

Monthly Adjustment Issues for First-Year College Students

September

- Learning how to live with a roommate (or multiple roommates)
- Can I manage online classes
- Is it safe to attend in-person classes
- Navigating the college campus (and probably getting lost once or twice)
- Getting a taste of freedom: having too much time with not enough structure on how to spend it, and no one to tell them to do their homework, to wake up, or be home by curfew
- Attending parties, complete with drinking and hooking up
- Wondering if they can handle the academic challenges
- Trying to find friends to sit with at dinner, to study with, and to hang out with on weekends
- Finding new ways to handle (and spend) money
- Dealing with homesickness and missing family, friends, boyfriends, girlfriends
- Experiencing a crisis of values as many of their beliefs will be challenged

October

- Taking midterm exams and receiving midterm grades
- Handling college expenses and money issues
- Questioning: "Do I fit in here?" "Can I make it?"
- Moving out of honeymoon period: life doesn't seem as perfect as it did last month
- Receiving poor grades for the first time ever
- Experiencing continued homesickness
- Falling behind and procrastinating
- Facing roommate problems
- Finding a group of peers to connect with

November

- Doubting choice about major field of study or experiencing anxiety about not having decided on a major
- Registering for second semester classes
- Encountering the first wave of campus wide illnesses
- Feeling the pressure of exams, papers, assignments or projects due before Thanksgiving
- Recognizing that finals are just around the corner and first-semester is nearly over
- Wondering if this particular college is really the place for them
- Experiencing consequences of some bad decisions
- Mounting academic pressure because of procrastination, difficulty of workload, or lack of ability
- Increasing alcohol consumption as a way to relieve stress
- Feeling tension in residence hall as students get on each other's nerves with increased academic pressure
- Feeling restless for vacation; may be excited about going home or afraid to face family due to poor grades

December

- Anxiety over preparations for final exams and final papers
- Adjustment to college exam schedule
- Sadness about leaving new friendships and/or love relationships
- Friendship tensions due to finals and living together for an extended period
- Extracurricular time strain, seasonal parties, end of the semester get-togethers, and religious activities
- Financial strain because of holiday gifts and for some, travel costs
- Anxiety or internal pressure for those who want to go home to see family and friends
- Doubts about academic competency or major
- Struggle between identity at college vs. identity among family and friends at home
- Final realization that they or others may not be able to return for second semester due to grades

January

- Readjusting to living away from home after winter break, including a sense of relief or possible homesickness
- Considering joining a sorority or fraternity
- Completing financial aid paperwork for sophomore year
- Seeking a fresh start; trying to change some bad habits from first semester
- Needing to pay off debt accumulated during holidays and time with friends
- Trying to lose weight from first semester and winter break activities
- Adjusting to the addition of new students in the residence hall, or loss of friends who may not have returned

February

- Facing challenges with intimate relationships
- Struggling with finding a “friend group” and fitting in
- Increasing concern over solidifying a comfortable social niche
- Dealing with the “winter blues”
- Experiencing a challenge to personal values
- Growing incidences of vandalism on campus resulting from frustration with “cabin fever”
- Mounting anxiety that mid-terms are approaching (depending on the institution)

March

- Coming up with money for spring break
- Experiencing excitement and/or nervousness about traveling without family for the first time
- Feeling bummed out about spending time at home while other students may be vacationing
- Struggling with poor behavior choices related to alcohol use
- Worrying about isolation from friends because of diverging values
- Mounting credit-card debt from spring break escapades
- Stressing over end-of-term projects, papers, and exams

April

- Feeling academic pressures as the semester nears an end, with papers, projects and exams due
- Increasing concern with weight loss and physical appearance due to warmer weather
- Experiencing a sense of spring fever, with bursts of energy or decreased focus on academics
- Focusing on romantic relationships, due to formal events like spring galas on the horizon
- Experiencing stress related to declaring or changing a major
- Realizing that there are new opportunities opening up at school as they transition to sophomore year

May

- Preparing for and completing final exams and other projects
- Deciding on their living situation for the following academic year
- Increasing excitement about finishing the year and going home for the summer
- Looking for a job for the summer months
- Feeling sad to be leaving new friends or romantic relationships
- Feeling regret that the year is over and they have not done as well as they expected, academically or socially

Excerpted from *Your Freshman Is Off to College: A Month-By-Month Guide to the First Year*, by Laurie Hazard and Stephanie Carter (2016).