

Navigating Your Student's First Semester

The first year of college is a period of transition as freshmen to live on their own, meet new social, academic, and personal challenges, and encounter new ideas and new people. While there have been other transitions in your child's life, this one is likely to be unique in that for the first time, you must witness these changes from a distance. Having some ideas of the challenges your student will face can help you respond effectively. While no two students will experience first year in quite the same way, the chart below outlines some of the predictable high and low moments for a typical first semester at Shorter University.

Time	Typical Experiences	Possible Responses	What Parents Can Do
Welcome Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student moves into dormitories, says good-bye to families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement • Fear • Loneliness • Homesickness • Self-doubt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/Listen • Encourage independence, but reassure your student that you are still a part of his/her life • Listen to students concerns. Don't try to talk him/her out of loneliness, homesickness, or fear. Let them know you have confidence in them. Remind them of past achievements. • Encourage your student to view this time of life as an opportunity for discovery and growth • Inquire about specific events: "How have you set up your room?" "Have you met any new people yet?"
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend classes, receive syllabi, meet professors and classmates • Begin campus job • Class add/drop period • Begin to establish relationship with roommate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed by academic expectations • Difficulty learning to live with someone else's habits • Homesickness • Worry about growing apart from family and old friends, boyfriend or girlfriend • Enjoying new independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Use e-mail, snail mail to stay in touch • Show genuine interest in student's experiences • Encourage your student to get to know a variety of people • Encourage communication with roommates • Avoid feeding fears • Encourage students to stay on campus the first few weekends
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settling into class/work routine • Dormitory socials • Exploring opportunities for campus involvement • Developing time management habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about identity-where do I fit in here? • Homesickness • Becoming more familiar with campus • Enjoying classes, excited by new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Inquire about course content, show interest in what they are learning • Send clippings, information about home, high school, friends • Encourage involvement
Week 3&4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First papers and tests • Developing study habits, forming study groups • Trying to keep up social activities, work, and meet academic demands. May be neglecting sleep and health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Fatigue • Less homesickness • Feeling a part of campus life and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Inquire about projects • Send small care package-healthy snacks, herb tea, a surprise • Suggest they seek a tutor from Office of Student Engagement and Success in classes they are struggling with

Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First papers and tests returned=reality check on academic performance • Sickness following lack of sleep, poor health habits and stress • Roommate tension may grow as stress increases and initial courtesy wears off 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disappointment with academic performance • Frustration-I always got A's in high school • Angry at professors • Self-doubt • Missing home and past life, especially if sick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Avoid feeding negative feelings of inadequacy or anger • Communicate high expectations as well as realistic perspective on college grades. Remind student that college is more demanding than high school • Encourage student to seek help from professors • If student is sick, encourage him or her to get help Health Services
Week 6-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homecoming • Second round of tests and papers • Midterm grades posted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement about going home for fall break • Stress • Difficulty managing social and academic demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Discuss midterm grades with students. Encourage the student to seek help from professors. Remind them, it is not too late to make changes • Encourage student to talk to his or her advisor about midterm grades • Seek help at the Office of Student Engagement and Success for tutoring
Week 10-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisement and pre-registration • Thinking about declaring/changing major • May be short of money • Final papers, projects assigned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety if still unsure of major • Frustrated if unable to get into desired courses • Stressed with demands of work, school, and social life. If student hasn't developed good time management by now, it shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Discuss interest and career goals. Don't push student to declare major if he or she is not ready. Encourage student to visit the Career Development Center to explore majors and careers • Inquire about courses for next semester. Show interest • Remind student that Thanksgiving break is coming up. Include him and her in holiday planning. • Ask son or daughter if he or she has made an appointment with his or her advisor
Week 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanksgiving break • Connect with old friends • Break up with boyfriend or girlfriend • Sleep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relief • Excitement at seeing old friends • May be reluctant to go back to school after the holiday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Expect student to spend some time with family but leave enough time for him/her to visit with high school friends • Do laundry, cook favorite dishes, make him or her feel special
Week 14-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final papers, projects due • All-nighters • Relationships with friends, boyfriends/girlfriends and roommates are strained by stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression about returning to school after Thanksgiving break • Overwhelmed by all that needs to be done in the next two weeks • Excited about social activities • Fatigue and stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Help student maintain perspective and realistic expectations • Discuss family Christmas plans. Another good time for care package- gift certificate to local restaurant or store
Week 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Exams • Packing to go home • Christmas shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety about first college finals • Fatigue and stress • Excited to be going home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray/listen • Let student know you're proud of him or her for having a successful first semester • Include him or her in discussion of holiday family plans

