

## Student Concerns by Month

Please remember that this is only a guide designed to help you understand the types of pressures encountered by college students. These stress periods affect each student in different ways.

### September

- ◆ Homesickness – especially common for first-year students and first-time residents
- ◆ Roommate conflicts which are often caused by personality differences and unwillingness to compromise. It is also the first time many students have to share a room.
- ◆ Initial adjustment to academic environment – feelings of inadequacy sometimes related to the changes in high school expectations to college expectations. Also, academic success in high school does not ensure academic success in college.
- ◆ First-year students begin to realize that life at college is not as perfect as they were led to believe by family, teachers, counselors, and friends.
- ◆ Class size and the adjusting to professors (as opposed to teachers in high school) can be discouraging for new students.
- ◆ Values exploration –students start to explore their own values without the guidance of their parents and home communities.
- ◆ New social life adjustments – including not having to check with parents about curfews and opportunities to experience new areas, making your own decisions on when to conduct social activities and establishing yourself in a peer group.
- ◆ Initial social rejections can create a feeling of inadequacy when not immediately accepted in a peer group or into a social sorority or fraternity.
- ◆ “In-loco parentis” problems – students feel depressed because of real or perceived restrictive policies and regulations of the college.
- ◆ Campus familiarization – includes becoming familiar with campus, classrooms, buildings and meeting places.
- ◆ Long distance relationship(s) – torn between being loyal to a significant other from home and going out with new people.
- ◆ Financial adjustment – involves adjusting to a somewhat tighter budget. Students who are supporting themselves start to realize how important budgeting their money becomes.
- ◆ International student adjustment – experience a sense of confusion, vulnerability and a lack of any advocate in higher positions while trying to make a successful cultural and academic transition.
- ◆ Family problems seem more intense because the student may either be caught in the middle or may feel helpless because they are far away.
- ◆ Adjusting to “Administrative Red Tape” – students soon realize that is usually a long and frustrating process when trying to find an answer to what seems to be a simple question.

## October

- ◆ Academic stress from midterms builds with the great demand for studying and preparation. For some students this may be their first exam of the semester. For many, the midterm workload pressures are followed by feelings of failure and loss of self-esteem.
- ◆ Midterm workload pressures are followed by feelings of a sense of accomplishment.
- ◆ Roommate problems continue, but they are smaller than in previous months.
- ◆ Values exploration continuing, especially in the area of sexuality and dating.
- ◆ Dating/non-dating/friendship anxieties extremely high. Non-dating students feel a sense of loss of esteem because so much value is placed upon dating. For women who do date, the pressure to perform sexually increases and consequently increases the feelings of rejection, loneliness and guilt and in some instances leads to unwanted sexual activity.
- ◆ Homesickness may be still felt by number of students.
- ◆ Job Searching stress for mid-year graduates starts with the onset of resume preparation and interviewing.
- ◆ Students may decide that college is not the place for them and return home for personal reasons or transfer to another school.
- ◆ Grief from not being part of a group develops because of inadequate skills for finding a group, or from not being selected by one.
- ◆ Financial strain sets in from lack of budgeting experience.
- ◆ Excitement about the holidays begins to grow.
- ◆ Homecoming blues develop because of no date for social affairs, and/or lack of ability/opportunity to participate in activities.
- ◆ Graduate school syndrome starts to emerge from graduating seniors. Signing up for graduate school exams, wondering if you will be accepted, wondering which school to apply to and questioning whether graduate school is the right thing to do.
- ◆ Time conflicts between academic and social expectations emerge.
- ◆ Signing up for classes involves starting to think about the following semester.
- ◆ Adjusting to new study habits includes not just being able to study the way they did in high school. More time and greater workload needs to be incorporated into their schedule for studying.
- ◆ Disenchantment with school – low regard level because students begin to realize that life at college is not as perfect as they were led to believe by parents, teachers and counselors. The novelty has worn off and the demands on their time are great.

## November

- ◆ Suicidal thoughts may occur from inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.
- ◆ Academic pressure begins to mount because of procrastination, difficulty of work assigned and lack of study skills. “Pre-finals” stress starts to emerge as preparation begins for taking the exams.
- ◆ Anxiety increases as final exams approach and papers are due.

- ◆ Time management conflicts continue.
- ◆ Social apathy causes frustration because of academic pressures.
- ◆ Depression and anxiety increases at this time of year because of feeling that one should have adjusted to the college environment by this point.
- ◆ Economic anxiety—funds from family and summer earnings begin to run out and loans may become due.
- ◆ Problems develop due to increased alcohol consumption because students see this as an easy acceptable way to relieve stress and from not knowing how to handle alcohol responsibly.
- ◆ Roommate problems may start to emerge again. This is mostly due to the pressure of school; tempers become shorter and people are less tolerant of others.
- ◆ Health (or lack thereof) can start to affect performance. Reasons include the changing weather and either lack of food quality or the negative feelings about institutional foods. Students tend to eat more ice cream and salads because they don't find as much red meat, yogurt, etc. on the line or the lack of new items forces them to eat other places.
- ◆ Students have given up making attempts to establish new friendships.
- ◆ Living unit dissention causes uncomfortable feelings with residents. Results from apathy, academic pressures, need for vacation from school.
- ◆ Students look forward to the holidays and break from school.

## **December**

- ◆ Increasing thought/deliberation about suicide occur from inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.
- ◆ Final exam pressures including anxiety, fear and guilt increases as exams approach and papers become due. Increased use of alcohol and drugs is related.
- ◆ Extracurricular time strains – seasonal parties, concerns, social service projects and religious activities drain student energies.
- ◆ Financial worries occur with the thought of Christmas gifts and travel costs.
- ◆ Pre-holiday blues emerges, especially for those who have concerns for family, those who have no home because of family conflicts.
- ◆ Friendship tensions become high with the onset of final exams.

## **January**

- ◆ Anxiety about second semester begins and students who did not perform as well as they would have liked first semester have the added pressure of improving performance.
- ◆ Some students may have lost a loved one, a friend or significant other by and ended-relationship or even death over break and they may find it hard to share the happiness and joy others experienced over the break.
- ◆ Moving to a new environment causes feelings of intrusion because students move onto a unit where most of the friendships have been established, priorities set and expectations understood. Unfamiliarity with campus also creates some anxiety especially for new students.

- ◆ Money problems begin because students were unable to find jobs over the holiday break.
- ◆ Post-holiday depression occurs at the beginning because students are away from the security and positive strokes of family and friends.
- ◆ Some students experience another bout of homesickness while others are happy to be back with new friends.
- ◆ Depression increases as students get tired of winter and being inside.
- ◆ Some students experience unwanted weight gains over the break with the holiday foods and home cooking.
- ◆ Reincorporating social and academic life is difficult at first with not having to worry about school for an extended period.

## **February**

- ◆ Exams and other academic pressures approach.
- ◆ Depending upon the weather, some people will experience cabin fever if the weather forces them to stay inside for a lengthy period of time. Unacceptable social behavior may occur and students may act out and break rules.
- ◆ Students begin thinking about changing majors or transferring schools.
- ◆ Career choice anxieties set in with the onset of job interviews.
- ◆ Worry of summer job hunting begins. This is especially high for students who were unable to find work during the Holiday break and those who may be seeking competitive summer internships.
- ◆ Relationship anxieties increase as either couple begins to strengthen their ties (engagement) or experiencing weakening relationships.
- ◆ Fall housing planning begins with trying to tentatively decide about living arrangements for next year.
- ◆ Job searching anxieties start to set in for students who are graduating in the spring.

## **March**

- ◆ Increasing thoughts/deliberations about suicide occur from the inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.
- ◆ Academic pressures increase with the approach of mid-term exams.
- ◆ With the pressure of the end of the semester approaching, many students start to increase their use of alcohol and drugs. This can cause them many biological and behavioral problems.
- ◆ Existential crisis for seniors – Must I leave school? Is my education worth anything? Was my major a mistake? Why go on?
- ◆ Living arrangement anxieties occur with the forcing of decisions – Should I move out? Live in the same building? Stay with the same roommate? Will a friend be left out of the plan?
- ◆ Summer job hunting will be heavy over spring break.
- ◆ Worry about finding a job or not finding one will cause severe anxiety.

- ◆ Trying to find money to use for spring break is a problem, especially when your peers are going to a place other than home and you are not able to join them.

## **April**

- ◆ Increasing thoughts/deliberations about suicide occur from an inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.
- ◆ Academic pressures increase with the end of the semester approaching. Papers, exams and final projects approach.
- ◆ Summer job pressures continue.
- ◆ Senior job recruitment panic continues.
- ◆ Financial strain from spring break affects social life.
- ◆ Many students are forced to select a major and are not sure what field they would like to enter. Social life pressures increase during this time period – formal dances, parties, concerts.
- ◆ Excitement about the approaching warm weather of spring and summer heightens.
- ◆ With spring arriving, love is in the air. Many students go through rejection or the fear of rejection or envy towards their friends who have found a significant other.
- ◆ Frustration from being ill because weather changes so dramatically. Causes colds, allergies, lethargic feelings and limits social interactions.
- ◆ As pressures build, students tend to become disenchanted with many normal services and food service is the primary target. They tend to get tired of eating “The same old” institutional food.

## **May**

- Increasing thought/deliberations about suicide occur from an inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.
- Anxiety develops because of the realization that the year is ending and a deficiency in a number of academic areas still exist. Students will miss their friends, and/or they may not have done as well academically as they had hoped.
- Finals pressures are at a critical level with papers, take-home exams and studying. Some of the major effects of the pressure include; increased use of coffee, No-Doz, Vivarin, and amphetamines; and increase or decrease in food consumption. Less sleep and a lower tolerance level with friends/peers.
- Senior job pressures increase for those who have not yet found one.
- Anxiety for couples who will be separated for the summer. Also, the fear that their significant other will find someone else while they're apart.
- Depression over having to leave the friends and people that they have grown close to during the school year.
- Anxiety of having to go home after having been independent the past year, especially if they are having conflicts with their parents.