

OLIVERIAN

A school as unique as its students.

Latest News from Oliverian

Home for the Holidays: Practice Makes Perfect

By Will Laughlin, Head of School

In a 1936 magazine article aptly entitled "The Crack Up," F. Scott Fitzgerald says that "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."



When I first encountered Fitzgerald's words, almost 25 years ago, I was a young, recently engaged high school English teacher. The two ideas duking it out in my own head were, "I am getting married next month," and "I must leave the country and assume a new identity." I loved my fiancée but was utterly terrified of marriage. The opposing impulses of commitment and escape were pulling me apart; I could not eat, I could not sleep, I could barely function.

Even as I picked groomsman's gifts and wrote a wedding song, I was planning my escape: Baja California in a pickup truck with a dog and a surfboard. Somehow I made it to the altar instead of Mexico, but with slightly protruding ribs, hollow cheeks, and a stomachache I thought would never go away. It was clear to me that I had failed Fitzgerald's intelligence test.

Life is full of these tests of emotional intelligence-situations that challenge our ability to deal with ambiguity and paradox. In fact, the most important things in life are fraught with these perplexities. To fall in love is to risk disappointment and heartbreak. Having a child pits joy against freedom. Every clear decision destroys a host of other possibilities. Loving a young adult well requires letting them go. A career expresses our giftedness and exposes our shortcomings. The people we love deeply are the ones who cause us the most pain. Life's just that way.

Fortunately, my own FIQ (Fitzgeraldian Intelligence Quotient) has increased over the years, albeit very slowly in the experiential context of marriage, career, and life in general. I'm better at making decisions, navigating transitions, holding things like joy and grief or anger and love at the same time, and staying sane when things don't make sense to me. Some of the best opportunities to exercise my FIQ take place routinely during the holidays because, in my family, the holidays are such a wonderful time of joy, connection, rest, and fellowship. And in my family, the holidays are such an agonizing time of pain, disruption, unrealistic expectations, and dysfunction. Both things are true. Maybe for you too.

It's because of these holiday challenges, not despite them, that Oliverian so values school breaks for our students. We don't offer an on-campus option because our students (and their parents) need predictable, temporary (and therefore survivable) opportunities to embrace the kind of transition, change, and paradox they will increasingly face as they enter adulthood. Blessedly, school holidays have a start and a finish and, as such, are the Spartan Race of family dynamics-a blur of fun and grime and bruises and obstacles and transitions and snacks and wipeouts and then it's over.

When students return to Oliverian after a holiday, we have plenty to talk about. How did it go? What was wonderful? What sucked? How can you get more of the former and less of the latter next time? What mistakes did you make? How can you recover? What are you in control of? Not in control of? Who drove you crazy...and vice versa? This makes school breaks a perfect training ground for developing core social and emotional skills and the kind of "first-rate intelligence" that Fitzgerald, too, had to practice to master. His article was entitled "The Crack Up" because he went a little nutty when faced with the ambiguities of adulthood. But he persevered,

practiced, reflected, and eventually came into possession of himself. And so too, shall we.

So it's in that hope that I wish you a full, rich, and growth-filled holiday season.

Warmly,
Will Laughlin, Head of School

Guidelines to Stay Well and Reduce Stress this Holiday Season

By Aaron Rumsey, Director of Counseling

The holidays are filled with obligations, visits, dinners, and parties. These events can be wonderful but can also create much stress and anxiety. There are strategies that people can use to effectively manage stress and engage positively with their families. A general guideline I try to remind myself of during the holidays is that I can flow with just about anything if I remember what I am really



after, which is to spend time with the people I care about. Instead of being so wrapped up in what we actually do or when I try to focus on the fact that we are doing it together.

- Be sure to look after yourself: It is too easy to ignore ourselves in favor of helping others during the holidays. If you find that you lie awake at night worrying about a situation, it is time to check-in with yourself. Make sure that you take extra time to look after yourself.
- Focus on staying calm and moving on: Our children have a unique ability to press all our buttons and generally wind us up. If you feel yourself getting angry, take a few deep breaths before replying and don't be afraid to take some space.
- Keep talking and listening: Make sure that you keep communication channels open with your teenager. Give them

opportunities to talk, ask general questions, and be sure to try and be a good listener. Be curious and interested.

- Allow teenagers to have time alone: Teenagers are trying very hard to find and create their own identity. It is important to allow them time on their own, and some privacy, to enable them to feel that they are growing up.
- Know who is there for you: Be sure to have some kind of support available to you if you need it. Supports can include: friend, partner, family member, counselor and so on. The holidays can create challenges for us and we often need support through them

We hope you all can enjoy each other over the holiday break, and we can't wait to reengage with you and with your children.

Aaron Rumsey, Director of Counseling

College Counseling in the Field

By Abby Hood, Director of Academics

It is a busy time of year in college counseling. Our seniors, who are navigating the short-term transitions between their Oliverian home and their family homes during this holiday season, are also imagining, exploring, and preparing for the larger transition to their future college home. Some students headed home for the

Thanksgiving break with a few acceptances already in hand, some with applications submitted and a persistent pit of anxiety in their stomach as they wait for news. Other seniors are midway through their college applications and will be puttering with essay revisions and fiddling with their Common App when they need a little break from family time. And some students are still reflecting, pondering, and researching in their quest to envision a post-Oliverian path.



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This is just as it should be. Despite the advice you may find on the internet, the college process is not one-size-fits-all and sometimes is not linear. But it must be a genuinely reflective one, in which the student has agency, balanced by the support, guidance, and limits from their family, in charting their future path. There are plenty of important small decisions to be made (SAT, ACT, or neither; essay topic; which deadline to submit for), which can seem like the meat of the process. However, there are far more important and larger questions to be asked first. What options do I want available to me in the future? How hard am I willing to work to have those options? What is the relationship between what I want and what I need, and what will I do when those two things do not align?

The number of appropriate paths through this self-exploration process is equal to the number of students at our school. This is reflected among the eight students who joined me last week on a trip to Burlington to visit the University of Vermont and Champlain College. One was a sophomore who intends to be a veterinarian and is interested in UVM's animal science and pre-vet programs. Another is a senior considering whether to apply Early Decision to Champlain. Another senior, undecided as to what she will study in college, is trying to experience as many different campuses as she can in order to figure out what feels like home to her. I am proud of each of these students, not only for how well they represented themselves and Oliverian on the two college tours, but also for their authentic and individual approach to the process. It is an honor to partner with each of them in the journey to find their next home.

Abby Hood, Director of Academics

Taking Care of Others

Before travelling to be with family over Thanksgiving break, Oliverian students and faculty took time to help other families in the area by donating and delivering all the fixings for a full Thanksgiving

meal. Haverhill Police Chief Byron Charles joined the Oliverian crew and delivered food to ten families in hopes that everyone can enjoy family time over a fine feast this holiday.



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