



Contact: Austin Douglas

Baylor University Senior

austin_douglas2@baylor.edu

253-495-5539 | www.baylor.edu

Helping Your Student Get Involved in Their New Community (Outside Campus)

Starting college is a major transition, not only for your student but also for your family. The first few weeks are often filled with excitement, new routines, and making friends on campus. When I first started at Baylor, I quickly realized that finding my place on campus was only half the story. What truly made me feel settled was discovering the broader Waco community around me. For many students, getting involved outside of campus not only provides balance, but also helps them see their college town as a second home.

Ways to Connect Beyond Campus

- **Exploring your new city.** College towns have their own rhythm and personality, and Waco is no exception. Remind your student to get curious about what is nearby. In Waco, that might mean walking through the farmers market on Saturday mornings, visiting Magnolia Market, or checking out the Dr Pepper Museum with new friends. By making an effort to step off campus and experience the community, students learn to truly appreciate their new environment and culture.
- **Discovering your local favorites.** Encouraging your student to establish their “regular” spots, on and off campus, can help them feel comfortable and settled. It might be a coffee shop where the barista begins to recognize their order, a

restaurant where they meet friends for late night study breaks, or a quiet bookstore that offers a peaceful place to unwind. A year into college I found my local, Waco favorite—Cha Community. It is a vibrant, welcoming, immigrant and woman-owned boba tea cafe. Shortly after creating my routine of studying there every Friday afternoon, I became a regular. The kind barista knows me and my go-to order. What begins as a quick visit to try something new can easily become the kind of tradition that makes college feel like home.

- **Finding organizations.** Getting plugged into community organizations is a wonderful way for your student to build relationships and give back while they are in college. Many students find that volunteering enriches their college years by helping them feel useful and connected outside of the classroom. In Waco, for example, animal shelters offer opportunities for students to walk dogs or spend time with cats, which is perfect for those missing a family pet. Nonprofits, churches, and civic groups also welcome student members and volunteers. These experiences not only give students a chance to serve but also allow them to build leadership and teamwork skills.
- **Seeking out internships & jobs.** One of the best ways for students to grow during college is by gaining professional experience in the community. Beyond helping with expenses, part time jobs and internships give them the chance to apply what they are learning in the classroom and explore future career interests. Waco is home to businesses, nonprofits, and start ups that welcome and seek out Baylor students, giving them access to mentorship, real world projects, and valuable networking opportunities. These roles often spark passions that shape career paths. By stepping into the professional world early, students gain confidence and direction while still in college.

Building a Second Home

When your student invests in the community around them, they are doing more than filling their free time. They are cultivating a sense of belonging that supports their well being and growth throughout college. Waco becomes not just the backdrop of their Baylor years, but a place where they build friendships, discover passions, and create memories that last long after graduation.

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