



a newsletter for parents & families



GEORGIA'S PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

University Housing

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Becoming a Critical Thinker

We all think about things. And this act can increase or decrease our quality of life, depending on how we go about it.

“Critical thinking is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it,” according to The Foundation for Critical Thinking. It’s a lifelong skill that must be practiced and cultivated, and one that can improve students’ sense of well-being as they continue learning to navigate the world successfully.

According to the Foundation, “a well-cultivated critical thinker:

- Raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- Gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- Comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- Thinks open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as needs

An In-Demand Skill

Critical thinking is a skill that’s at a premium. Sixty percent of employers identify critical thinking as a skill in which college graduates across the country are deficient, according to research by PayScale and Future Workplace.

be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences

- Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems”

Students will engage in activities — from academics to free expression events on campus — where critical thinking skills can serve them well. They’ll learn from new experiences, form sound beliefs and make solid judgments. To help students develop these important skills, it’s important that they pay attention to clarifying their thinking, cultivating curiosity, developing solid reasoning and inquiry abilities, asking good questions and more.

Sources: The Foundation for Critical Thinking, criticalthinking.org; Sacred Heart University News, 12/21/17

To Clarify Others’ Thinking

Students can ask the following questions to determine what it is that others are saying...

- “I’m not sure I understand what you’re trying to say. Can you please restate it in other words?”
- “Could you please give me an example?”
- “This is what I’m hearing you say... Do I understand you correctly?”





13 Ways to Handle Loneliness

Students often encounter varying levels of loneliness when they first come to campus. Here are 13 ways they can address those lonely feelings head on and work toward a more comfortable sense of campus belonging...

1. Reach out to other people who seem lonely and like they're trying to find their place, too — you'll feel better together
2. Attend an organizational meeting for possible new members — you'll all be in the same boat!
3. Go to a residence hall or campus program to be with others who have similar interests
4. Step outside of yourself to participate in a service project and contribute to others
5. Talk with a trusted staff or faculty member to gain some insight and be listened to
6. Offer to assist with a campus or community project — people love willing helpers!
7. Connect with an old friend when needing a boost
8. Make a list of your strengths and what you have to offer
9. Say hello when walking through campus
10. Get those endorphins flowing with some exercise
11. Engage in a good book with a positive message
12. Try not to look at your loneliness as a permanent condition — your efforts will pay off
13. Sleep on it and dig into a new day



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...

- A desire to feel connected to campus
- Roommate adjustments
- Exploration and acknowledgement of personal values
- Long distance relationship strain
- Feelings of loneliness and homesickness may increase
- Experimentation with alcohol and other drugs
- Getting acclimated to a new type of academics
- Figuring out how to get organized and manage their time
- Searching for a sense of belonging





Fostering Students' Self-Responsibility

Self-responsibility is one of the most important things that students can learn during their time at school. Here are some ways to foster that sense...

- 1. Help Students Make Their Own Decisions.** When you say, “Well, what do you think you should do?” during a conversation, you’re offering your support but, instead of jumping in with advice, you’re helping students figure out their own answers.
- 2. Trust Students.** And let them know that you do. They’ll likely feel more confident, supported and able to stand up for what they believe as a result.
- 3. Communicate Without Over Communicating.** Check in with each other a few times each week. However, don’t feel like you need to touch base every day — there needs to be some space in between so your student can gain a sense of independence.
- 4. Don’t Solve Everything for Your Student.** The tendency to want to jump in and “take care of things” is natural. Yet, students need to start learning to do these things for themselves. So, try not to fix things. Instead, ask questions like “What steps have you taken so far?” to help your student take the lead and take self-responsibility.
- 5. Stay Involved.** Just because students go off to college doesn’t mean they stop needing your input. Your involvement is essential to their success. Be interested, ask questions without prying too much and listen to what they have to say.



- 6. Let Go a Bit.** You can’t know where students are every hour of the day — nor should you have to keep track of them. Instead

of quizzing them about where they’ve been, ask more general questions like “Have you gone anyplace interesting lately?” or “How have you been spending your free time?” so they can share without feeling put on the spot.

- 7. Keep Them in the Loop.** Even though students are building a new life at college, it doesn’t mean that they should be cut off from what’s happening back home. Share a balance of news to keep the connection strong — and to make sure students focus on people besides themselves, too!

In this time of transition, keep the lines of communication open, let mistakes be made and encourage students to make decisions for themselves. It’s all part of the process, especially during this important first month!

Gaining Independence

Students need to express their autonomy and spread their wings when they get to school. This doesn’t mean that they’ve stopped needing you — of course not! What it may mean, though, is that students need a chance to:

- › Make their own mistakes
- › Decide how to confront challenges
- › Communicate with others when there’s a problem
- › Choose how to spend their time
- › Take responsibility for their actions
- › Struggle a bit
- › Learn from experience

Be there to talk things through when students need that and to offer support. The actual “doing,” though, is primarily up to them. This independence is one of the main ways that they will learn, grow and develop into strong adults.



Overcoming a Resistance to Change

Change can be hard. We get in our patterns, our grooves, and then, bam! Something changes.

We are often creatures of habit, craving the familiar and the comfortable. If something is working, why change it, right? Well, sticking to something simply because it's known can make us less adaptable beings. This can impact our growth as people. And, in today's modern workplace, resisting change can cause us to be labeled as "difficult" or "dinosaurs." The only constant is change and students need to be able to roll with the punches to be successful in many aspects of their lives.

Why Students May Resist Change

To be amenable to change, it's important to first recognize students' reasons for resisting change. According to blogger Torben Rick, they include...

- Misunderstandings about why change is needed
- Fearing the unknown
- Resisting changes to their routines/comfort zones
- Being exhausted and saturated by continuous change
- Fearing they'll lack competence to make the transition well
- Being connected to the old way of doing things
- Having a low degree of trust that the change can be made competently
- Believing the change is a temporary fad
- Not being consulted regarding the change
- Feeling that communication and transparency are lacking
- Perceiving/guessing what the change will hold
- Not viewing the benefits and rewards for making the change as worth the trouble involved

Changes That College Students May Face

The college years constitute a great deal of change. For instance, students may face issues such as...

- Changing their major
- Changing how they communicate with instructors
- Changing how they interact with friends and family
- Changing their career focus
- Changing their interests
- Changing their spiritual/political/philanthropic views
- Changing their reliance on others to speak for them
- Changing their sense of responsibility and help-seeking
- Changing their roommate
- Changing their manner of handling money
- Changing their study style

Adaptable People...

- See opportunity where others see failure
- Experiment
- Are resourceful
- Think ahead
- Don't whine
- Engage in positive self-talk
- Don't blame others
- Are curious
- Adapt
- Stay current
- Put things in context
- Open their minds
- Absorb, understand and move on

Source: *Forbes*, 9/3/15

The Impact of Social Change

Our resistance to change is often focused on social change, or the change in human relationships that generally comes along with technical change, according to the *Harvard Business Review*. For instance, students may balk at a proposed change to the structure of a student group they belong to because it could change who they get to work with. And, if they really like working with those people, this type of change can be upsetting!

Change is a constant that students will face during their time on campus — and beyond. Preparing them to be more adaptable, accepting individuals will help them face any number of scenarios in open, effective ways.

Sources: *Harvard Business Review*; <https://www.torbenrick.eu/t/r/hwj, 5/23/11>