As I reflect on my daughter's freshman year of college at the University of Arizona, I am grateful.

As the vice president for enrollment management and dean of admissions, I appreciate that it may seem silly for me to write about my own child's first year. But I feel compelled to share. The UA offered her everything we market in our recruiting messages and I was able to see firsthand that we are making good on our promises.

Her freshman year started off shaky. She sprained her ankle badly the weekend before classes began. She struggled getting around campus. Additionally, students in one of her small classes took a personality and leadership quiz. She found she was unlike everyone in the room and she quickly felt like an outcast. This, compounded with struggling on crutches, made her wonder if she had selected the right major.

She persisted, yet struggled, those first few months. In fact, she had not found her fit in many of her classes. I expected that. I try to prepare parents of new college students for this. Change is hard and I knew there would be tears at different times during the semester.

Around mid-semester, something magical happened. One of her instructors contacted her to meet for coffee. My daughter was worried. I let her know she was probably meeting with all the students in the class. She said, "No. Just me." Of course, that worried me, too! After their meeting, I received an excited text that read, "Mom, I just had the best meeting of my life!"

The care and support she received from that instructor is what the UA is all about. Her instructor showed that she cared, talked to her about her passions and interests, and helped her strategize about other educational areas she might want to pursue. The comfort and compassion she provided my daughter was amazing. Without this personalized outreach, I am confident my daughter would have continued to struggle.

My daughter's college experience changed that day. She moved on to another major and feels confident in her choice. She would not have felt this way without the guidance she received. Her instructor continued to follow up, including emailing her at the end of her first semester to tell her how proud she was of her, and then again at the start of the spring semester to wish her well. It is the little things. They add up and make such a difference.

I am also grateful for the wide variety of educational options my daughter had in her first year. Her experience has been everything that I wanted for my child. Listening to her describe the Middle Eastern studies coursework and Mexican American studies class was enlightening. I was thrilled to see her enjoyment in expanding her understanding of different cultures as well as learning more about her own and the relevancy to the world we live in. It was also exciting to see her love of writing develop from the encouragement of her English 102
instructor. Her instructors’ expectations and encouragement pushed my daughter to reach her full potential.

Outside the classroom, my daughter has been fortunate to work on campus. Her office is a built-in family that supports her as a student and whole person. It is remarkable to see the care from so many UA employees. They have been a shoulder to cry on during hard times and a team to share successes with in good times.

I could go on about her newly developed love for the Spanish language or her interest in minoring and obtaining a bilingual endorsement, but I will stop. My heart is grateful knowing the UA is doing exactly what we share with prospective students and families. We are educating innovative problem solvers, with leadership skills and the ability to think creatively.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that I am also grateful for the preparation she received from Tucson’s Flowing Wells schools. From elementary through high school, she was taught important lessons that included high expectations for achievement with integrity.

Thank you to the UA instructors, staff and faculty who impacted my daughter’s life this past year. Thank you for all the UA students’ lives you impact each and every day. Never doubt how much a single interaction can make a difference. I am grateful.

Bear Down.

Kasey Urquidez, Class of 1994, is vice president for enrollment management and dean of undergraduate admissions. Urquidez also holds two master's degrees and a doctorate. She has written two previous columns about her daughter: Picking the UA: Reflections From a Dean and Her Freshman Daughter[1] and I’m Now That Bumper Sticker: ‘Proud Arizona Mom’[2]. A version[3] of the above column first appeared on the National Association for College Admission Counseling’s blog.

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Links
[1] https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/picking-ua-reflections-dean-and-her-freshman-daughter