



a newsletter for parents & families



GEORGIA'S PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

University Housing

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## Understanding the W-Curve Emotions First-Year Students May Experience

The first year of college can be quite a ride for many students. They often experience what's called the W-Curve emotional pattern and it can hit students in different ways.

To support your student, here are a few things to know about the W-Curve:

- 1. The Honeymoon.** This excitement stage often starts before students even get to college, as they're meeting new people, connecting on social media and ready to be independent. Once they get to campus, orientation activities, programs and more often keep them busy and engaged for the first few weeks.
- 2. Culture Shock.** Then, reality sets in, as some students feel homesick, the excitement of living with a roommate wears off and they find the academic demands to be harder than expected.
- 3. Initial Adjustment.** Students then learn to manage their experiences and settle in to the demands of college life. This may include making friends beyond their initial connections, developing a routine, and gaining more confidence in their academic and social abilities.

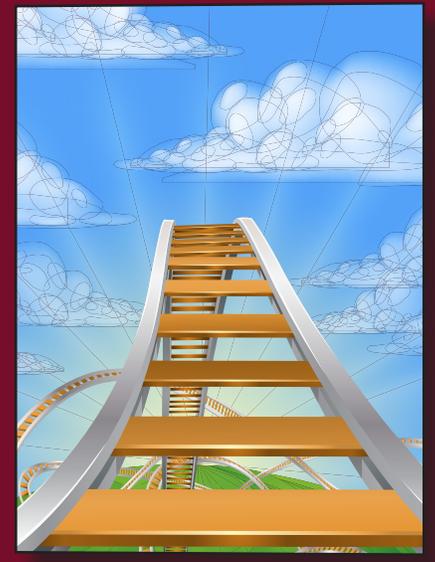
- 4. Mental Isolation.** Once students go home for an extended period, like after a holiday break, they may start comparing home and college. They may not feel like they completely belong at home anymore, which can lead to homesickness about the comfort home used to provide and adjusting to things that have changed. Plus, students may have doubts about college and their future choices, as their values and beliefs are challenged, roommate issues arise, relationships get messy and it gets more difficult to make friends.

- 5. Acceptance and Integration.** This is when students start finding their place and feeling more comfortable on campus, often referring to it as "home" now. Their connections with peers, faculty and staff grow stronger, and they're more aware of how to succeed academically. Roommate issues ease up and students start relying on hometown connections less.

**Sources:** Mayo Clinic Health System, 9/6/17; "Culture Shock and The First-Year Experience" by William J. Zeller and Robert Mosier in the *Journal of College and University Student Housing*

"Parents may have selected or directed areas of study for their child, which results in students not knowing themselves or having a lack of confidence. Parents also may feel uncomfortable and not let go, which may interfere with students looking to be more independent."

— *Licensed Professional Counselor Jennifer Wickham at the Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire, Wisconsin*





## Providing Midterm Support

The year's first round of midterm exams is almost here. Students are likely preparing to show how much they learned, or didn't learn, when midterms kick into high gear.

As a parent or family member, you can help alleviate some of the panic associated with this high-stress time of year. For instance, you can...

**Be Understanding When They're Not in Touch.** Preparing for midterms often throws students off schedule, causing them to be unable to get to everything on their To Do lists. One of those things may be calling or seeing you as frequently. Try to understand and not take it personally.

**Keep Burdens Away.** This may not be the best time to tell your student that money is tight or that



the house is up for sale, especially if there's nothing she can do about it.

**Encourage Healthy Habits.** Good nutrition and getting enough sleep will help your student stay focused and on track. Too much caffeine during late-night study sessions can throw his system out of whack.

**Send Positive Stuff.** An encouraging text, a piece of real mail, a fun magazine to read when midterms are over... these "little" things can mean a lot!

**Don't Add Academic Pressure.** Making all or nothing statements like "You better pass this test" or "If you fail, we'll pull you out of school" adds a whole other layer of stress to an already stressful time. Try to steer clear of ultimatums and unnecessary pressures so your student has a shot at doing her best.

And let students know that you are there, ready to talk and process through things, when they need you. Having the support of people who believe in them can make a huge difference in getting through midterms successfully.

## Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month...

- First year students begin to realize college life is not as perfect as they were expecting it to be
- Diversity issues become very apparent as students begin interacting with others who are very different from them
- Conflicts between friends – both new and old – can occur as students settle into the rhythm of the new academic year
- Feeling behind in class work and wanting more contact with instructors
- Anticipating midterms and questioning their abilities
- People start to show their "true selves" – masks start to come off as students begin to feel more comfortable in their surroundings
- Job panic of mid-year graduates as the realization settles in that they will be graduating soon





# Strategies to Help Students Not Feel So Overwhelmed

Feeling behind in your academics, like you'll never catch up, can be an overwhelming feeling. Yet, students who try some simple, effective academic success strategies are much more likely to overcome that overwhelmed feeling.

Here are some strategies to share with your student...

## Come Up with a Study Plan.

Many students are used to studying and doing their work at the last minute. This won't fly at college, so it's

important to come up with a study strategy that maps out the week ahead and what needs to get done. Figure intentional chunks of time to study and where to go to make this happen.

## Use Instructors' Office Hours.

Go meet face-to-face with an instructor, explain how you're struggling and ask for assistance. This helps professors see that you care and want to do well. Plus, you become more than a face in the crowd this way!

**Visit Support Services.** Whether it's visiting the disability services office to address a learning concern, the writing center to get help with a paper or the counseling center to talk about test anxiety, support is there, ready to help.

**Don't Just Rely on Weekends.** It's easy to put most your academic work off until the weekend. Yet, everyone needs down time to stay healthy. So, parcel out the work throughout the week and the weekend, giving yourself time to enjoy some non-academic pursuits, too!

## When Overwhelmed...

- Take several deep breaths
- Dump your To Do list on paper so it doesn't keep swirling in your head
- Talk it out instead of bottling it up
- Make exercise a priority to release pent-up stress
- Do one small thing at a time rather than tackling something big all at once



## FAFSA Filing Available October 1st

It's that time of year! To gain access to federal loans, grants and work-study programs, current and prospective undergraduate and graduate students must fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) each year. Some states use the information to determine state-based aid, too. And the FAFSA for next year can be filed starting October 1 and all the way through June 30.

Filing early ensures better access to limited funds and a quicker response regarding school aid packages, however. Certain aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, said Rick Castellano, a spokesperson for Sallie Mae, as reported by the *Associated Press*, so filing early makes good sense.

Once your FAFSA is processed and you receive your student aid report (SAR), check it over to make sure all the information is accurate. Correct any errors right away.

To complete the FAFSA online, go to [studentaid.gov/afsa](http://studentaid.gov/afsa) or use the myStudentAid app.

Source: *Associated Press*, 9/15/19



Check with Financial Aid to see if you need to also complete a CSS Profile and other institution-specific paperwork.



## Discussing Finances for the Months Ahead

If your family is like many others right now, you are spending smartly and saving as much as you can. The strain of sending a student to college is tough, especially in an uncertain economy. And it's likely that your student is feeling the financial pressure, too.

That's why it's smart to start talking about finances for next term, now. Consider...

**Budget Assessment.** How much money is your student spending in a month? Encourage him to keep track during the month of November so you can all get an accurate assessment of what he needs for next term. Keep in mind that students tend to participate in more social activities



in the spring. Not only have they met more people by then, but clubs and organizations tend to be more active then, too.

**Winter Break Plans.** Will your student be working over winter break? If so, now is the time for her to begin putting these plans in motion to ensure she can get the job that she

needs. Waiting until break begins will likely be too late and will waste valuable time that she could already be working.

### **Upcoming Expenses.**

Ask your student to talk with his peers to find out what expenses to anticipate for the next term. From academic responsibilities to social commitments, he can get a sense for what he may need from students who've been through the cycle already.

Once students have a sense of what they'll need next term, your family can determine what is doable and what may not be. This can inform choices about job searching, spending, saving and seeking help from campus resources.

## Planning is the Key to Safe Nights Out

To have safe nights out, it's important to make a plan ahead of time, according to the University of Colorado-Boulder's Director of Health Promotion and the Collegiate Recovery Center, Liesha Conners Bauer. "Know where you're going, know who you're going with and know what to do if you get separated from your group of friends and how you're going to get home," she told the *Boulder Daily Camera*

For students, this can include doing the following things ahead of time...

- Determining the form of transportation they'll be using
- Deciding who they will be spending time with
- Knowing what constitutes one serving of alcohol (1.5 ounces of liquor, 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer)
- Setting a limit
- Avoiding mixing prescription drugs with alcohol
- Drinking water with drinks
- Eating before going out

Planning means students keeping important things in their control so they're less likely to compromise their safety or that of others.

Source: *Boulder Daily Camera*, 8/28/19

