

Like Clockwork: The Rhythm of College Life

Certain times in the academic year tend to be universally challenging for students. Parents who understand the ups and downs of the first college year are better able to help their students negotiate the challenges of transition to college life. Below are some typical examples of what they will face throughout the first year.

August/September

- Excitement
- Testing newfound freedom
- Frequent calls and visits home
- Homesickness and loneliness
- Anxiety about roommates, professors, classes
- First exams

October

- Roommate problems begin to arise
- Students question: “Do I fit in here?”
- First test grades returned
- Midterm exams
- Love relationships from home remain strong
- Consequences of decision-making experienced

November

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

December

- Anxiety over preparation for finals
- Excitement and/or anxiety regarding going home for holidays
- Sadness about leaving new friendship and/or love relationships
- Roommate challenges continue

January

- “Fresh Start” mentality sets in with new term
- Satisfaction and/or disappointment with fall term grades
- Homesickness
- Loneliness for love relationship back home
- Relief at being away from home and back at school

February

- Feelings of claustrophobia and depression set in with winter
- Potential increase in alcohol and other substance abuse
- Challenges with love relationship back home
- Valentine’s Day brings out loneliness, isolation

March

- Anxiety regarding finding roommate(s) for next year
- Excitement and/or disappointment regarding spring break plans
- Midterm exam stress
- Concern over summer employment
- Concern over winter weight gain

April

- Excitement with arrival of spring
- Concern over declaring major
- End-of-semester pressure
- Final exam anxiety

May

- Apprehension about returning home for summer
- Sadness over leaving new friends and/or love relationships at school
- Realization of how college influences life decisions

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
- Wanting involvement with family maintained, but expecting their desire for complete freedom to be respected (Blimling, 1999)

Reprinted with permission. Mullendore, R.H., and Hatch, C. *Helping Your First-Year College Student Succeed: A Guide for Parents*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 2000.