

What to Expect in Your Student's First Year at Purdue

August

What's Happening with Your Student:

- They are adjusting to a new life, new responsibilities, new relationships, new roommates, and new freedoms. The first six weeks of college are a challenging time for new students who are trying to make these adjustments all at once.
- They are excited about moving away from home, but may also be homesick.
- They may be insecure about fitting in, being as smart as everyone else, or navigating unfamiliar surroundings.
- They are separated from friends, loved ones, and familiar surroundings.
- They're unsure of what to expect academically—the unknown workload and expectations from faculty.
- They're starting over. They are no longer well known in their school setting – almost no one here knows their former status in high school. This may be a relief for some students or a concern for others.

What Parents Can Do:

- Accept your changing role as a parent. Your new role is likely to be that of a mentor or coach. You'll be providing support, encouragement, advice, and guidance - without the control you once had. This is another stage of life! Your important role as a parent does not stop, it just changes.
- Listen and provide reassurance when communicating with your student. Remind them that these adjustments and feelings are normal.
- Set realistic expectations for your student regarding academics, financial responsibility, social involvement, drinking, and drugs. Discuss these expectations early in a non-judgmental manner. Be open to just listening, as well, which will help keep the lines of communication open.
- Encourage your student to be independent, responsible, and proactive. Be an empathic listener but refrain from 'coming to the rescue' when problems arise. By teaching your students how to solve their own problems, you will demonstrate that you have confidence in them. Encourage them to take responsibility for their own actions and accept the consequences. Let your student know they have your trust.
- Become familiar with Purdue academic and wellness resources so that you can direct your student to the appropriate ones when needed.
- Encourage your student to become a part of the campus community by joining student organizations and attending residence hall or campus-wide events.

- Send your student messages to their @purdue.edu e-mail account. Include pictures of the family pet, notices about local events, and anything else you can think of. This will help them keep in touch with you while also encouraging them to check their e-mail!
- Consider coming to campus for Purdue Family Weekend, which is September 15 - 17, 2023 (https://www.purdue.edu/parentandfamily/Programs_and_Events/Family_Weekend.html). It is a great time to visit your student and have them show you around the campus. But don't expect your student to drop everything if you come. Plan to attend some events alone.
- If you cannot come to campus for Purdue Family Weekend (or at other times), consider sending "care packages." Remember to include treats to share with roommates and anything needed to keep warm and healthy as fall continues and winter approaches.

September

What's Happening with Your Student:

- They are questioning their identity, pushing boundaries, and experimenting with new things. Experimenting may include challenging previous beliefs about religion or politics, experimenting with alcohol, drugs or sexual activity, and challenging social norms.
- They may have trouble managing time. In September, it is common for students to have a false sense of comfort because papers and projects aren't due until October. This may lead to procrastination.
- They're learning about opportunities to get involved with campus groups.
- They're starting to understand that what worked for high school academics won't necessarily work for college, and that a new level of work is expected. This may result in feelings of inadequacy. They may ask themselves, "Can I really succeed here?"
- They may be experiencing roommate conflicts.
- A new trend with college students is an increased dependence on high school friends. Unfortunately, this enables them to avoid getting involved with new people and the Purdue community. Facebook, cell phones, Snapchat, and other social media now make it easier than ever to keep in touch with old friends at other colleges or back home, which can result in an increased feeling of 'not fitting in' at college.
- They are meeting with their academic advisor for a "September Check-In." This is a required 15-30 minute meeting when they discuss how things are going (e.g., classes, roommates, making friends, adjustment to college life, etc.).

What Parents Can Do:

- Listen to your student's concerns and be reassuring. Don't tell your student that these are the best years of their life. Be prepared for the late night "dump" phone call! Students need to vent frustrations or fears, and you will be the dumping ground. Recognize that having these feelings is normal, as is the tendency to want to vent them to a parent. In most cases, your student will feel much better afterwards, but you might be left feeling worried.

- Encourage your student to get involved with campus groups. It's easy to meet new people at college, but students must make the effort. Those who lock themselves in their room and text old friends or play video games are going to have a hard time connecting to the new environment. They soon will feel that they don't 'fit in' here.
- Provide your student with time management techniques, or refer them to the ASC (the Academic Success Center) or the Student Wellness Office (located in the Cordova Recreational Center ["Co-Rec"] Wellness Suite) for time management and stress-reduction strategies and activities.
- Continue conversations about alcohol use. In their first six weeks, first-year students are vulnerable to pressure to 'fit in.' Sometimes they perceive this to mean drinking. Discuss the consequences of making poor choices when it comes to alcohol. These include trouble with classes, increased risk of sexual assault and violence, trouble with the law, possible negative impacts on professional school or employment opportunities - and even death.
- Encourage your student to become involved in the numerous alcohol-free social events on campus and to avoid risky drinking behaviors. Keep the lines of communication open on an adult-to-adult level. Avoid being judgmental.
- Help keep disappointments in perspective, such as not being selected for a particular activity or not becoming 'best friends' with a roommate. Refer your student to support services on campus (such as CAPS or their floor's resident assistant) if additional support is needed.
- Ask them about their 'September Check-In' meeting with their academic advisor.

October

What's Happening with Your Student:

- They are feeling stress about tests and midterms. They may have fallen behind in September because they were not accustomed to the workload and the type of time management skills required for college.
- They may have received their first college grades on papers and projects. This helps students to understand what professors expect of them. It may also mean that students realize that they are no longer "top of the class." Some students who once earned A's are now earning B's, C's or D's. Students may feel like a failure or lose self-esteem because they are unaccustomed to receiving poor grades.
- They're facing competing social demands. Students who got involved in too many campus organizations may have trouble balancing the demands of the organizations with the demands of their coursework.
- They'll begin to work on papers and must learn to navigate a college library system. The library system is an important campus resource. However, because it is likely larger and different from libraries that they have used in the past, it may be intimidating.
- They are learning to manage their own money and may have trouble sticking to a budget. College presents many pressures to spend money — on pizza, movies, clothes, etc.— and they may run out of money sooner than expected.

- First-year students will meet with their academic advisor in October and November to prepare for spring semester course registration. Some will have chosen their major, while others will continue to explore their options, and still others will be completely undecided.

What Parents Can Do:

- Be sympathetic, but try not to “fix” problems for the student. By letting your students fix their own problems, you will demonstrate that you have confidence in them, and help them to have self-confidence. Coach them through some possible solutions.
- Help them to be realistic about academic achievement in a college environment. It is common for Purdue students to experience at least a full point decline from their high school grade point average. For example, students who were 4.0 GPA students in high school may only be 3.0 students at Purdue. Show them that this means they need to adjust their study strategies (changeable) vs. them assuming they are a “bad student” or “not smart” (unchangeable).
- Direct your student to college resources for assistance with papers and assignments. There are many resources designed to assist students with their academic struggles. You can also encourage your student to go to professors’ and teaching assistants’ office hours, seek help from student-run tutoring groups, or to obtain private one-to-one tutoring. Encourage them to visit the ASC staff (Academic Success Center) who are trained to assist students with college level work/expectations.
- Help your student to establish a budget and teach your student how to stick to it. Most high school students have a limited understanding of money management, and this lack of knowledge and experience continues in college. Educate your student on financial responsibility before the lack of responsibility becomes a problem.
- Ask your student what they are learning in EDPS 10500. What have they learned about themselves from the inventories they have taken (Self-Directed Search, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and StrengthsFinder)? What major(s) are they considering? What is it about that major(s) that interests them? How is it a “good fit” for them?
- The residence hall contract renewal process typically begins in October for students who plan to live in the residence halls for another year. Students must choose between staying in the same room and requesting a new room and/or roommate. They may be thinking of moving off-campus to an apartment or to a fraternity, sorority, or co-op house.

November

What’s Happening with Your Student:

- Stress levels are high as tests continue and many papers and projects are due. They also begin to realize that the semester is almost over. Procrastinators may panic as they face the consequences of falling behind in coursework. Students may pull “all-nighters” to get work done.
- They may continue to struggle with time management and balancing social activities with academics.

- Some students may have concerns about moving back home at Thanksgiving, especially if the student has changed dramatically since the last time they saw their parents.
- In EDPS 10500, students are learning about careers that interest them and then interviewing someone working in a specific career as an assignment for class.
- If your student asks you for assistance with their EDPS 10500 “Career Interview” assignment, ask which career they have chosen to focus on and help them brainstorm someone in that career they can contact and interview. Regardless of whether they ask for your help, talk to them about the interview and ask what they learned. If you haven’t already done so, share about your own career exploration process and how you ended up doing what you do. Talk about the real-life joys and challenges of full-time employment.

What Parents Can Do:

- Be supportive and encouraging. Refer to college resources such as PUSH (Purdue University Student Health Center) if your student is sick or in need of counseling services. Continue to encourage a healthy lifestyle, including exercise, sleep, diet, and relaxation.
- Encourage your student to make an appointment to meet with their academic advisor to prepare to register for fall classes if they haven’t done so already.
- Talk to your student about his/her plans for housing for the next year. Help them consider the pros and cons of the different options available to them, and have a discussion of how the cost of those options “fits” into the family budget for college.
- Be available to listen to your student's concerns, but don’t worry if your student doesn’t call, text, or e-mail as often as you would like. Your student may be too wrapped up in school to remember to contact home. Remind them how important they are to you by e-mailing them without expecting them to reply. They will “get the message.”
- Be supportive of your student's academic progress without focusing on grades. Ask open-ended questions about what your student is learning, or why certain topics are of interest, instead of asking about grades on tests or papers.
- Listen to what they have to say about the major(s) that interests them. Encourage them to thoroughly research the options and not to make a decision too quickly.

December

What’s Happening with Your Student:

- After Thanksgiving, there are only two weeks until finals. Papers and projects are due, and they may be the longest papers or projects that students have ever done. Students will continue to feel stress.
- They’ll also feel stress about finals. For first-year students, this will be their first college finals and they’ll have the added fear of the unknown.
- They will be able to access their grades from fall semester on December 20th and will feel either disappointed or delighted. Parental reactions to the grades weigh heavily on their minds and

influence their stress level as they anticipate a new term. Whether the grades were good or bad, they will have a better understanding of what college work requires.

- They'll probably sleep a lot over the Winter Break, as they try to 'catch up' on four months' worth of lost sleep!

What Parents can Do:

- Consider sending a care package to help your student get through final exams.
- Prepare yourself for changes when your student returns home after finals. The first year of college is a period of tremendous change and growth. Students demonstrate this change in different ways—new haircut, new piercings, tattoos, changes in religious or political beliefs, etc. Your student will appreciate your support, rather than criticism, through this changing time. Recognize that while your student may be going through many changes, in the long run, your student will probably maintain most of the core values that you instilled.
- Discuss home 'rules' and expectations as soon as your student returns home or, preferably, before! Don't wait for a conflict to arise before communicating. Students who have been making their own decisions for four months may find it difficult to suddenly succumb to their parents' control again. Many parents have expectations about time spent with the family, which conflicts with student expectations to spend time with old friends.
- Ask some questions about their overall experience in EDPS 10500, and where they are at in terms of major/career exploration. If they have chosen a major and are expressing strong confidence about the decision, celebrate with them! If they are considering a couple of different options, congratulate them on the progress they have made and encourage them to continue working with their academic advisor and others during spring semester. If they tell you they are still totally undecided, tell them that's okay, too. Remind them they have up to four semesters in Exploratory Studies, plenty of time to make an informed decision. In all cases, encourage them to continue to seek the advice and assistance of their academic advisor.
- Be supportive of your student regardless of their fall semester grades. If grades were poor, refer your student to their academic advisor and Purdue's resources for help in future semesters. Remind your student of your academic and class attendance expectations, but keep those expectations realistic given the level of academic difficulty at Purdue.

January

What's Happening with Your Student:

- Students return to campus after the Winter Break. Many will feel relieved to get back to their independent lifestyle, while others will feel homesick as they return to campus.
- There will be uncertainties in the new semester, as students begin a new set of classes and meet new professors. Some may have a new roommate and/or living situation.

What Parents Can Do:

- If you and your student set up a study or tutoring plan during Winter Break, now is the time to check in with them to see how it is working and whether it needs adjustment.
- Remind your student to keep up with coursework. Many students find that falling behind early in the term is a major cause of stress and failures later on in the term. Help with time management tips so that academics, social activities and personal time are balanced.
- Refer to the Study Abroad Office for information about study abroad opportunities. Academic advisors can also help with this.

February

What's Happening with Your Student:

- Students may be depressed as the cold weather and lack of sunshine continue.
- They'll start taking midterms, and some papers or projects may be due.
- Many students neglect their health and exercise plans.
- The residence hall contract renewal process ends (typically in late February). Students who haven't already decided where they will live next year must choose either to stay in the residence halls or move off-campus.
- Students may get 'cabin fever' due to being indoors too much. This causes some students to be anxious, tense, distracted, or frustrated with people around them—especially roommates.
- Student organizations can demand a lot of time from students. As a result, students who have trouble with time management may feel overcommitted and overwhelmed.
- Some students have relationship anxiety, especially around Valentine's Day.
- Students make plans for Spring Break (March 11-16). This may lead to financial concerns for some. Others may feel envious of their friends who are going to places warm and exotic. This may also lead to disagreements with family over different expectations for how and where this vacation will be spent.
- Some students will meet with their academic advisor and register for summer courses.

What Parents Can Do:

- Encourage your student to actively enjoy the winter. Students who learn to enjoy the winter, instead of dreading it, are better able to fight off 'cabin fever' or the winter blues. Of course, if those winter blues turn into something more serious, refer your student to CAPS (Counseling & Psychological Services), where trained staff can help your student cope with stress, depression, and more.
- Support your student as they try to balance academics and extracurricular activities. Encourage your student to seek assistance from the on-campus resources, including their professors. Advise your student to go to professors' office hours and to get to know them.
- Send care packages. Valentine's Day is an excellent time for you to let students know that you're thinking about them.

- Listen and support your student's relationship or roommate concerns. Refer your student to their resident hall's floor resident assistant if roommate conflicts cannot be resolved, and to CAPS if relationship concerns are severe and interfere with academics.
- Discuss plans and expectations for Spring Break. Talk about who's paying for the vacation, whether or not it will be spent with the family or friends, and about making responsible choices regarding behavior.

March

What's Happening with Your Student:

- They'll be stressed as they take more midterms and have more papers or projects due.
- Most will have their housing plans for the following year wrapped up by this point. This may be a relief for some.
- Some students may demonstrate irresponsible behavior at parties over Spring Break, and suffer the consequences of that behavior.
- Students may feel pressure from peers and other to choose a major and CODO out of Exploratory Studies.
- Students begin to think about summer plans including jobs or internships. Students may also be concerned about how they will fit into the family and the family's expectations if they return home to live with their parents for the entire summer.
- Financial Aid documents for the following year (e.g. – the FAFSA) are due.
- Students meet with their academic advisor in March (or April) to prepare to register for fall semester courses.

What Parents Can Do:

- Keep the lines of communication open. As your student begins to prepare summer plans and for the upcoming fall semester, they may seek your guidance and advice or may want to make decisions without your help. Recognize that either way, these decisions are part of growing up, and trust that in the end they will make decisions that are best. Encourage your student to see their academic advisor before registering for courses.
- Remind them to ask their academic advisor for help with deciding on a major and learning how to best move to that major.
- Send care packages. Gift cards and homemade goodies are welcome surprises.
- Refer students to the Center for Career Opportunities (CCO) in Young Hall for information about summer jobs and internships. Assist your student in planning housing and transportation for internships or jobs, if needed.

April

What's Happening with Your Student:

- Students get 'Spring Fever' as weather warms up, and they'll find concentrating on academics harder than ever. There are also more distractions on campus, as students go outside to play Frisbee, go biking, or enjoy a stroll around campus.
- If they have not already done so, they will meet with their academic advisor to prepare to register for fall semester courses.
- Stress levels are high as papers and projects come due and students prepare for finals.
- Final exams do not occur during students' typical class time, so students must research and plan travel to their summer destinations accordingly. This is especially difficult for international students.
- They must make plans for moving out of their current residence halls and pack everything!
- For some, leaving their college friends for the summer will be the biggest concern of all.

What Parents Can Do:

- Be supportive through these stressful times and send care packages to help your student get through final exams.
- Remind your student to take care with a healthy diet, exercise, and enough sleep.
- Encourage your student to find out when final exams will be as soon as the schedule comes out. Assist them in planning for travel home or to summer destinations if they need it.
- Communicate about end-of-term plans for moving out of the residence hall.

May

What's Happening with Your Student:

- They are experiencing stress and pressure about finishing up the semester, final exams and securing summer plans. Their final spring semester grades are available on May 8th.
- Many students will return home for the summer. Others will stay on campus and stay involved in employment, research or internships. Those staying on campus may have the opportunity to stay in a residence hall or choose to sublet an apartment near campus.
- Students who lined up summer employment ahead of time will begin their summer jobs. Others will still need to find work.
- Students who return home may have anxiety about losing their independence and will be concerned about adjusting to life under their parents' roofs again.

What Parents Can Do:

- Discuss with your student what your expectations are for her/his behavior, roles, and responsibilities during the summer months if moving home. Students may not be expecting to take on household-related tasks, especially if they have job and social commitments for the summer. This is a time to renegotiate the responsibilities as one adult to another. Will you expect your student to eat at family meals? Be home by a certain time? Call if coming home late? Or something else? These are all restrictions that they have not had for nine months. Be sure to talk about what you expect, and be willing to compromise, before problems occur.
- Talk with your student about their grades and try to be supportive and non-judgmental. Focus on what they learned, and if needed, what they can do to improve next semester.
- If your student is still undecided about their major, brainstorm with them about what they can do during the summer to continue their exploration and research, including job shadowing, informational interviewing, part-time work, and volunteering.
- Respect and appreciate the independent, self-reliant, mature person who has returned home, even if she/he seems nothing like the person you dropped off at Purdue last fall.
- Use this summer to openly communicate with your student as an adult, and to discover and appreciate the intellectual growth your student has developed in the past few months.

June

What's Happening with Your Student:

- Students who returned home may be experiencing conflict with their parents about independence, house rules, duties, expectations for work around the house, and respect for the needs of the family vs. the needs of the individual.

What Parents Can Do:

- If you haven't already, discuss what your expectations are for behavior, roles, and responsibilities during the summer months.
- If your student is taking a summer course(s), remind them of your expectations, but be realistic about the challenges of the faster paced summer terms (4, 6, 8 or 12-weeks).

July

What's Happening with Your Student:

- Students who are now considered sophomores may feel nostalgic as they realize how quickly the year flew by and how much they have changed and grown as individuals.
- Students who returned home for the summer may be anxious to return to campus in the fall and may miss their campus friends. Some may have anxiety that the relationships with their friends, boyfriends, or girlfriends may have changed over the summer.
- Summer jobs reduce the amount of "spare time" for students to relax and enjoy summer.

- Students may be tired of living under “house rules” and challenge parental rules.

What Parents Can Do:

- Appreciate your student's growth and changes as they develop into an adult.
- Talk with your student about plans for fall, finances, and relationships. Students at this age are far more willing to communicate with parents as fellow adults.
- Help assess 1st year successes and failures, and discuss plans for making improvements in sophomore year.
- Check in with your student about the summer “house rules” and take into account their suggestions. Certain new situations (e.g. - work, school) may require more flexibility than originally agreed.

August

What’s Happening with Your Student:

- Students may have anxiety about their new fall living arrangements and new roommates.
- They’ll be sad summer is ending, but excited to return to campus and see their friends.
- They may want to spend all of their remaining free time with old friends, instead of with the family. This may differ from what the family wants.
- They may have financial concerns that they didn’t make enough money over the summer to support their budget needs for the fall.

What Parents Can Do:

- Support your student through this new transition.
- Recognize that last days of summer will be busy and your student may not want to spend much time with the family if friends are in town.
- Continue to communicate with your student about your expectations for academics and behavior regarding drinking and relationships. Your role as a mentor continues throughout the college years, and these conversations become easier if you have established a respectful adult-to-adult relationship.

Thanks to Macalester College, whose online “Parent and Family Handbook” was the source from which this was adapted.