

THE RHYTHM OF COLLEGE LIFE

There will be many ups and downs your student will experience during their first year of college. These are very normal. There are many resources and services available to assist students in being successful at Occidental College. Please encourage your student to talk to their faculty advisor or consider a visit to Oxy's Emmons Wellness Center.

August/September

- Students are adjusting to 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 may express a whirlwind of emotions from excitement and joy to anxiousness, fear and frustration.
- They are insecure about fitting in, being as smart as everyone else or navigating unfamiliar surroundings (both campus and the local community).
- They may feel overwhelmed with all of the options for them to be involved with in terms of clubs and organizations, campus programs and events.
- They are unsure of what to expect academically as they start classes with new professors.
- They are working to establish a new schedule and how to manage their time.
- For students living on campus, they may experience homesickness.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ Have you met your Resident Adviser (RA)?
- ✓ Are you planning to go to the Student Services & Community Resource Fair to learn about getting involved?
- ✓ If you are choosing to work, have you gone to [Human Resources](#) to see what jobs are available?
- ✓ How is it going with your roommate(s)?
- ✓ Have you personally introduced yourself to your faculty members?
- ✓ How is it going with meeting your "neighbors" and/or making new friends?
- ✓ Have you used the Bengal Bus or bike-sharing services yet?
- ✓ Are you attending campus events on the weekends?
- ✓ Are you excited for the upcoming [Homecoming and Family Weekend](#) event (October 13-14)?
- ✓ Do you know where [Emmons Wellness Center](#) for counseling and health services is located?
- ✓ How's your Cultural Studies Program ([CSP](#)) class; are you connecting with the instructor?
- ✓ How is your sleep? Your diet? Are you getting any rest/relaxation/quiet time?

Strategies for Parents:

- Don't overreact to those first frantic telephone calls or conversations. Listen carefully and try to determine how best to address your student's needs. Be there as a parent but also refer them to campus resources to help with the situation.
- Help your student solve problems on their own – do not try to solve them for them. Brainstorm options with them, break large problems down into manageable issues, and refer students to campus support systems for more help. Help empower your student to take control of the problems they are facing.
- Ask open ended questions to keep communication open. Try not to sound as if you are preaching. Remember that listening is part of communicating. Being a good sounding board is

an important part of the process. How you respond to the things your student shares will affect how comfortable he or she will feel about sharing things with you in the future.

- Be open and honest about your values and expectations on sensitive subjects such as alcohol, drugs and sex.
- Keep in mind that your student is struggling for independence and autonomy. They may seem standoffish as they learn how to balance their new independence with their family connections.
- Take some extra time to communicate your support and encouragement. Positive feedback is especially important for your student at this time. A [care package](#) is a great way to brighten any student's mood.
- Review with your student the College's [safety](#) and security measures and services, and to not take any risks with personal safety.

October

- Your student may begin to question their identity, push boundaries and experiment with new things.
- They will begin to experience diversity as they encounter people different from themselves.
- They may have trouble managing time as coursework, extracurricular activities, jobs and social commitments take up more time.
- They are starting to understand that what worked in high school academics won't necessarily work for college and that a new level of work is expected. With the first papers and exam grades returned, students may feel inadequate or anxious about their academic performance.
- They may begin to have roommate conflicts as they become more comfortable with each other.
- They are learning to manage their own money and may struggle with sticking to a budget.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ Have you visited your faculty during office hours?
- ✓ How is your preparation for mid-term exams?
- ✓ What are your plans for the fall break?
- ✓ How are you adjusting to your roommates?
- ✓ How are your finances?
- ✓ How are your eating habits? Are you staying healthy?
- ✓ Are you ready for mid-term exams? Do you need tutoring assistance?
- ✓ How are you spending your free time?
- ✓ Have you had a chance to check out more of Los Angeles and the surrounding communities?
- ✓ Have you checked out the Student Activity Center ([SAC](#))
- ✓ Have you checked out the [Office of Student Life](#)?
- ✓ Are you comfortable setting limits, respectfully disagreeing with others?
- ✓ Have you received your free flu shot at Emmons yet?
- ✓ Do you know who to ask when you need help?

Strategies for Parents:

- Talk about the subject of money and budgeting and what role you will play and what role your student plays in financing their education.
- Students may begin to question their choice of college, or even if they belong in college. This is normal for many students, and the thoughts and feelings typically pass. Reassure your student that adjustment to College takes time, and to be patient and remain committed.
- Express an interest in their academic pursuits and encourage your student to be talking with their professors regularly. Provide referrals to academic resources if your student indicates

struggles. Be careful to not get into the trap of blaming the professor – find out the root cause of any problems your student shares about a particular course or assignment.

- Ask questions about how your student is spending free time. This allows you to determine if your student is managing their time well and is having the chance to connect with others. It may also provide clues for any risky behaviors they might be engaging in.
- If your student seems stressed, provide some ideas for stress busters, such as exercising, listening to music or artistic expression. If you feel your student needs help managing stress, encourage them to visit Emmons Wellness Center.

November

- Your student may get sick as the weather begins to change.
- Stress levels remain high as end-of-the-semester projects and papers will be due soon. They also must begin to prepare for final exams.
- You may have concerns about going home for Thanksgiving and reconnecting with family and old friends or remaining on campus during the break.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ Do you know what your grades are going into finals week?
- ✓ Are you remaining connected with your faculty?
- ✓ Are you adjusting to California's weather (do you need more summer clothing)?
- ✓ I hear there's a theater production this month; do you plan to check it out?
- ✓ Have you reviewed the end of the semester move-out details provided by the [Residence Education & Housing Services](#)?
- ✓ How are things going with the clubs and organizations you have joined?
- ✓ How are you managing your stress?

Strategies for Parents:

- If your student is coming home for Thanksgiving Break, be prepared that they may have changed. Try to maintain family traditions, but be flexible with the new attitude of your student. Allow your student time to reconnect with high school friends and realize they may not spend much time at home over the weekend.
- Encourage your student to consider connecting with the [Writing Center](#) or with Peer Subject Advisers for additional support.

December

- After Thanksgiving, there is little time before finals week. Term papers and projects are due and students may feel overwhelmed and/or stressed out.
- They may get very little sleep and neglect nutrition or exercise leading to illness.
- Many students may be concerned about the pressures of the upcoming holidays and/or returning home to live with family after a semester of independence.
- Some students may be anxious about their finances and purchasing holiday gifts with limited income.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ When is your last day of exams for the fall semester?
- ✓ When do you have to move-out of your room for winter break? Have you arranged for transportation home?
- ✓ When do classes start for the spring semester?

- ✓ How do you think you did in terms of meeting your academic goals for the semester?
- ✓ Do you know how to connect with the [Dean of Students Office](#) or [Emmons Wellness Center](#), if you need support or feel sick?

Strategies for Parents:

- Encourage your student to maintain healthy behavior in the stress of final exams. Send a [care package](#) of healthy foods. Encourage your student to exercise to relieve stress or to have an incentive system for study breaks.
- Take time to reflect on the semester with your student. Ask them how they felt their first semester went and what their biggest successes were. Assist them in setting goals for the second semester. Be supportive as they share mistakes they made or things that they learned.
- Students being home over the semester break may feel a lack of independence due to the loss of their normal college routine. Try to help your student find a sense of independence while maintaining their family responsibilities.
- Your student may be reluctant to share semester grades – they are only available online (they are not mailed home). If your student does not bring up the subject, make sure you do. Talk with them about academic successes and recognize them. Discuss any disappointments they have with their grades and set strategies for a more successful second semester. Remember that the first semester is a huge transition period and not all students will do as well as they had hoped.
- If your first year student ends up with a semester GPA below 1.85, they will be placed upon academic probation; a letter will be sent to parents/guardians.

January

- Students return for the spring semester.
- After receiving semester grades, students may feel delighted or disappointed. Family reactions to grades weigh heavily on their minds and influence their stress level.
- There are uncertainties as students begin new classes, meet new professors and begin to understand the expectations of their new schedule and course load.
- They begin to think about their next year, which courses to take, choosing a major, living arrangements, and other details.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ How do you feel about your spring semester schedule?
- ✓ Do you have a study plan for your classes this semester?
- ✓ How is it going with your roommate(s)?
- ✓ Are you aware of the upcoming programs and events – sports events, theater programs, or music performances?
- ✓ Are you going to apply for any leadership positions for next year such as Resident Adviser, Peer Mentor, or Orientation Leader?

Strategies for Parents:

- Holiday blues, academic concerns and difficulty in saying good-bye can make leaving for spring semester an emotional experience. Be sure to be extra supportive with your student at this time.
- Reinstate the campus support systems that are available for your student – counseling and health services, academic advisor, Dean of Students, tutoring and academic resources.
- Revisit the goals and expectations you have for your student.

- If your student did not get involved in the first semester, encourage them to join a club or organization this semester.
- Talk with your student about how you communicated last semester and if it worked for them and you. Do you want to talk to each other more often? Over email or phone? Find a system that works for all of you.

February

- They may feel depressed due to the lack of cold weather. California stays sunny year around.
- Many students neglect their health and exercise plans.
- Some students feel relationship anxiety as Valentine's Day approaches.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ How is your preparation for mid-term exams?
- ✓ What are your plans for spring break next month?
- ✓ How are you feeling about your social network and your relationships?

Strategies for Parents:

- Don't overreact if homesickness issues resurface. Think about how you supported your student last semester and help them cope this semester.
- Some students may have difficulty getting back into the swing of things. Provide encouragement and listen to their concerns. Help them adjust to their new schedule and responsibilities.
- Your student may surprise you with questions about their decision making. They may want to do a spring break service trip, or talk with you about declaring a major in an area you didn't foresee. They will be looking for your reassurance and support. Discuss each area with them and listen to their decision making process before helping them make an informed decision.

March

- Your student will feel stress over mid-term exams and papers.
- Room draw selection process occurs.
- Students will feel anxious as course schedules come up for the following year. Some students may feel pressure to declare a major or take certain courses.
- They begin to consider summer plans, such as, summer employment, study abroad, internships or summer courses.
- Spring break occurs.
- The FAFSA form for financial aid is due.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ Tell me about your goals for the summer and next year.
- ✓ Have you attended a diversity event on campus?
- ✓ How are you taking care of yourself?
- ✓ Have you thought about your summer plans? Have you started looking or secured a summer job/internship? Have you looked for summer housing?
- ✓ Are you planning to take summer classes at a nearby college?

Strategies for Parents:

- Provide guidance as your student decides on summer plans. Are you expecting them to be at home? To have a summer job? Or are they able to take summer classes or do an internship?
- Have you visited the [Career Center](#) to develop a beginning resume?
- Students will be home for Spring Break. Be prepared for them to feel stress with mid-term papers and exams. Provide encouragement for and recognition of their academic work. Show an interest in academic projects.

April

- Students select courses for next year.
- Students begin to declare a major(s).
- Stress levels are high as final exams and final papers and projects come due.
- They experience sadness about leaving friends for the summer. Senior students may feel sadness about leaving the College and their friends.
- They may feel anxious about their academic performance for the semester and worried about grade reports.

Questions to Ask:

- ✓ Your student may come to you with questions on which classes to take. Refer them to their academic advisor to help with course selection. Encourage them to take courses that help them explore a variety of interests.
- ✓ Did you meet your academic goals/expectations this semester?
- ✓ How are you preparing for final exams?
- ✓ Do you feel prepared for your courses next year?
- ✓ When do you need to check out of your residence hall? Have you made transportation arrangements?
- ✓ Have you spoken with your Resident Adviser about the requirements for checking out of your residence hall?
- ✓ How have you changed since August?
- ✓ How do you plan to keep in touch with your new friends this summer?

Strategies for Parents:

- Help your student with the stress of final exams. Continue to offer support as well as referring your student back to their professors if they have questions. Remember to encourage them to access academic support services for tutoring or to start a study group with their peers.
- Be prepared for checking out of the residence halls. Your student may feel sadness leaving friends for the summer and moving out can be a stressful time. Provide assistance but make sure you follow the direction of your student – this allows them to still feel in control.
- Take time to reflect on your student's academic year. Recognize the hard work they put into being successful in their first year of college. Show your pride in their achievement. Discuss their plans for sophomore year in terms of living arrangements, selecting a major, and campus life.

Helpful Resources

Dean of the College, Arthur G. Coons Administrative Center (AGC); *3rd Floor*
(323) 259-2634

Dean of Students Office, Berkus Hall
(323) 259-2661

Career Services, Hameetman Career Center; Arthur G. Coons Administrative Center (AGC); *AGC 109*
(323) 259-2623

Student Life, Johnson Student Center (JSC); *JSC 102*
(323) 259-2918

Campus Dining/Marketplace, Johnson Student Center; *JSC – 2nd Floor*
(323) 259-2629

Office of Community Engagement, Johnson Student Activities Center; *Room 135B*
(323) 341-4692

Dean of Students – Disabilities Services, Berkus Hall
(323) 259-2969

Dean of Students – Student Success, Berkus Hall
(323) 259-2661

Emmons Student Wellness Center – Health & Counseling Services, Emmons Wellness Center
(323) 259-2657- Office; (323) 341-4141 – Hotline

Financial Aid, Arthur G. Coons Administrative Center; *AGC Room 119*
(323) 259-2548

Writing Center, Academic Commons; Ground Floor
jprebel@oxy.edu

Intercultural Affairs, Intercultural Community Center
(323) 259-2522

Office of Religious & Spiritual Life; Herrick Memorial Chapel and Interfaith Center
(323) 259-2621