**Tips for Parents - First Year Experiences**

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Students new to Texas A&M are likely to have many adjustments to make during their first semester in College Station. Hopefully, most experiences will be positive; however, some difficulties are likely to be encountered. If your student experiences difficulty with the transition or too much stress, please remember that the Student Counseling Service is an excellent resource. You may want to check out our services at http://scs.tamu.edu.

Some of the typical adjustment issues for new students are described below.

**Homesickness**

Texas A&M University is a very big place. For many new students, this fall will be the first time away from home for an extended period of time. The transition from high school or community college to a major university can be difficult. Some people are shy and have trouble meeting "strangers." Others have difficulty adjusting to the greater diversity on campus. Some have difficulty because their backgrounds are very different from most of their classmates. Some students may feel that they just do not fit or belong at A&M, either socially or academically.

These adjustment/transition issues are normal and will probably be resolved in a few weeks. One way to facilitate the adjustment process is to encourage your student to make connections on campus and in the community. If your student is still experiencing homesickness and adjustment concerns a month or so into the semester, suggest he/she come talk to a counselor or seek out an ATMentor for help. Also, if your student tells you he/she is crying daily, unable to sleep or sleeping so much classes are being missed, or just feels really depressed, encourage him/her to come to the Student Counseling Service to discuss the situation. It is a good idea to discourage your student from coming home every weekend if you are able to do so. Leaving campus on weekends will keep him/her from establishing the connections needed to reduce homesickness, and it can negatively impact academics.

**Academics**

A&M has high academic standards, which means that your student might be surprised by how difficult the course work is, even though he/she knew it was going to be harder than high school or community college. Occasionally, some students are unwilling to expend the effort required to do well. They may lack strong commitment to obtaining a degree or have difficulty seeing how today's actions impact the goal of getting a degree that is so far in the future. Some students are willing and strongly committed, but their study skills and time management are not well enough developed to allow them to be successful in such a demanding academic environment. Your student will know how well his/her study methods are working after the first round of exams. These exams usually occur the end of September or the first part of October. If these grades are lower than expected or desired, encourage him/her to get help immediately. Waiting until the second round of tests usually just makes the problem worse. The Student Counseling Service offers an assessment of study skills at no cost.

**Relationships**

Whenever people live together in high density living areas, issues are bound to arise. We are all different, having different ways of thinking about things and doing things, as well as different values and habits. Some of us are organized and neat in the extreme, and some of us are messy and disorganized. Some of us are morning people, and some of us are night owls. Some of us are "bookworms" and some of us socialize frequently. Difficulties with roommates can make life in college miserable. Certainly, a negative living situation can be destructive to emotional health and to grades. If your student experiences roommate difficulties, suggest that he/she and his/her roommate(s) have a conversation about general expectations and set some ground rules. They then should meet periodically to talk about how things are going. Communication is the key for resolving roommate difficulties. If they find that after trying they cannot resolve issues, they may want to come to the Student Counseling Service for help in the matter.

**Social Life**

There are many opportunities for a rich social life at Texas A&M University. Some students even start the weekend on Thursday night and continue it through Sunday night. Additionally, during the fall semester there are football games, midnight yell, and many shows and/or concerts before each home game. There are also bars like the Dixie Chicken or the Chicken Oil Company and dance halls like the Hall of Fame. There are literally hundreds of student organizations and activities. It is easy to get so involved in social activities that academics are negatively impacted. The Student Counseling Service can help students learn to balance academics, extracurricular activities, and time for fun. If your student appears over-extended, please have him/her consider seeking help before serious problems arise.

**Finances**

Another issue that can arise is financial problems. Some students do not have adequate financial resources to pay for tuition, housing, and living expenses without working. If your student must work, remember that 10 hours of work per week is the equivalent of one three-hour class, and many students work more hours than 10. If working is a necessity, your student might consider taking fewer classes each semester; otherwise there might be inadequate time for study.

Students who are not used to managing money can find themselves in financial trouble before they know it. Credit cards can be a huge problem. Another money management problem is not paying bills on time. Help your student understand that he/she can ruin his/her credit rating and get into a lot of debt quickly and easily if he/she does not take care of finances.

It can be both exciting and scary to realize that your influence as parents is moving to a different level. Your student will have much more autonomy in decision making, which means that some experimentation with different behaviors is normal. Hopefully your student will make wise choices that will help him/her to have a very successful first year at A&M. Please remember that the staff of the Student Counseling Service is available to help your student with any difficulties that may arise so that the first semester at A&M is as positive and rewarding as possible. You may contact us by calling (979) 845-4427. Students may register for academic, career, and personal counseling services on-line at <https://scs.tamu.edu/secure>.

