



'A Checkup, From the Neck Up'

Drexel University has become the first American college to deploy a "mental-health kiosk" on campus. The hope is that touch-screen technology might make that first call for help less intimidating. See a video about Drexel's effort at chronicle.com.

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graduate students could cost Mr. Phipps, who has a diabetic stepson, \$3,000 or more a year.

"I mentor undergraduates, and it's hard to recommend grad school to anyone now," he says. "You're going to suffer a lot through grad school, and your quality of life will be poor for six or seven years."

TO SOME, that is how it should be. Graduate school, the thinking goes, is supposed to be rough, a painful but necessary marathon on the way to an academic job. If a student can't navigate the challenges of a doctorate — both the rigors of the program and the life challenges along the way — he or she probably won't fare well as an assistant professor, better paid but under similar stress.

Sheryl Tucker, dean of Oklahoma State University's graduate school, says academe should no longer tolerate that view. One way universities can help change their graduate-school culture, she says, is by preventing students from being overworked.

When Ms. Tucker started her job, in 2011, she often heard of doctoral students whose assistantships demanded too much of their

time. It's one of the most common complaints of graduate students everywhere: The 20 hours on paper is more like 30 or 40 hours in reality. It's particularly a problem when the teaching or research is not related to the student's dissertation.

Ms. Tucker decided that administrators had to sharpen their message: Students and faculty members needed to know that any work beyond 20 hours should be the student's choice, and students needed to know they had recourse

it, we did have to say, "This is how OSU defines our workweek with the federal government. There are federal regulations about how employment works," Ms. Tucker says. "You have to have difficult conversations. It's not fun."

She reports rarely hearing students complain of overwork anymore. Where it continues, it tends to be greatest in the sciences, Ms. Tucker says.

Humanities and arts disciplines, however, present their own challenge to students' well-being: iso-

"Yes, graduate school is stressful, and a lot of time and energy must be devoted to it, but we don't need to demoralize folks."

when they felt overworked.

Oklahoma State officials, including Ms. Tucker, had to speak individually with many faculty members or department heads who resisted the change.

"When push came to shove, if someone really was not getting

lution. When coursework and exams are complete, often all that's left between a student and his or her Ph.D. is two or more years of dissertation writing, which can be a lonely endeavor.

Some colleges are responding by creating more-structured pro-

A College Wish List for My Son

By MAX'S MOM

WHEN my husband and I left our eldest to begin her freshman year of college, I was hit by a double barrel of emotions. I felt extreme joy that our daughter was taking her first steps toward adulthood, and an unexpected grief that she wouldn't be getting back in the car and riding home with us.

As we prepare our 17-year-old son for this same journey, my emotions are more complicated. When Max* was 8, he began experiencing episodes of depression, irritability, inflexibility, and hyperactivity. At 12, we had a diagnosis: bipolar disorder. After several false starts, we found a talented child psychiatrist who prescribed the right mix of medications.

Because Max became ill so young, many aspects of his adult personality have been slow to develop. He has poor organizational skills, is easily overwhelmed, procrastinates, and is socially immature.

He attends a small private high school, which has been a largely positive experience. Still, at the beginning of every academic year, my husband and I trudge in to meet with the same teachers and administrators to remind them that Max is not lazy or willful. We hand out literature about juvenile bipolar disorder and tell them Max has a disability that requires accommodations, just like epilepsy or cerebral palsy.

What classmates and teachers have come to appreciate about our son is his intelligence, warmth, mordant sense of humor, writing ability, and an empathy beyond his years.

Last fall we began touring colleges. In some ways, the process has been easier than the overwhelming choices that confronted our daughter. This time we are restricting our search to small schools, no more than 5,000 students, within a three-hour drive of our home. Max's illness affected his junior-year grades, so even though he scored well on the ACT, the more competitive schools are off the list.

To aid in our search, we can tap into a relatively new resource: college rankings for mental-health services. In 2013 the nonprofit Jed Foundation, which pro-

notes emotional health and suicide prevention among college students, invited institutions to take its new online self-assessment survey. More than 40 colleges have earned JedCampus Seals for their comprehensive mental-health and suicide-prevention programs. Among them is Alfred University, in Alfred, N.Y. Just a 90-minute drive from our home, and with a student body of 2,000, Alfred merited a visit. Through a website, BestCollegesOnline, I also found that the Rochester Institute of Technology, right in our own backyard, has a highly regarded disability-rights office that provides in-depth learning-support services.

But providing high-quality mental-health care is simply not enough. Faculty members should be trained to recognize early symptoms of emotional distress and should know where to refer students for help. To explain to Max's professors how his illness can affect his learning, my husband and I need to meet with them at the start of each semester. For instance, Max can look uninterested when he is depressed. If he is feeling anxious, he may leave in the middle of a class. Should he fall behind academically, his academic adviser would need to notify us early on — before he is feeling too overwhelmed to catch up.

Kids with mental illness often have low self-esteem and delayed social skills, and Max is no exception. That's why we prefer a college that has a student-led mental-health-advocacy group, like Active Minds, or a NAMI on Campus club, created by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, so Max will have a ready-made peer group. Colleges that put a high priority on freshman-orientation programs get an extra point in our score book, too.

UNDER the Americans With Disabilities Act, colleges must make academic adjustments based on students' individual needs. With a little research, we will identify schools with a reputation for closely following the ADA. For example, Max takes medication that makes him groggy early in the

morning. Allowing him to register early to guarantee placement in midmorning and afternoon classes would address that issue. To ease the transition to college, he should carry a reduced course load in his freshman year. Having a single room would give him space to de-stress.

As parents, we also have our job to do to prepare Max for the academic and social challenges that await him. He has grown accustomed to being waited on, so I am rolling back my waitress services. His list of chores has grown, and he's now expected to take his medication without a reminder. We have also been encouraging Max to keep regular sleep hours, eat healthfully, and exercise.

Once Max decides on a school, we will meet with whoever handles disability rights to request academic and living accommodations to ensure his greatest possible success in college. That will include reviewing the school's mental-health-leave policy. Before he leaves for college, we will obtain our 18-year-old's signed permission to access his health and academic records. We will encourage Max to start off with the lowest course load possible.

What we want for Max is what all parents want for their collegebound children: to find his passion and his calling over the next four years; to be happy, to make friends, to be challenged intellectually and personally; to become an independent, functioning adult who can make his way in the world.

For that to happen, Max will need a college that will be supportive and understanding of the fact that he has a significant mental illness.

**Max is a pseudonym. While I fully support the growing movement to disclose mental-health diagnoses, I chose not to use my son's real name here. He is young and not fully able to weigh the consequences of my telling his story here. The stigma of mental illness still exists, and I did not want to jeopardize his entry into and success at the college of his choice.*