Welcome everyone to our 2023 family briefing. As a reminder, the family briefing is for parents and family members of students. Students will receive student specific information at their Advising Briefings on Wednesday. Any students in the room, we ask that you please go to the resource fair in Duffield Atrium. There is plenty to do at the resource fair where you can start to meet some other first year Engineering students, and then meet back up with your parents after this presentation. Now I am pleased to introduce Lynden Archer, James A. Friend Family Distinguished Professor in Engineering and Joseph Silbert Dean of Engineering, to share some words of welcome.
• Welcome again everyone to our 2023 Cornell Engineering Family Briefing. My name is Miranda Swanson and I serve as Associate Dean for Student Services. I'm joined by Alan Zehnder, Professor in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs.
• We're happy to have this opportunity to share some information about the college and then have an open discussion with our panel of faculty, staff, and students. They will introduce themselves in just a little bit.
• Whether this is your first or final student that you are sending to college, you are probably experiencing a range of emotions: nervous, sad, happy, anxious, tearful, excited or all of those at once. Anybody out there experiencing any of those emotions?
• Here’s what your students are feeling…
In June our advising staff asked incoming students to list one word to describe their feelings about coming to Cornell Engineering.

This is a word cloud – the larger the word, the more students listed it. You can see there are many emotions represented – everything from excited, ecstatic, and eager to nervous and even...hungry.
• As you may also be anxious and nervous, what we’d like to do today is present information about what you can expect in your student’s first year.
• We’ll talk about goals for them, the curriculum (which is another word for their classes), the many changes your student will be going through, support systems available, and about your role as family.
• Then we’ll open it up to our panel of experts for your questions.
• Now I’ll turn it over to Professor Alan Zehnder to guide us through the first half of this presentation.
GOALS OF THE 1ST YEAR:

- **Get to know roommate**, learn where their classes are, figure out how they like to spend their time, and, of course, where the library and important offices are. It’s a time of exploration and finding a group of friends.
- **Math is the key** to being successful in engineering – worked hard to provide appropriate instructions to get them pre-enrolled into the appropriate math course.
- Learn about **engineering and the various majors** – it’s an opportunity to find out what they like and don’t like. They will attend ENGRG 1050, the advising seminar and Major information sessions.
- Learn how to **ask for help**. Get to know their faculty advisor and establish a rapport with Eng. Advising office.
- Most important, we want them to **become a sophomore**. What that really means that they will have adjusted to a new environment, learned the ropes, learned how to study, know how to take care of themselves, and have some understanding of how to manage their time.
We show here the full curriculum, but as you can imagine there are many variations.

Many engineering students take four semesters of Math, four semesters of physics, chem, or bio - the distribution depending on what major they ultimately choose. They will take an Intro to Eng course and an Intro to CS course. In some cases a science may be substituted for the 4th math class.

And, all engineering students at Cornell take two freshmen writing seminars and an Advising Seminar – ENGRG 1050.

They also must take 6 additional liberal studies courses from departments all over campus to explore humanities, arts and social sciences.

Two Physical Education courses and pass the swim test.

The remaining engineering courses are determined by the major.
**AP/GCE/IB Credit**

- AP/GCE/IB credit means added flexibility
- May choose to use or not use this credit
- Math is special! Greatest predictor of engineering success
- Work with faculty advisor
  - Assess confidence level with the material
  - Cornell Advanced Standing Exam (CASE)
    - Math, Chemistry, Computer Science, Physics (if no AP score)
    - Use to assess preparation and whether to accept AP credit

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- A number of students have AP credit. Your student is received info about AP over the summer, in their academic briefing and in the Eng. Handbook – it gives the various scores needed to obtain credit for courses here at Cornell.
- If your student is unsure whether to use the credit and move on to the next course, they can work with their faculty advisor and/or college advisor to decide whether to accept their credit, but we also encourage them to take a Cornell Advanced Standing Exam (CASE) when offered.
Affiliation

• By start of the fifth semester
• Preparation and planning now
• Exploration encouraged
  • Intro to Engineering (ENGRI) courses
  • ENGRG 1050 – required to go to 2 major information sessions
• Uncertainty about a major is common and expected

• Students don’t affiliate with a major until their sophomore year and exploration is encouraged
• There are a number of ways to do that. . . Intro to Eng, ENGRG 1050, “Got Major”
• Uncertainty - 40% of our students change their minds after they get here or were undecided to begin with. And we have majors they may have never heard of
Faculty Expectations

• Come to class prepared and ready to think
• Complete work on time
• Ask questions in class
• Comment if course pace not OK
• Follow the Code of Academic Integrity
• Talk with instructors if students have questions, concerns or problems

• Some of these are obvious. . .come to class, work done on time, but most importantly. . .
• Students need to take initiative to ask questions. There isn’t a faculty member who won’t help a student who asks for it, but it’s not likely that a faculty member will tap a student on the shoulder and say, I see you didn’t do so well on your last prelim. Can’t emphasize enough how important it is for students to ask questions and speak up when they need help.
The Essential Student Guide

Academic Integrity

All freshman required to watch a short film, “Cheating” (in the To Do List).

Guide is distributed electronically and discussed during ENGRG 1050.

Why are we discussing this topic with families?
A Cornell student’s submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student’s own. All outside assistance should be acknowledged, and the student’s academic position truthfully reported at all times. In addition, Cornell students have a right to expect academic integrity from each of their peers.

1. Ways in which you may have supported your child in high school – for example proofreading and editing drafts of papers – are not appropriate now that they are in College. In the same way that they are now responsible for their own time management, they are responsible for their own academic work.
2. Many academic integrity offenses result from poor decisions made in moments of stress or not knowing or understanding certain rules.
   a. You can help your student by encouraging them to be PROACTIVE about reaching out for support when they are struggling: tutors, Academic Excellence Workshops, the Learning Strategies Center are just a few examples of people and places that can help.
   b. Encourage your student to understand the rules in any given course. When in doubt, they should ask their instructor.
What can students expect?

• Workload may feel reasonable at first
• Increased load over time
• Mental stretch
• First exams (called “Prelims”)
• Grades: Wake up call

What can students expect?

• Students will find that the workload increases over time. They will be stretched mentally and at times will feel like they are working harder than they thought possible.
• First prelims – end of Sept. The first set of exams is often the time students have to come to grips with the fact that they may not get all A’s like they did in high school.
• It’s extremely stressful when students get that first low grade (and to many a B is a low grade). That’s when our Advising staff steps in with a safety net.
Early Intervention

- Mid-semester safety net
- Faculty in core courses notify advising of students with C or below in core courses
- Advising staff contacts students, offers assistance, and provides resources
- Students responsible to respond to offers of help

- Early Intervention is a program developed to try to assist students who need it early in the semester. The staff contacts students who have a C or below on their first prelim and offers to assist them in trying to determine what’s keeping them from their best performance, and also provides resources. Students need to respond to our outreach and come in for help.
- There are many resources available – faculty, TAs, and the College offers Peer Tutoring for free, and there are many locations around campus where students can get specific course help. There are workshops at LSC - study skills, time management, rapid reading, tips on learning from lecture, exam strategies, etc.
What can families (you) expect?

Initially
• Love most of my classes
• Homework is easy
• Less work than I thought

As time goes by
• This is really hard
• Not sure I made the right choice
• I don’t know if I belong here

As more time goes by
• I’m doing this really cool project …

- We’ve touched on what faculty expect and what students can expect. So, what can parents and families expect?
- Students may find that the first few weeks feel like a bit of a review, particularly if they took a number of AP courses. You may hear things like, “homework is easier than I thought.”
- As Alan said, they’ll find very quickly that the pace speeds up so don’t be surprised if they sound more serious as the semester goes by.
- In most cases, as students experience that they can overcome some initial challenge, they build confidence and start to feel that they do belong here, and eventually they start to enjoy their academic experience.
In addition to the academic expectations, students are coping with many changes.

- They may be in a completely different environment,
- will be making all or many new friends,
- and adjusting to a completely different way of managing their time. Some days they may have no classes while on others they might have 4.
- They may be sharing space for the first time and navigating interacting with people who are from very different backgrounds.
Keys to Success

- Ask for help
- Keep up with the work
- Seek out resources
  - Engineering Advising
  - Diversity Programs in Engineering
  - Engineering Learning Initiatives
  - Learning Strategies Center (LSC)
  - Class Office Hours

- With everything so complicated for your student right now, I want you to know that the keys for success are actually fairly simple.
- Your student was admitted to Cornell Engineering because they have the capacity to be successful in our curriculum. That said, we expect that students may stumble given everything we have told you so far – the academic work is rigorous, those who were able to breeze through high school classes may need to learn or re-learn solid study skills now that they are in college, they may be needing to learn time management, and students are experiencing many environmental changes. The keys to success are not to avoid stumbling, but rather to learn how to make a quick recovery.
- Important to keep up – pace may be faster than they are used to and it’s hard to catch up if they get very far behind.
“— If you learn anything at Cornell, please learn to ask for help. It is a sign of wisdom and strength

- David Skorton, Former Cornell President

• We really encourage our students to not be afraid to ask for help. This may be obvious to you, but not to your student as they may never have had to ask for help from anyone but you before.
• Encourage them to think about all the resources available to them and seek them out.
  • There are more than 50 staff in Engineering Student Services, Diversity Programs, and Undergraduate Programs here to support your student.
  • There are faculty and staff in each of our academic departments who care about the wellbeing and success of your student.
  • There are also staff in central offices across campus from Cornell Health to Residential Programs to the Dean of Students.
• So, please encourage your student to knock on our doors, whether literally or figuratively. That’s what we’re here for. If in doubt about where or how to start, call or email Engineering Advising.
Advising

*Faculty Advisors*
- Curriculum requirements
- Guidance re: majors, graduate study, and career planning

*Engineering Advising (professional staff)*
- Supplement faculty advising
- Emphasis on first- and second-year students
- Advise on common core requirements, affiliation planning, pre-health, and study abroad

*Peer Advisors (students)*
- Course enrollment
- Student Life
- Role Models

Speaking of advising…

As a baseline, there are 3 sets of advisors for every Engineering freshman.

- Each student is assigned to a faculty who will work with them in their Advising Seminar (ENGRG 1050).
- Engineering Advising Office consists of professional advising staff who focus mostly on 1st and 2nd year students, who advise on common core requirements, affiliation planning and process, pre-health, and study abroad
- Peer Advisors – work closely with faculty in the Advising seminar and are great at helping students navigate Cornell
Cornell really does = opportunity. There is so much to do.
- Over 1000 student org on campus,
- Engineering has over 30 project teams,
- several college-wide student orgs, and a student org in each academic department.
- and social activities are almost limitless.

We want your students to get involved in some extracurricular activity. If they do nothing but study, it can leave them isolated and lonely. **On the other hand, we encourage them to be careful in their** first semester until they learn how much they can manage.
So what does all of this mean for you?
Your role is in transition.

You can’t control, but you can influence.

You can listen.

**CHANGE**

You can raise questions.

You can’t regulate their lives.

You can point them to resources.

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- **Your role now is really in transition.**
- Once you leave campus, you will have **shifted to a role of influencing your student.**
- It’s impossible to control when they go to bed, when they get up, what they eat, whether they go to class and any number of other things.
- It’s important for you to **shift from being the one in control to being a coach for your student.**
- But before we talk more about the positive influence you can have, let’s take a minute to talk about ways you might inadvertently have a negative influence....
“While parental involvement might be the extra boost that students need to build their own confidence and abilities, over-parenting appears to do the converse in creating a sense that one cannot accomplish things socially or in general on one’s own.”


“Extra love and support doesn’t make up for being a helicopter parent.”


“I do want to say a few words about the concept of over-parenting, more often termed helicopter parenting.

Helicopter parenting is defined as an OVER-involvement in the lives of their children, which includes making important decisions for them, solving their problems, and intervening in their conflicts.

A Washington Post article on this topic details a study that "showed that those college students with “helicopter parents” had a hard time believing in their own ability to accomplish goals. They were more dependent on others, had poor coping strategies and didn’t have soft skills, like responsibility and conscientiousness throughout college.”

It is important to note that research shows that love and warmth doesn’t mitigate the damaging effects of helicopter parenting. In other words, the best of intentions doesn’t turn the negative impact of over-parenting into a positive (or even neutral) one.

So what’s the alternative to “over-parenting”?
Develop a “Coaching Mindset

Hold Your Student Accountable
• Student takes responsibility for finding solutions
• “Oh Zone”: Oh, that sounds like a difficult situation; how will you handle that?
• Student is CEO of their own college experience

Support and Encourage
• Actively listen, ask open ended questions
• Help your student explore alternatives
• Trust in your student’s decision making
• Help guide toward resources
• Send notes of support

• So let’s go back to this idea of shifting from being the one in control to being a coach for your student.
• When I use the word coach, I am not thinking of a sports coach who is directing, instructing, and training; rather, coaching for growth is about supporting your emerging adult/your student in their development and maturation. Coaching in this sense puts your student in the lead. It assumes that they have the answers within them. Even if those answers may not always be the same as yours.
• One of the most important things you can do is just be supportive and encouraging.
• Important to Listen without fixing – instead ask open ended questions (not a yes/no answer). For example, instead of “did you go to class today”, you might ask “what is it that makes biology so interesting?” “What is your day like there?” Tell me about your writing assignment.
• One of the greatest gifts you can give your student is to help them believe in their own ability to make decisions. Try not to tell them what to do unless asked.
• Oh Zone – great phrase to remember – e.g., trouble with roommate – “oh, that sounds like a tough situation; how will you handle that?”
• Remember, the resources are here, but students need to activate them. Ultimately, they are now responsible for their success. But you can remind them and encourage them to use the support Cornell has available.

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Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA)

• Students are treated as legal adults and have the right to
  • Inspect records
  • Challenge incorrect information
  • Keep records private (e.g., instructor names, course schedules, grades, etc.)
• Parents/Legal Guardians may be notified when it is in the best interest of the student
  • Withdrawals
  • Good standing is an issue
  • Disciplinary probation
• If health or well-being is at serious risk, and known to us, you will be notified

Another part of the transition for parents is that the educational records of our students are protected by FERPA and Cornell’s Access to Student Records policy.
• Students have the right to inspect and question their records and also to keep them private.
• Most of you are used to seeing report cards and class schedules but by law, we cannot share it with you.
• Many parents have great difficulty with this one but is part of the transition of students to adulthood. They are treated as legal adults . . .
• HOWEVER…Students may order a transcript online and have it sent to you.
• If students are having great difficulty or there are behavioral issues, and we believe it’s in the best interests of the student, you may be notified.
• You can be sure if we know that the health or well-being of a student is at risk, we will notify you.
Summary

• College is a big adjustment
• Our academic work is challenging
• Students should get involved but be selective
• Tons of resources and support
• Students need to be proactive as they are ultimately responsible for their success

• So, what do we want you to take away from today?
• This really is an incredible place with lots of opportunity for your student to get involved
• Sometimes it’s hard to manage all the choices.
• There is a lot of support for students; but they do have to ask.
• Your most important role is to be supportive and encouraging.
  • I want to reiterate the idea of a "Coaching mindset" in which you assume that your student is capable of finding solutions.
  • Remember that getting it wrong, stumbling, and even failing is a part of learning
  • Communication is key – talk to your student about how they want you to support them
  • And again, remind them of their resources
And speaking of resources – here are a couple for you: there is a cornell parents page and if you go to the engineering college website you can also find information specifically for parents and families of Engineers. Our undergraduate handbook is also available there.