

From the Office of the Dean of Students “Student Engagement for Success”

UNDERSTANDING A STUDENT’S FIRST SEMESTER

The first year of university is a period of transition as students learn to live on their own, meet new social, academic and personal challenges and encounter new ideas and new people. Having some idea of the challenges your student will face can help you be an effective support person. While no two students will experience first year in quite the same way, the chart below outlines some of the predictable high and low moments for a typical first year student.

TIME	TYPICAL EXPERIENCES	POSSIBLE RESPONSES	WHAT PARENTS CAN DO
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students move into dormitories, say good-bye to families • Meet Residence Staff and House President • Meet and interact with fellow House members • Meal plan in Morrison Hall begins • Busy and hectic days filled with many sessions, activities and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement • Fear • Loneliness • Homesickness • Self-doubt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Encourage independence, but reassure your student that you are still part of his/her life • Listen to student’s concerns. Don’t try to talk him or her out of loneliness, homesickness or fear. Let them know you have confidence in them. Remind them of past achievements • Encourage your student to view this time of life as an opportunity for discovery and growth • Inquire about specific events, i.e.: “How was the Orientation event last evening?” “How have you set up your room?”
Early September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend classes, receive syllabi, meet Faculty and classmates • Begin campus job • Class add/drop period • Begin to establish relationship with roommate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed by academic expectations • Difficulty learning to live with someone’s habits. • Homesickness • Worry about growing apart from family and old friends, partner • Enjoying new independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Use e-mail, snail mail to stay in touch • Show genuine interest in student’s experiences • Encourage your student to get to know a variety of people • Encourage communication with roommates • Avoid feeding fears • Encourage student to stay on campus for first few weekends
Mid September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settling into class/work routine • Residence social activities/Events • Exploring opportunities for campus involvement • Developing time management habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about identity - where do I fit in here? • Homesickness • Becoming more familiar with campus • Enjoying classes, excited by new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Inquire about course content, show interest in what they’re learning • Send clippings, information about home, high school, friends • Encourage involvement

Late September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing study habits, forming study groups • Trying to keep up social activities, work and meet academic demands. May be neglecting sleep, health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Fatigue • Less homesick • Feeling a part of campus life and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Inquire about projects • Send small care package-healthy snacks, herb tea, a surprise
Early October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roommate tension may grow as stress increases and initial courtesy wears off • Thanksgiving Weekend signals a much needed break • Connect with old friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self doubt • Missing home and past life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Encourage student to seek help from professor • Do laundry, cook favorite dishes, make him or her feel special
Mid-Late October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-term tests and quizzes • Break up with partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Difficulty managing social and academic demands • Frustration - I always got A's in high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Discuss mid-semester grades with student. Listen. Encourage the student to seek help from professors in courses that are challenging. Remind him or her that it is not too late to make changes • Encourage student to talk to his or her advisor about mid-semester grades
Early November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Papers and tests returned - reality check on academic performance • Advisement and pre-registration • Thinking about declaring/changing major • May be running short of money • Final papers, projects assigned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety if still unsure of major • Stressed with demands of work, school and social life. If student hasn't developed good time management by now, it shows • Frustration - I always got A's in high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Discuss interests, goals. Don't push student • Disappointment with academic performance • Engage student in reflection about academic performance - i.e. "What do you think you did wrong?" "What can you do differently to do better on the next paper or test?" • If student is sick, encourage him or her to get help in the Health Center
Late November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final papers, projects due • All-nighters • Relationships with friends, family, partners and roommates strained by stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed by all that needs to be done in the next few weeks • Excited about social activities that end off the semester • Fatigue and stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Help student maintain perspective and realistic expectations • Discuss family plans for the up-coming break • Another good time for a care package - gift certificate to a local restaurant or the mall
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Exams • Packing to go home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety about first university finals • Fatigue and stress • Excited to be going home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen • Let student know you're proud of him or her for having a successful first semester