



SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
Dean of Student Affairs
Dean of Student Affairs Office

Dear Parents and Families,

Greetings from what is now an unseasonably *cold* mid-November here on the Medford/Somerville campus! For most of our students, midterms have now come and gone. Final papers and projects are on the horizon, and students are making spring semester advising appointments and finalizing Thanksgiving plans. As we head into the final weeks of fall, I expect you're looking forward to connecting soon -- in person or otherwise -- with your son or daughter. I am writing this month's Parent Newsletter to encourage you to make time in your upcoming conversations with your student to reflect with them on all that's transpired in their learning and development at Tufts this term. These conversations may include times when your student has met frustration, failure, and what they might consider substandard outcomes in or out of class -- the moments that actually have great potential for growth -- and I'd also like to make sure parents and loved ones know the resources available to students here on campus.

If you've ever heard me speak at Orientation or Parents and Family Weekend, you know that learning from failure is a frequent subject of my outreach to students and families. Academic or personal setbacks bring

students unique opportunities to reevaluate how they apply effort, examine how much interest they have in something, and better understand their intrinsic motivations and passions. Some failure will be an inevitable part of every student's Tufts experience, particularly if they choose to challenge themselves. For new students accustomed to being the best in their high schools and hometowns, early disappointment can be an unfamiliar and unexpected part of their transition. In twenty years advising first-years and sophomores, I can almost set my watch by when the big questions start to come up, including those prompted by a low-ish grade or someone not making the cut for a group or team. For many sophomores and seniors the questions now are: *Is this what I really wanted to do with my education and career? What do I do if it's not?* For first-years in their first term and for juniors deeper into their academics and co-curricular pursuits, around this time we hear: *I always thought I was good at journalism/music/biology/coding/etc., but suddenly I'm over my head or I'm out altogether. Who am I without this part of my identity?*

Many students quietly carry these questions around with them as Thanksgiving break looms, wondering if they are the only ones reevaluating their methods and questioning their strengths, and sometimes wondering how they'll talk to friends and family about their uncertainty. I assure you that any student currently reckoning with these questions is in very good company. If your student raises these questions with you, encourage them

to keep talking -- to you, to our resources here at Tufts, and to one another. Encourage them to make room for other students who might also feel this way, too.

Faculty, staff and peer leaders are eager to engage students as they reflect on their goals and explore what might be next. In the next few weeks our [Residential Life staff](#), the [CARE team](#), the [Accessibility Services office](#), [Counseling and Mental Health Services](#), and [Tisch Library](#), among others, will partner to offer programs designed to help students manage the stress of exams and semester's end through study breaks like [Pause for Paws](#). These informal chances to have fun and unwind also serve as opportunities to remind students of the many resources available to them throughout their time at Tufts. The advisors at the [Career Center](#) also have many conversations with students, and are well equipped to provide support. Encourage them to stop by for Drop-ins or make an appointment.

As you talk to your student, keep in mind that a number of departments help students develop skills for deeper resiliency and more meaningful engagement. Our [Office for Student Success and Advising](#) is dedicated to assisting first- and second-year students as they navigate new courses, select majors, and find their academic footing. The [advising deans](#) and departmental faculty can assist with course decisions and refining areas of focus in an academic discipline; staff in the [Academic Resource Center](#) support students who might need to reevaluate their time

management and study strategies. The [Dean of Student Affairs Office](#) assists students looking for direction or connection when they don't know where to start, as do staff in the [Group of Six](#), [Career Center](#), and the [University Chaplaincy](#).

As part of our community fabric, the clinicians in [Counseling and Mental Health](#) are also available to support all undergraduates with mental health concerns. Across the country, US colleges are seeing increased demand on mental health services. For example, [62% of college students reported feeling “overwhelming anxiety”](#) in 2016. We recognize that it's more important than ever to destigmatize asking for help and ensure that students know the resources available to them. Meanwhile, we want to make certain that we continue to provide meaningful and effective support to all of our students. President Monaco and Dr. Paul Summergrad of Tufts Medical Center are currently leading a [Mental Health Task Force](#) that is actively assessing student wellness and engagement at Tufts. The Task Force seeks to ensure that Tufts is “meeting the needs of our students, fostering resilience, and providing a healthy and supportive community in which all students can reach their potential.” You can help us meet that goal by having a conversation with your own student about connecting with all the resources available at Tufts.

As parents and loved ones, I expect you are keenly aware of the pressures your student might feel and the ways that setbacks can

sometimes seem oversized. At Tufts we hope to combat a larger societal culture that emphasizes external achievement and success through a consistent emphasis on genuine, meaningful engagement and interpersonal connection. We believe this approach will better equip your student with the skills to navigate meaningful careers, active citizenship, and true excellence at Tufts and beyond. Regardless of where your student is in their Tufts experience, what they're studying, or what co-curricular life they're enjoying, we are ready to support them in making the most of their time here. If they're encountering challenges, please encourage them to seek us out; if we can help you as you help them, we are eager to connect anytime.

My very best wishes to you and your family as we approach the holiday season. Please reach out to [my office](#) any time you think we can be of assistance to your student or to you.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Pat McMahon
Dean of Student Affairs