



a newsletter for parents & families



GEORGIA'S PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

University Housing

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Five Strategies for Successfully Handling the First Month

The first month of school often sets the tone for the year ahead. Knowing some helpful strategies can help your student succeed in getting acclimated to campus.

For instance...

1. If your student is **struggling with class material**, encourage him to talk with his professor during office hours, make a meeting with a teaching assistant, attend a study skills workshop and visit the learning center for tutoring assistance.
2. If your student is **feeling lonely or homesick**, encourage her to talk with a residence hall staff member, someone in campus ministry, a peer educator or a caring counselor in the counseling center.



3. If your student is **unsure how to get involved**, encourage him to check out organizational meetings, talk with returning students, seek the counsel of trusted professionals on campus, participate in a service project and just *try* something new.
4. If your student is **hoping to make new friends**, encourage him to reach out through simple efforts like inviting others to dinner, joining an intramurals team, saying hello to people in class and on campus, and being his genuine self instead of who he thinks he "should" be.
5. If your student is **wanting to become the best version of herself**, encourage her to pursue interests, stretch beyond her comfort zone, reach out to others, learn new things, listen well, meet campus faculty and staff, seek out a mentor, engage in giving and receive feedback willingly.

Quick Tips

- › Take a tour of the library to get familiar with resources
- › Walk around campus to get the lay of the land
- › Attend an organization fair to see what's available
- › Go out for coffee with a student leader to pick their brain
- › Find a campus job to engage with others and make some money, too!



These efforts and more can help your student dig right into campus life in positive, productive ways!



A Sense of Belonging

Belonging — or finding the place and people where you fit — is a potent force in many students' lives. It's what can help them feel comfortable on campus, as they learn to belong to a community larger than themselves.

There are multiple places where students can start to build on their sense of belonging once they get to school. These may include...

- An intramurals team
- Their residence hall floor
- With fellow commuters in the commuter lounge
- Study groups
- Various student clubs and organizations
- Community service outings
- Music and performing arts groups
- The interfaith center or campus ministry

- On- or off-campus jobs
- With a faculty or staff member
- Their orientation group
- At campus programs and events

Promoting a sense of belonging often starts by talking with students so they can see the possibilities — and picture themselves in their midst! So, consider bringing up the concept now as you discuss campus involvement and engagement with your student. As a result, he'll be ready to explore options and find a place to belong.

Negative Belonging

Students seeking a sense of belonging sometimes turn to negative groups — those who go out a lot, groups involved in hazing, students who bully others, etc. Consider making this part of your discussion so your student can be more aware and ready to embrace *positive* belonging opportunities!



Seasonal Student Issues

It's likely hitting your student now... he or she is heading to college in a few weeks. With that revelation will likely come some excitement — and some anxiety — regarding topics such as...

- Will people like me?
- Will I find friends as good as the ones I have now?
- How can I reinvent myself?
- Will I be able to handle college academics?
- How will I find my way around campus?
- Who will I turn to if I'm struggling?
- Will I still be as connected to my family/friends?
- What if I don't get along with my roommate?
- Will people make fun of how I talk/dress/act?
- How will I get involved?
- Will I find a place to belong here?





7 Ways to be a Good Friend

One of the biggest things on students' minds when they head off to college is making friends. That's why providing them with some tried-and-true friend-making tactics can help, such as...

- 1. Listen.** Be an engaged, active listener who looks at the person speaking instead of their phone or the floor. When people feel listened to, chances are they'll be *very* interested in pursuing a friendship.
- 2. Ask Appropriate Questions.** To find out more about new people, encourage your student to ask questions that are friendly without being too intrusive. It can all begin with where others are from, what they're looking forward to studying, books they've read, etc.



- 3. Share Who You Are.** In turn, students can share bits about themselves so that others can see the things they have in common as well as the differences they can each learn from. Just don't over share, especially when first meeting someone!

- 4. Look Out for People.** It feels good when others care about your well-being.
- 5. Be Encouraging.** Help others see the good in themselves. Encourage them to try new things and explore possibilities. We can all use a dose of genuine cheerleading!
- 6. Show an Interest.** There are so many things we can learn from other people — and vice versa. That's what true friendships can give us and it often starts with showing an interest.
- 7. Remember What's Important to Them.** And then ask them about it. This can lead to the most positive of reactions and connections.

Addressing Student Fears

Fears that students may express going into the school year ahead include...

- Will people accept me?
- What if I can't find anyone to connect with?
- I'm afraid I'll look stupid.
- What if my voice shakes when I talk or I don't make any sense?
- What if I'm so different from the others that we have nothing in common?
- Will I self-disclose too much, making others uncomfortable?
- Will I seem smart enough to be in college if I open my mouth?

Some students let their fears get the better of them. You can help by...

- Listening without judgment.
- Not just saying, "You can do it!" but going the next step to help them figure out *how* they can do it.
- Reminding them that college is full of all sorts of people to connect with, not necessarily the cliques they may have experienced other places.
- Encouraging them to talk with a support person on campus about their fears, whether it's a residence hall director, an advisor, a coach or a counselor — there are lots of folks ready and willing to listen and problem-solve with your student!
- Letting your student know that you support her, no matter what, and reminding her of times when she has attacked her fears successfully. That'll help build her confidence mightily.





Encouraging Students to Get Involved

The college years are filled with opportunities for students to get involved. Whether they choose to pursue new hobbies or hone skills they've been developing for quite some time, the campus community will open your student's eyes to a wealth of new experiences in which they can choose to take part.

Talk with your student about how he wants to spend his out-of-class time. Does he want to try out a sport that he has always wanted to play? If so, intramurals might be the ticket. Is she looking for a way to make a difference in the local community? Volunteering through a campus organization could work. Or maybe he wants to develop leadership skills? Joining a programming or advocacy club could be the way to do so. There are so many options!

How You Can Help

You can help your student by encouraging her to get out there and explore. Talking with the residence life staff or an orientation leader is a good place to start. You can also suggest that your student check out the following resources on campus to see all that is available...

Involvement = Academic and Personal Success

Research shows that students who engage in campus happenings, whether it's joining an organization or attending campus events, often feel more a part of their school. They also learn to juggle more, leading to increased academic success.

So, instead of warning your student away from out-of-class involvements, consider encouraging him to balance his academics with some campus happenings. His social life, his sense of belonging — and his grades — will likely thank you!

- The student activities office for a list of clubs and organizations
- The residence life office for information about getting involved in the residence halls
- The recreation center for a list of intramural teams, club sports and fitness classes
- The community service or campus ministry office for a list of local volunteer opportunities and immersion trips
- The career center for a list of internships and practicum options
- The music and performing arts department for theater, orchestra, band, art and other opportunities
- Academic departments for academic-related opportunities such as doing research, studying abroad or participating in activities led by faculty members

Students should definitely be focused on their academic work, but getting involved in co-curricular experiences is so important, too. After all, students spend many of their hours out of the classroom. When they choose to use their time wisely, they can really round out their educational experience by developing skills that will aid them with communication, leadership and more. These are the “soft skills” that employers are seeking!

