

From Homeschool Grad to Successful College Freshman

from Phyllis Paladin

[This article first appeared in Issue 59 (Summer 1997) of the *PA Homeschoolers* newsletter.]

My oldest son, Larry, graduated in July. In late August, he began his freshman year at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Larry was accepted into the Robert E. Cook Honors College at IUP, a brand new, unique program that sounded like it was designed with my son in mind. I was confident that Larry was properly prepared for college and capable of competing in this tough academic environment. Nevertheless, I was relieved when the first semester was over. My son had adjusted well to dorm life and the campus environment, and his first semester grades confirmed my convictions that Larry was right where he belonged.

During Christmas break, Larry and I had many opportunities to talk about these first few months of college life. I was especially interested in areas where he felt he was at a disadvantage or where our homeschool program was lacking. I am now using my son's suggestions to improve our homeschool program for my younger son and two daughters.

Larry feels that time management skills are very important to academic success in college. In his words, "No one tells me when to go to bed, when to study, or when to go to class. In fact, no one even cares if I go to class." It seems that many freshman struggle with this freedom and are simply poor at disciplining themselves to study instead of taking part in one of the many more interesting activities that are always available. I have made an effort to put my children in charge of their own schedules, especially in the high school years. Each child receives a weekly list of goals and assignments on Saturday morning, and has until the following Friday at 4PM "check-in time" to complete them. I still meet with each child daily, but they are ultimately responsible for seeing that we cover enough material each day. This system may have helped Larry to adjust to college, although procrastination is still a temptation since many professors don't have "check-in time" until the end of the semester.

Prioritizing is another skill that Larry mentioned. College involves a much greater volume of work than is usually required in homeschool. Since it is impossible to take enough time to do your best job on every assignment, it is important to know which assignments deserve the most time and attention. I'm sure we could teach children this skill around the home. In managing a household, there are always so many things to do that I am constantly deciding what is the most important, what can wait, and what can be "temporarily dealt with." I intend to involve the children in my decision process and give them more practice in prioritizing.

Larry did run into a few areas where he felt he was at a disadvantage because of his homeschooling. He had to work at adjusting to lecture courses, especially boring lecture courses. Larry's suggestion is that homeschoolers practice learning in lecture situations and taking notes. We have a very good opportunity to develop these skills during church services. I have begun to give my younger children "sermon worksheets" based on each Sunday's sermon. I hope this will give them practice in learning from a lecture situation. It also means that I have to take notes and pay very close attention to the sermon and that

we all benefit from remembering much more of what is taught at church. However, Larry did say that students should get practice listening to boring lectures. Our pastors are not boring, so we have to continue to look for a source of boring lecturers!

After very carefully guiding my children through all of the mechanics of writing a research paper according to the MLA Style Sheet, copyright 1971, that I am so familiar with, Larry told me that the MLA Handbook, as it is now called, has been revised. I was teaching my children some outdated procedures for citing references and footnoting information. The exciting outcome of this unfortunate situation, was that my son simply found out the correct procedures and used them. It didn't seem to bother him that he had to learn something on his own. I would like to believe that learning many new things on his own during homeschooling prepared him for this experience. I have purchased a 1997 version of the MLA Handbook and we are now learning updated annotations.

Larry also had to learn a new form of essay writing for his Honors Core Course. He had never done any writing exactly like what was expected of him for this course. Again, he was able to learn the format and got an "A" in the course. It seems that the type of essay that Daniel is practicing for the AP US History exam is very similar to what was expected in the Honors College. Therefore I would expect that an AP course might have eliminated this problem and that our younger children may not face the same difficulty.

A final issue we discussed was that homeschooling is just "too enjoyable." We all work at letting our children pursue topics in ways that will motivate them and hold their interest. In planning unit studies and choosing topics for long papers and projects, we give our children lots of latitude and flexibility. Larry wonders if this is always a good idea. He brought up an interesting point in that he was required to study topics that he has very little interest in, and he felt that some homeschoolers may have a difficult time in college simply because they have never been required to learn material that they are not interested in or to learn in ways that are not always fun. His point is worth thinking about.

I am more committed to homeschooling now than I have ever been before. Unless there would be a major change in our family situation, I intend for all of our children to graduate from homeschool. One aspect of homeschooling which I especially enjoy is that I am constantly learning. Among all that I am learning, I hope to continue to learn to become a better homeschooling mom and more important, a better parent.