Handout: Information for First-Year Students

**The First Year in Five Stages.** The transition from high school to college is an important milestone. Many students who live on-campus or commute experience a wide range of emotions during their first year at college. *These emotions are normal and often occur in five stages.* The following timeline includes examples of things students commonly face during their first year of college.

1. **The Honeymoon Period.** You may experience anxiety, anticipation, and an initial sense of freedom when you begin school. Homesickness and the desire for frequent contact with family are common. You may be getting to know roommates, making new friends on campus, and finding your way around. This period tends to be a time when you might incur many expenses for items such as textbooks, school supplies, and room decorations/furnishings.

**2. Culture Shock.** You begin to grasp the realities of adjusting to college. You begin to get feedback on your progress in class. You might experience shock at the workload, grades on first exams, or time management problems. You may feel out of place and anxious. For example, you might be dealing with the following items for the first time:

* Sharing a room with strangers.
* Budgeting time and money.
* Finding support and being a self-advocate.
* Managing a commute from home to school.
* Navigating a new community.
* Managing challenging coursework and a job.

This phase will pass. This feeling is very typical. There are free resources on campus to help-- you just need to ask.

**3. Initial Adjustment.** As the year goes on, you will begin to develop a routine. You will become familiar with campus life and new academic and social environments. If you are living on a campus, it is also completely normal for conflict to develop between roommates. You may be sharing a room with someone who is quite different from you. Most students are able to work things out when they discuss issues directly with one another or with a Resident Advisor.

If you are a commuter, you may have feel like you don’t fit in with the campus community or know the campus and its resources as well as your peers. Commuters also must balance their responsibilities at home and at school. It is important that you work to build relationships with your instructors and classmates. You can depend on outside support systems and also access the school’s academic and social services.

You may reassess your time-management strategies, begin to explore majors or careers, and make plans with academic advisors. You might begin to plan to move off campus for next fall.

**4. Homesickness or Loss of Confidence.** With final exams finished, many students return home for winter break, and there may be concerns about how you will adjust to routines at home. For many, winter break is an opportunity to catch up on sleep and reconnect with old friends. You will also begin to receive your first-semester grades and may experience joy, disappointment, or relief.

Homesickness often occurs right after a vacation. You may become a bit insecure and have some misgivings about your new environment. You might wonder if you belong at college or if college is really all it is supposed to be. Homesickness is normal. As with any major transition period, students will have their ups and downs. Many students feel homesick at one time or another during their first year.

**5. Acceptance and Integration.** You finally feel like you are a part of the college community. You begin to think of it as home. You feel more confident with your time-management skills and experience less stress with exams. You will also be enrolling in classes for the fall and considering options for the summer. You might have mixed feelings about leaving for the summer and decide to stay to take classes and/or pursue summer work opportunities.