

Differences between High School and College

High School	College
<i>Teacher/Student Contact</i> – Contact closer and more frequent (5 days a week)	<i>Teacher/Student Contact</i> – Faculty are available during office hours (only a few hours a week) and by appointment to address students' concerns.
<i>Competition/Grades</i> – Academic competition is not as strong; good grades can often be obtained with minimum effort.	<i>Competition/Grades</i> – Academic competition is much stronger; minimum effort may produce poor grades.
<i>Status</i> – Students establish a personal status in academic and social activities based on family and community factors.	<i>Status</i> – Students can build their status as they wish; high school status can be repeated or changed.
<i>Counseling/Dependence</i> – Students can rely on parents, teachers, and counselors to help make decisions and give advice. Students must abide by parents' boundaries and restrictions.	<i>Counseling/Dependence</i> – Students rely on themselves; they see the results of making their own decisions. It is their responsibility to seek advice as needed. Students set their own restrictions.
<i>Motivation</i> – Students get stimulation to achieve or participate from parents, teachers, and counselors.	<i>Motivation</i> – Students apply their own motivation to their work and activities as they wish.
<i>Freedom</i> – Students' freedom is limited. Parents will often help students out of a crisis should one arise.	<i>Freedom</i> – Students have much more freedom. Students must accept responsibility for their own actions.
<i>Distractions</i> – There are distractions from school, but these are partially controlled by school and home.	<i>Distractions</i> – The opportunity for more distractions exists. Time management will become more important to students.
<i>Value Judgments</i> – Students often make value judgments based on parental values; thus, many of their value judgments are made for them.	<i>Value Judgments</i> – Students have the opportunity to see the world through their own eyes and develop their own opinions and values.

Reprinted with permission from:

Mullendore, R.H., & Hatch, C. (2000). *Helping your first-year college student succeed: A guide for parents*.

Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. All rights reserved.

Ten Transitional Stages of First-Year Students

The following phases are typical of new students' adjustment to college. Stages may not occur in the sequence described, and students may not experience all of the phases. However, this information can serve as a useful guideline to understand the challenges students might face during the first year.

1. *Post-high school satisfaction/Pre-college elation*

As students experience much excitement over the prospect of attending college, expectations tend to be unrealistic and are based on brief glimpses of college life from campus visits, movies, or television.

2. *Early separation anxiety*

As they begin to pack and prepare for college, students realize that they are actually leaving behind the support systems of family and friends.

3. *Acute separation anxiety*

As students leave home, they experience emotional moments with loved ones. They realize that they do not know the unwritten rules of this new campus culture. At this stage, it is especially critical to meet experienced older students, such as resident advisors and Peer Leaders, who can assist with the adjustment process.

4. *The honeymoon*

This is a time of euphoria as students anticipate intellectual excitement and a satisfying social life. Students feel ready to experience all that campus life has to offer.

5. *The end of the honeymoon*

After the frantic rush of orientation and welcome week activities subsides; students realize that college life consists of hard work, frustration and disappointment. Normal events such as long lines and class schedule changes may be unsettling to the new student. Initial grades may be lower than expected, which can come as a shock to the students who "coasted" through high school. Students may work much harder than ever before, only to receive lower grades. At this point, students often experience feelings of homesickness. Faculty and staff can help ease anxiety by helping students realize that this is normal and that they are not alone.

6. *The grass is always greener*

Midway through the first year; students often think they can solve their problems by transferring to another institution. At this point, students should be encouraged to give the college they are attending at least a full year's try. Students should be reminded that they might have had a worse experience at another school and situations that seem impossible in the first semester often disappear later in the year.

7. *You can't go home again*

A first visit home is often traumatic due to a sense that things have changed. Siblings are curious about college life and reunited high school friends tend to exaggerate college success. At this time students may realize that they have changed and may long to return to campus.

8. *Learning to cope*

After about six weeks, students have learned their way around campus and are expanding their circle of friends. Their self-confidence increases, they participate in more activities, and they enjoy campus life.

9. *Fear of failure*

Students often panic around the time of midterm or final examinations as they fully appreciate the amount of work involved. Students should be reminded that thorough course preparation is the best way to ensure a good grade. Warning signs that indicate trouble include panic attacks, procrastination, sleeping over twelve hours a day and avoidance of academic responsibilities.

10. *Putting it all together*

By the middle of the second semester, students notice that classes, residence life and social activities have come together into a well-integrated lifestyle. Students are more confident, better able to make decisions, and are aware of opportunities for both personal and intellectual growth.

Adapted from:

Zuker, F. (n.d.) Transitional trauma: Predictable signs in the transition from high school to college.

First Semester Adjustment Issues

Certain times during the academic year tend to be universally challenging to students. Those who understand the ups and downs of the first college year are better able to help students negotiate the challenges of transitioning to college. Below are some typical adjustment issues faced throughout the first year.

August/September

- Testing new-found freedom
- Frequent calls and visits home
- Homesickness and loneliness
- Anxiety about roommates, professors, classes

October

- Roommate problems begin to arise
- Students begin to question: "Do I fit-in here?"
- Love relationships from home remain strong, or fall apart (this is usually the time high school sweet hearts break-up)
- Consequences of decision-making are experienced

November

- Roommate challenges become more clear
- Many exams and papers due before Thanksgiving
- Excitement and/or anxiety regarding going home for Thanksgiving
- First series of campus-wide illness (cold, flu, strep, etc.)

December

- Anxiety over preparing for finals
- Excitement and/or anxiety regarding going home for the holidays
- Sadness about leaving new friendships and/or love relationships

In addition to these more predictable stressors, students may experience the following concerns throughout the academic year:

- Missing family birthday and holiday celebrations
- Missing participation in family traditions

Adapted and reprinted with permission. Mullendore, R.H., & Hatch, C. (2000). *Helping your first-year college student succeed: A guide for parents*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. All rights reserved.

First-Semester Timeline

This timeline was adapted from a timeline developed by the Dean of Students Office at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire to “outline the perspectives of first-year students, their parents, and faculty throughout the first semester of college.” While this is a generalization, many of these events are common amongst first-year students, their parents, and faculty, and being aware of these events is valuable when planning for a first-year seminar.

Week	Student Perspective	Parent Perspective	Faculty Perspective
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying “goodbye” to parents, siblings, friends, pets • Enthusiasm • Getting used to and along with roommates • Getting lost • Fear of the unknown • Homesickness starts (and continues) • Long distance relationships • Discovering house parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying “goodbye” to student • Dependent/independent behavior by student • Excitement for their student • Hopes that the experience will be a good one • Reality of student leaving hits • Fear of the unknown • Struggle maintaining the perspective that college is a milestone and not an end in itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking forward to teaching again • Looking forward to new students • Updating course syllabi • Receiving class lists • Placing material on reserve in the library • Excitement about quality of students this fall
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I join a join a student organization? • Following the crowd for weekend activities • Experimenting with alcohol • Adjusting to lectures • Managing time between classes • Getting (or not getting) care packages • Balancing work and play • Doing laundry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-evaluation of student/parent relationship • Show interest in what’s going on at school • New quiet in the house • Struggle with when, how, and how often to contact student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning to identify students personally • Pace and intensity of faculty/student interactions pick up

3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being sick alone for the first time ● Learning to study or developing a study system ● Balancing loyalty between new and old friends ● Finding a purpose for college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Concern about student being sick ● Disagreeing on how to best deal with a sick student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begins to spend more time answering questions about course content ● Reminded by behavior and responses that they are dealing with new students who are still used to high school.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First Exams ● Feeling overwhelmed ● High school romances end/college romances begin ● Initial roommate cordiality wears off ● Computer problems and learning to check school email every day ● First home visit ● Adjusting to new parent/student relationship ● Concerned by anonymity in lecture classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adjusting the parent/student relationship after first home visit ● Sends news of goings on from hometown and high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students are asking for some form of evaluation, instructors saying grades are not important this early in the semester ● Develops first impressions of students' individual and group capabilities ● First absences and frustration over the question "did I miss anything important?"
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Starting to see the need for time management ● Getting back first college grades ● First reality check of academic performance ● Reconciling differences between high school and college grading ● Seemingly unsympathetic professors ● Feelings of discouragement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Requests for more money ● Siblings wanting to visit student ● Adapting to student being gone ● Wonders if student is studying hard enough ● Contact from student starting to diminish ● Frustration at professor who gave their student a bad grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Outline mid-semester expectations ● Hands back first major test/paper ● Prepares for complaints and appeals ● Dealing with students who got off to a rough start

<p>6 through 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustrations with paper writing • Frustrations with group projects • New friendships evolving • Learning campus culture • Deliberate experiments with personal identity • First football game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing progress reports with other parents • No one wants to admit their child is struggling • Planning a visit for parents' weekend • Frustration with FERPA and the fact that the only way to have access to student's grades is through the student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forcing more integration into the learning process • Expectations are more clearly articulated
<p>9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-semester academic wakeup call • Re-evaluation of major • Advisement and planning courses for the next semester • Frustration about class selection for the next semester • Frustration that professors still do not know his or her name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns of new boyfriend/girlfriend and curious as to the status of the new relationship • Wondering if the student is making ethical and moral decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiasm over meeting new students has tempered by the challenges students present • Balancing what they think students should know and what they actually know.
<p>10 through 13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing the need to take time for themselves • Busy with schoolwork • Thanksgiving break and finding time to visit old friends • Beginning to look into off-campus housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student spending too much money • Student wants to take trips with friends over winter break • "Does my child need me for anything other than money?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that the end of the semester is near, but there is still lots to cover • Negotiations with students to alter syllabi
<p>14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crunch time begins • Pressure from parents regarding grades • Students realize they have changed since high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopes social life isn't out of control • Discussing living arrangements for the next year with the student • Discussing car usage with the student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First time to breathe easy since start of semester (Thanksgiving) • Time to get un-graded papers back • Make sure essential material is covered

<p>15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything is due • All-nighters • 24-hour quiet hours in residence hall begin • Library gets busy • First serious relationship ends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student calls home stressed • Parents wonder how to deal with student's relationship breakup • Parents try to express love and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for finals • Conferences with individual student • Reminder that students still haven't read the syllabus
<p>16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finals week • Packing to go home • Holiday stress • No money for gifts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great time for big care packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving finals • Grading finals • Finishing up semester
<p>Winter Break</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting to living at home • Final Grades posted • Changing relationships with family members • Seeing how high school friends have changed • Missing school friends • Working in hometown • Realization that "home" is now at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student being at home is not like it used to be. • Finally adjusted to not having student there, and then they come home for break • Learning of student's major change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for the upcoming semester • Catch up on reading, writing, and research • Write grants • Travel to conferences

Adapted from the Freshman Timeline compiled by Robert Shaw, Dean of Students Office, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Calendar of Common Student Issues by Month

Not all students will experience all these issues and concerns, and the issues won't always surface during the month indicated. However, experience suggests that these issues often do occur during the months identified, and being aware of this might be helpful to you as you work with students.

SEPTEMBER

- **Homesickness**—This is a common issue for new students.
- **Roommate conflicts**—Conflicts might be caused by personality differences, lack of understanding, and unwillingness to compromise; or even the new experience of learning to live with someone.
- **Initial adjustment to academic environment**—Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority may develop because of the discrepancy between high school status and grades and initial college performance. Strategies used in high school may not be effective at the university level.
- **Exploration of values**—Students are confronted with questions of conscience over conflict in areas of diversity, alcohol experimentation, morality, religion, and changing social expectations.
- **New social life adjustments**—Students are adjusting to things like having the newfound freedom of not having to check with parents about what time to be in, having the opportunity to experience new areas, making their own decisions on when to participate in social activities, and establishing themselves in a peer group.
- **Initial social rejections**—It creates feeling of inadequacy when students are not immediately accepted in a peer group, social sorority or fraternity, or other student group.
- **Campus familiarization**—Students have not yet become familiar with campus classrooms, buildings, and meeting places.
- **Long distance relationships**—Students are torn between being loyal to their significant others from home and going out with new people.
- **Financial adjustments**—Students are adjusting to a somewhat tighter budget now that they are in college. Students who are supporting themselves have to adjust to budgeting money. Learning to responsibly use credit cards is also of concern.
- **International student adjustments**—Students experience a sense of “culture shock.” This includes confusion, vulnerability, and a lack of any advocate in higher positions while trying to make a successful cultural and academic transition.
- **Family problems**—These may seem amplified because the student may be caught in the middle or relied on for the answer. Being far away makes students feel helpless in reaching a solution.
- **"Administrative red tape"**—Students soon realize that it may be a long and frustrating process when trying to find an answer to what seems to be a simple question, or when trying to work something through the administrative process.

OCTOBER

- **Academics**—Stress from midterms builds because of the great demand for studying and preparation. For some students, this may be their first exam of the semester. For many students, the midterm workload pressures are followed by feelings of failure and loss of self-esteem.
- **Roommate problems**—These continue, but they are smaller in scope than in previous months.

- **Values exploration**—Students continue to explore values, especially in the area of sexuality.
- **Dating/non-dating/friendship anxiety**—Non-dating students feel a sense of loss of self-worth because so much value is placed upon dating. For women who date, the pressure to perform sexually increases, and consequently increases feelings of rejection, loneliness, and guilt. In some instances this leads to unwanted pregnancies.
- **Homesickness**—This may still be experienced by a number of students.
- **Sadness**—Sadness from not belonging to a group develops because of inadequate skills for finding a club or organization.
- **Financial issues**—This sets in from lack of budgeting experience.
- **Homecoming “blues”**—Students feel upset because of no date for social affairs, and lack of ability or opportunity to participate in activities.
- **Time conflicts**—Academic and social commitments might vie for students’ time.
- **Class registration**—Students need to start thinking about what classes they need to take in the spring semester as well as make an appointment with their advisors. This can cause a lot of anxiety.
- **New study skills**—More time and greater workloads need to be incorporated into students’ schedules for studying.
- **Disillusionment with college**—Student begins to realize that life at college is not as perfect as they were led to believe by parents, teachers, and counselors. Old problems seem to continue, and new ones are added.

NOVEMBER

- **Suicide**—Increasing thoughts and deliberations about suicide occur from an inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.
- **Academic pressure**—Pressure begins to mount because of procrastination, complexity of academic work, and lack of ability. Pre-finals stress starts to emerge as preparation begins.
- **Time conflicts**—Time management conflicts continue.
- **Depression and anxiety**—Students feel that they “should” have adjusted to the college environment by now.
- **Financial anxiety**—Students’ funds from parents and summer earnings begin to run out and loans and other bills are due.
- **Increased alcohol consumption**—Since students see this as an easy, acceptable way to relieve stress, drinking becomes more prevalent.
- **Roommate problems**—This is mostly due to the pressure of school. Tempers flare, and people are less tolerant of others.
- **Health issues**—Deteriorating health starts to affect performance. Reasons include the changing weather and either lack of food quality as well as stress from classes.
- **Dorm issues**—Living unit dissension causes uncomfortable feelings with residents, resulting from apathy, academic pressures, and need for vacation from school.

DECEMBER

- **Suicide**—Increasing thoughts about suicide occur from students’ inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.

- **Final exam pressures**—Anxiety, fear, and guilt increase as exams approach and papers are due. Increased use of alcohol and drugs is related.
- **Co-curricular time strains**—Seasonal parties, concerts, social service projects, and religious activities drain student energies.
- **Financial issues**—Worries begin with the thought of holiday gifts and travel costs.
- **“Pre-holiday blues”**—This is a special concern for those who have concerns for family, and those who have no home because of family conflicts.
- **Friendship tensions**—These become high with the onset of final exams.

JANUARY

- **Academics**—Anxiety about second semester performance begins because students may not have performed as well as expected the previous semester. They have the added pressure of doing well to be able to stay in school, to maintain scholarships/financial aid, or to keep grades competitive with their peers.
- **Loss of a loved one**—Some students lose a loved one, friend, or significant other over the break, and they find it hard to share the happiness and joy others experienced.
- **Transfer students**—Moving to a new environment causes feelings of intrusion because students move onto a floor where most of the friendships have already been established, priorities set, and expectations understood. Unfamiliarity with campus also creates some anxiety.
- **Financial issues**—Money problems begin because students were unable to find jobs during the holiday break.
- **Post-holiday depression**—Students are away from the security and familiar environment of home.
- **Weight gain**—Some students experience unwanted weight gain over the break with the holiday foods and home cooking.
- **Reestablishment**—Reestablishing social and academic life is difficult at first with not having to worry about classes for an extended period.

FEBRUARY

- **Academics**—Hourly exams and other academic pressures approach.
- **Weather**—Depending upon the weather, some people will experience cabin fever if the weather forces them to stay inside for a lengthy period of time. With the lack of organized activities to compensate for this, anti-social behavior sometimes occurs, such as excessive property damage.
- **Financial issues**—Anxiety for finding a summer job begins. This is especially true for students who were unable to find work during the holiday break.
- **Relationship issues**—Relationship anxieties increase as either couples begin to strengthen their ties (engagement) or experience weakening relationships.
- **Housing issues**—Fall housing planning begins with trying to tentatively decide about living arrangements for the next year.

MARCH

- **Suicide**—Increasing thoughts about suicide may occur from an inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.

- **Academic pressures**—These increase as mid-term exams approach.
- **Drugs and alcohol**—With the pressures of the end of the semester approaching, many students start to increase their use of alcohol and drugs. This can cause many problems, both biologically and behaviorally.
- **Housing issues**—Living arrangement anxieties occur with the forcing of decisions: Should I move out? Live in the same building? Stay with the same roommate? Will a friend be left out of the plan?
- **Financial issues**—Trying to find money to use for spring break is a problem, especially when your peers are going to a place other than home and you are not able to join them.

APRIL

- **Academic pressures**—These increase with the end of the semester. Also papers and exams are coming up.
- **Financial problems**—Financial strain from spring break effects social life. Summer job pressures continue.
- **Social anxiety**—Social life pressures increase during this time period: formal dances, parties, concerts.
- **Relationship issues**—Many students experience rejection and envy the friends who have successfully found a significant other.
- **Health problems**—Frustration from being ill sets into students. Students experience an increase in colds and lethargic feelings, which limit social commitments.

MAY

- **Suicide**—Increasing thoughts about suicide may occur from an inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.
- **Academic issues**—Finals pressures are at a critical level with papers, take-home exams, and studying. Some of the major effects of the pressure include increased use of coffee, caffeine pills, amphetamines, and alcohol. Financial issues—Summer job pressures increase for those who have not yet found employment.
- **Relationship issues**—Couples who will be separated for the summer are anxious and the fear that their significant other will find someone else while they're apart.
- **Depression**—Having to leave the friends and people who have become close during the school year may get some students down.
- **Independence issues**—Students feel anxious at having to go home after having been independent the past year, especially if they are have conflicts with their parents.

Reprinted with permission from Mansfield University of Pennsylvania Peer Leader Handbook