Dear Parent,

As students prepare to transition from home to college, you may wonder how they will navigate difficult decisions on their own. The decisions college students make surrounding alcohol can have a powerful impact on their lives. This letter will share some of the activities and strategies VCU undertakes to address the alcohol issue on campus. We encourage all parents to talk with their students about alcohol before they come to campus and we have included a page of tips to give you some ideas about what other parents have found helpful.

Because of media, it’s not unusual for young people to assume that all college students drink. This simply is not true. Research at VCU and other universities around the country repeatedly shows that most college students either choose not to drink or do so in moderation. Incoming students should know that non-drinkers are common. However, it is also true at the college level that roughly half of students are of legal age and that alcohol is present in many places. At VCU, we have an active campaign to help dispel misperceptions that heavy or risky drinking is an inevitable part of college life. Our media shares the fact that most students either don’t drink or have zero to four drinks when they go out. Most students drink alcohol five or fewer days per month. More than 90% of students never let alcohol affect their academics (see www.thewell.vcu.edu and our Real Rams Take Charge of Their Health campaign).

VCU provides a variety of resources related to alcohol-abuse prevention. Students may visit The Well’s website and take a free online self-assessment that provides immediate feedback on substance use issues. The Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services offers many interactive presentations during Welcome Week, including one presented by The Well called “Love & Liquor: What’s normal? What’s not?” This program is offered at a variety of times and provides a humorous but realistic look at issues faced by young adults. During the session, students will use immediate audience response devices called “clickers.” The real time feedback generated by clickers is a powerful way to dispel misperceptions and to convey the truth about healthy behavior. All incoming students are encouraged to attend.

In the fall of 2011, researchers at VCU launched a study of substance use and mental health. Once again this year, all incoming freshmen will receive a letter inviting them to participate. We hope this cutting edge research will lead to a better understanding of how to cultivate academic success. A letter about this new research initiative is included in this mailing. We hope you will take a moment to read the letter and learn more about this exciting research.

Finally, we encourage you to be clear about your expectations regarding drugs and alcohol. The first weeks of college can set the tone for a student’s entire college career, so it’s a great time to check in with them and be supportive. In addition to the enclosed tip sheet, the following link from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism provides excellent information about educating young people about alcohol: http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov.

Welcome to the VCU family!

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