events, and experiences are seamlessly accessible to all.


## FamilyWorks Clinic

**229.219.1281**

Welcome to FamilyWorks, the university-based, brief therapy center for the Marriage and Family Therapy graduate program.

FamilyWorks trains graduate students in relational thinking and provide brief therapy to families, couples, and individuals who come from all over south Georgia and north Florida. Phone and online sessions are still offered to everyone in the state of Georgia for free.

# Wellness Services



Every undergraduate graduation ends in a firework spectacular to celebrate our new alumni Blazers!

## Financial Aid

**229.333.5886**

The Office of Financial Aid is dedicated to helping students and parents obtain the financial aid necessary to pay for a college education here at Valdosta State University. Our office should be your first stop if you are looking for information on grants, scholarships, loans, veterans' education benefits, and many other ways to fund your education at Valdosta State University.

## Registrar

**229.333.5940**

The Registrar's Office maintains all student academic records including, Registration, Enrollment & Final Grades We process transient requests, issue transcripts, verification of enrollment, major changes, and monitor student progress through graduation.

## IT Solutions

**229.245.4357**

The Division of Information Technology (IT) manages the majority of Valdosta State University's network and communications, and computing technologies. Our purpose is to support the university's mission of teaching and learning, research, and service by expanding access to a sound, secure, and sustainable technology infrastructure in terms of business intelligence, instructional technology, information systems and security, networking, and client support.

## Parking & Transportation

**229.333.5870**

Valdosta State University campus provides ample parking spaces to accommodate the campus community. Should you have questions about where to park to attend classes or campus events, please contact Parking & Transportation. We will be happy to assist you!

# Financial & Additional Services

## Student Life

**229.333.5886**

Student Life offers the opportunity for students to enhance their collegiate experience with co-curricular activities. The Office of Student Life promotes student development and leadership by providing quality programs and services that fulfill the diverse educational, recreational, social, and multicultural needs of the student population and the university community.

## The Shannon Center for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

**229.253.4446**

Our mission is to educate on diversity, enhance equity, and embrace inclusivity. Through programming, conversations, and celebrating each other!

## Career Opportunities & Volunteer Services

**229.333.5942**

Career Opportunities is a multifaceted career center designed to assist VSU Students and Alumni in meeting their career goals; through our partnerships with local, regional, and national employers to identify talent to enhance today's workforce.

## Housing & Residence Life

**229.333.5920**

The Housing and Residence Life staff is committed to providing you with the tools you need to be successful and grow while you are here. Living on campus, you will find that we provide facilities, programs, and services that will assist you in achieving your academic and personal goals.

## Campus Recreation

**229.333.5898**

The mission of Campus Recreation is to provide the VSU community with experiential opportunities through programming, services, and access to recreational facilities. Campus Recreation strives to promote a healthy college experience that builds the foundation for lifelong wellness.

# Student Services



A successful student is an engaged student! Students who are a part of a group or attend events are 2.5 times more likely to graduate in 4 years!





VSU has had three different mascots over the years. The New Blaze, a flaming matchstick man, was created to fulfil the spirits of Valdosta's community. He has been a part of the VSU family since 2000.



# Safety & Policies

## Division of Student Affairs

**229.333.5886**

As a student-centered learning environment, we are proud of our students' many successes both in and out of the classroom. Students are what make Valdosta State the dynamic, growing, and the nationally recognized institution it is. The Division of Student Affairs professional staff is dedicated to providing quality services, support, and programs for our students and the campus community. We strongly encourage student involvement and ownership of the college experience.

## Student Conduct

**229.333.5940**

Valdosta State University is a learning environment based on trust and mutual respect in which open dialogue, vigorous debate, and the free exchange of ideas are welcome. The University is equally dedicated to the core values of community, including a commitment to practice civility, integrity, and citizenship. As members of this community, and proud Blazers, we will strive to uphold these core values for the advancement of the University.

## Public Safety

**229.219.3191**

The Valdosta State University Police Department has established an escort program at Valdosta State University. This program provides additional protection to all VSU Associates (faculty, staff, students, and visitors) while walking around campus. Additionally, our police officers are prepared to provide a walking escort to any member of the VSU community to any location on campus upon request.

## Blazer Guardian App

The Blazer Guardian app allows students to create safety profiles that streamline communication with University Police and friends, family members, and classmates. The app also features a safety timer (virtual escort), which can be used to alert police when a student has not arrived at their destination within a specific amount of time. The Blazer Guardian app includes a feature called 'Send a Tip,' which allows students to send personal or anonymous text and photo messages to the UPD if they are in danger or see someone else in trouble but cannot call and report the incident.



# Common Questions

## What is FERPA, and how does it impact parent and family access to student records?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law that pertains to the release of and access to student education records.

What this means to parents and families is that VSU staff and faculty cannot discuss some aspects of your student's education with you without permission from your student. While FERPA is in place to protect your student, we understand that this is a big change. Offices and departments on campus are happy to talk with you about policies and procedures, even if they cannot discuss your student's specific situation.

## How can I access my student's account to pay tuition or check their balance?

Your student's tuition & balance is part of their educational records, which are protected under FERPA. As a result, your student will need to grant you access to their Online Student Account for tuition and billing purposes.

Students must grant an Authorized User through their Online Student Account. An email will be sent to the new user and they will have to accept it. If there are more questions, contact the Bursary at 229.333.5725.

## Can I gain access to my student's grades?

Your student's grades are part of their educational record, which is protected under FERPA. Students have access to their own educational records such as grades and class schedules via myVSU. We encourage you to discuss a strategy with your student for how and when they will share their grades with you.



# Common Questions

## How will the University notify me if my student is injured and in need of emergency assistance?

If a student is transported to the hospital and VSU is made aware, a University employee will contact the person listed as Emergency Contact in the student record. A student may review and edit their Emergency Contact information in Banner or by contacting the Registrar's Office.

## How to get a hold of someone if my student who lives on campus needs a wellness check?

You should contact Public Safety at 229.219.3191 and a police officer will check in on them.

## How will my student get University Emergency Alerts?

Students are automatically enrolled in the VSU Campus Alert System. This will notify students via email, text message & phone call that there is an emergency on campus. The system will use the information listed in myVSU. It will share what the student should do and when it is all clear. If your student needs to update their information, they should go to their myVSU accounts. Please have your student ensure their cell phone number is accurately listed on their student record in Banner or by contacting the Registrar's Office.

Valdosta State has 21 National Championships! The Red Hots have the highest with 8 National Championships!



# What to Expect During the First Year

**Changes:** There will be lot of changes that you may not have anticipated.

- The students are exploring their independence and trying to find a way to establish a balance between school, work, and fun.
- They are finding ways to express themselves and create boundaries. If the student seems distant, don't be alarmed they trying to figure out how to handle the new perceived freedom while staying focused.
- Pay attention to the changes and definitely ask questions to see how you can support and encourage their continued independence.
- The entire first year will be about adjusting to college life.

**Community Engagement:** College is a large community with many different opportunities for students to become engaged and involved.

- Students who are involved in campus activities, clubs, or organizations perform at higher rates than students who aren't as involved.
- Students will likely join a club, or organization that matches their interests. They need a balance of school and healthy interaction.
- We encourage students to build relationships, make connections with peers, faculty, and staff and attend a variety of events as it builds character and helps them adapt to the college culture.

Graduating students can purchase a class ring. They ring in the tradition by dipping it in the fountain.





Odum Library houses approximately 530,000 bound books & 3,300 print periodicals and newspapers!

## What to Expect During the First Year

**Classes:** Students are taking 12-16 hours of different workloads. This looks like 4-6 classes.

- It is likely to take about two months to get used to the demand of college classes. Even if students participated in Dual Enrollment, being a full-time college student takes time to adjust.
- Ask students about their class schedule, how they think they are doing and what is their biggest concern about their classes.
- Students should devote at least 3 hours of study time to each class a day.
- There are some classes and assignments that will require more energy, effort and discipline than they may be used to. Encourage them to develop a healthy study routine.
- Students will use BlazeView regularly to access course information, and assignments and submit assignments.

**Advising:** Advisors are different than guidance counsellors. Advisors assist students with course selection as they work towards their degree.

- Advisors will recommend a course of action for students which include courses and class times, but the student must actively engage in their academic advising.
- Students can schedule regular appointments with their advisors to discuss changes to their schedule, ask about dropping or adding a course, and being connected with various resources.
- The advisors will help the student advocate for themselves while encouraging success.
- Students will need to schedule their advising appointments in the Advising Appointment Scheduler through their MyVSU account.



# Effective Communication Strategies

## Expect some changes

These years provide an important opportunity for growth for your student and for your relationship with the person your student is becoming. A college student may be trying out different looks, identities, attitudes, and aspirations. Show interest in your student's new experiences. Don't be surprised if your student who came here intent on majoring in one area changes majors in a couple of quarters.

## Resist the urge to solve problems for your student

You can ultimately be most helpful by listening to their concerns and guiding them through their own problem-solving process. It's more important for them to develop their ability to cope with problems than to depend on your wisdom and advice. Create space in conversations for students to discuss their rationale for decisions they have made. Wait to offer advice until they ask for it.

## Support their independent decisions

...without assuming it means they don't want or need you. Keep in touch—texting is usually a convenient way to communicate. However, expect that students may not write or call as often as you would like. Students usually appreciate little gifts or cards in the old-fashioned mail as well. Before your student comes to college, talk about the means of communication that they prefer for keeping in touch with family.

## Listen, really listen

Show that you are paying attention and respond to what they are saying by reflecting their feelings and asking open-ended questions.

## Pay attention to what the student is doing right

..rather than areas where they are not doing well. Expect that grades for freshmen may be lower than they were in high school. Ask your student what they are learning in classes rather than emphasizing grades as the sole indicator of a successful freshman year.



## Avoid blaming and criticizing

Guide them through the process of reflecting on their problem or concern. Think of yourself as coaching them in an important life and learning experience. “Gee, that must have been disappointing to have failed the chemistry test. Chemistry was one of your favorite classes in high school. It must be much harder in college. What do you think you will do to feel more prepared for the next test? I wonder if the Tutorial Center could be of help? Do you see any way we could be of help to you now?”

## Don't dismiss students' concerns

...by telling them, “These are the best years of your life.” These years can be complicated and confusing. Showing empathy for their struggles and times of disappointment can be a powerful support to a student.

## Visit your student at VSU

Even if your student comes home often, making a trip to see your student in their college environment can mean a lot. It's usually fun for students to show their families around their campus. Keep in mind that they will need to get back to their lives (i.e., study, friends, activities) so make visits friendly and not lengthy.

## Encourage your student to take advantage of services and resources

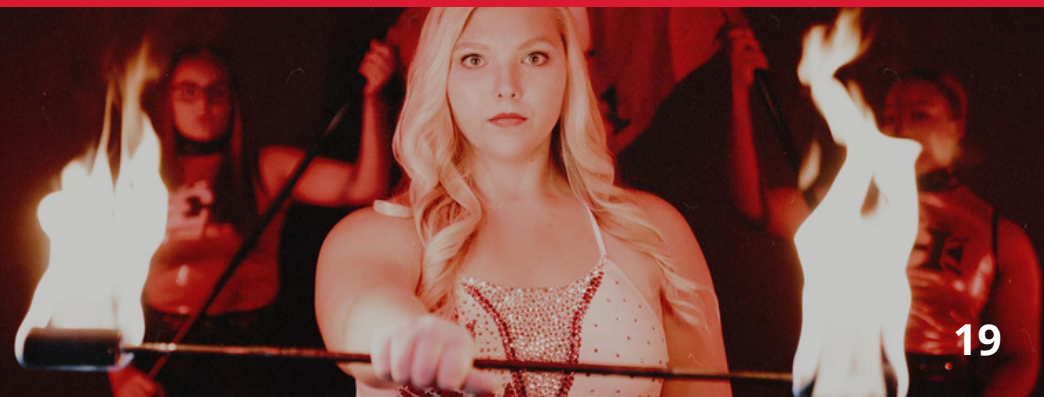
There are many professionals here whose job it is to help students cope with and learn from the various challenges of being a college student.

Keep in mind that we treat students as adults and cannot share information with you about your student without their permission.

## When students come home for winter or summer break, plan for some adjustments for everyone

Students will be accustomed to a different schedule, a different social life, and more freedom to come and go. Be clear about your expectations, but realize that things won't go back to the way they were before the student left for college. If they speak of getting back “home” to VSU, don't take it personally. It probably means they have been successful in creating a life for themselves here that gives them identity, purpose, and a sense of belonging.

# Effective Communication Strategies



Kirby Smart, Will Muschamp & Chris Hatcher started their football coaching careers here at VSU! The Blazer Football Team just hired our 11th Head Coach, Tremain Jackson!





## Questions to Ask Your Students

**We have created some questions that you can ask your student throughout the school year to help them think about resources and their engagement on campus!**

- How are you feeling about your classes?
- Have you met any new friends?
- What is your RA's name?
- Have you downloaded the Guardian app?
- What do you need in terms of support from me?
- Do you have everything you need to be successful in class?
- Have you joined any student organizations?
- What are you most excited about this fall?
- Have you gone to any community events?
- Have you met with your academic advisor?

