



Parent Guide to the First Year College Student:

Tips and Contact Information

Prepared by Leigh Williamson
Updated by Lisa Kasper
Student Success Coordinator
Muskingum University
2010

My student's First Year Seminar Advisor is: _____

The common reading book for 2010 is:

Muskingum College Pictorial History by Heather Giffen, William Kerrigan, and Ryan Worbs

Muskingum University Mission Statement:

The mission of Muskingum University is to offer quality academic programs in the liberal arts and sciences in the setting of a residential, coeducational, church-related college and in the context of a caring community where individual fulfillment is encouraged and human dignity is respected. Its primary purpose is to develop-intellectually, spiritually, socially and physically-whole persons, by fostering critical thinking, positive action, ethical sensitivity and spiritual growth, so that they may lead vocationally productive, personally satisfying and socially responsible lives.

First Year Program Mission

The First Year Program is committed to:

- ✓ Campus-wide collaboration
- ✓ Successful transition to the academic expectations and campus life of college
- ✓ The education of the "whole person" as described in the Muskingum University mission
- ✓ Program improvement through continuous evaluation of data related to First Year academic achievement and campus engagement

Purpose of this Guide:

Any time a student leaves home to go to college, it can be a stressful situation for both parents and students. The purpose of this guide is to answer questions you may have, and to offer contact information for offices you may need throughout the academic year. We will do our best over the next four years to fulfill the Mission of the University, and are pleased that you will be a part of this experience. Some of the information given in this guide may help you as you move through this process with your student.

Letting Go:

When you leave your new college student on Move-In Day, you will probably feel a number of emotions. You will most likely feel proud of the accomplishments that brought your son or daughter to Muskingum University, excited about this new stage of development, anxious about how classes will go, and uncertain about how this change will effect the family as a whole. All of this is normal, and your student will be experiencing a wide range of emotions as well. While new students will be excited about “being on their own,” some are also terrified of **really** being on their own. They too will be anxious about how classes will go and whether they will succeed in college or not. Most students encounter some level of homesickness, and are surprised by this. Below are some of the most common issues related to letting go, and how you can best help your student and yourself cope with this very big change.

Why has my student been so tense and snappy over the last few weeks before heading off to college? You'd think it would be exciting.

The reality is that students are nervous about such a big change. Change is stressful on all parties. You are feeling this stress for your reasons, and students feel stress for their reasons. Leaving behind what is familiar and venturing into unknown territory is frightening. You may be more capable of rationalizing your feelings, and recognizing the source of this tension, but your student may not want to admit his feelings of anxiousness. Students will have difficulty sorting out how to separate from you, and still be part of the family they have always known. You can be helpful here, by sitting down with your child and explaining how you are feeling. This could open the door for the student to do the same. By doing this, you will model how to best open up about vulnerabilities and concerns.

What about homesickness?

Almost every first-year student experiences some level of homesickness, whether that student has moved to Muskingum from across the country, or across town. If your student has spent very little time away from home in the past, it may be more difficult. However, there are a number of ways you can help a student through this period of adjustment.

1. Encourage your student to stay on campus! When here, students are able to discover the variety of activities that take place over the weekend and throughout the week.
2. Encourage your student to get involved! By getting “connected” with other students and organizations, your student will become an active member of this new community. We offer many opportunities for students to “get connected.”

3. Reassure students that they are still part of the family, even though they are not living at home. Also reassure them that your family will always be there for support and rest from school.
4. Reassure students that the first order of business, and their main job, is to focus on life *at school*, academically and socially. Students need not worry about the family at home; you will get support for yourselves when needed.
5. Send care packages. Students like to hear about what is going on back at home, so throw in a newspaper, notes from siblings, food, etc. This will reassure them that life is moving on at home, and that they are still a part of it.

I know that my child is a legal adult, but how can I still offer guidance while I am trying to give room to grow?

Your role has switched from daily monitor to part-time consultant. The best way you can help your student is by encouraging the student to resolve their own problems. Parents often want to rush in and fix a problem, but by doing this, the child hasn't learned to take responsibility for it. Your student may discuss the issue and their feelings about it, but then your job is to help the student figure out how to tackle it. Help them to examine the options and consequences and, as much as possible, support the decisions they make. You might even share examples from your own life about how a situation initially appeared to be a "mistake" but then became an opportunity. Allow the student to make appropriate contacts and follow through. This is how you will help your student make independent decisions.

What kind of contact should I expect with my student in the first few months of being away?

In order to establish their independence, many students will withdraw a little from frequent contact. Don't be alarmed. This "distance" is mainly a matter of adjustment. However, while some students may not call or email very often, others may be in constant contact. If this is the case, the more reassurance you can offer, and the more trust you display, the more you will encourage independence, and the stronger the student becomes.

I don't understand why my student is so stressed. Living in the residence hall, you don't have to cook or clean, just go to class and study. What's so stressful about that?

It's great that students who live in the residence halls don't have to worry about keeping up an apartment and cooking for themselves, but there are many other factors about residence hall living that can typically be stressful. Roommates, even if they are someone your student has known and liked, are stressful. This is a living environment that most students aren't familiar with for this long of a

period of time, and under these circumstances. If your student is feeling stressed about roommate or residence hall issues, she should speak to the RA (Resident Assistant) and get suggestions on how to resolve concerns.

The other stressors include new freedoms, new friendships, and new social situations. As your student develops a stronger sense of identity, these will be less of a stress, but initially, it can be quite overwhelming. Give your student some time to settle in to this new way of life.

My student always made A's, with an occasional B, in high school with seven classes a day. Now there are only a few classes a day, and lots of free time. Shouldn't I be able to expect the same kinds of grades in college?

Not usually. Although many students earned high grades in school before college, they have now ventured into a level of academic expectation with which they are largely unfamiliar. Most students come to college without sound study strategies, and it takes time and effort to learn them. The level of college reading is much more difficult and there is a great deal more of it. There will be fewer graded assignments to base the semester grade on. Taking notes in a college classroom is quite different from notes in a high school classroom. All of these areas will be discussed within the context of the First Year Seminar class, but there are additional opportunities for guidance on them as well. You should encourage your student to speak to the professor about questions or uncertainties about course content or an assignment, and to attend tutorials and other review sessions when they are offered. The Student Success Center in Patton Hall offers free peer tutoring in most subjects Sunday through Thursday from 4:00 PM to 9:00 PM.

Conclusion:

There will be many times during the college years when you will want to jump in and fix problems for your student. Letting go is a challenging transition for all. However, the best thing you can do for each other is to reassure your child, and yourself, that you will all make it through this period. Your child will grow more confident with each step.

Calendar of Possible Stressors and Issues:

The stressors listed below are common for most all first year students. As you talk to your son/daughter throughout the first year, keep some of these in mind, and it may help you to understand where the stress points are. Often, the student may not be aware of what is actually causing the stress.

August/September

- Leaving the security of home, family, friends, and everything familiar in their hometown

- Facing the unknown --- new friends, new experiences, new expectations, new environment, new demands, etc. It's all new!
- Sudden independence --- with independence comes the responsibility of making your own decisions and dealing with the consequences
- Testing the value system when exposed to new situations and people
- Living in a close community in the dorm. Adjusting to a roommate is tough, and dorm rooms don't offer much privacy. Some students aren't used to sharing a bathroom at all, much less with their 30 closest friends! (Students who commute may feel "left out" by not living in the dorm. Getting involved in groups and activities is a good way to avoid this feeling.)
- Feeling the need to decide on a major and future profession
- Social pressure and fitting in with the right group. Sometimes it takes a while to find just the right group of new friends.
- Learning how to manage time --- learning how to juggle the new academic demands, social opportunities, and work responsibilities
- Lots of new academic expectations from self, faculty, and family

October

- Mid-term exams and early assessment grades
- Feelings of academic inadequacy and lack of skills
- Conflicts with roommates, family, and friends as adjustment continues
- Thinking about classes for next semester

November

- Growing academic demands as the semester nears an end
- Finalizing a class schedule for the next semester
- Excitement about going home for the holidays, but also feeling nervous about going home after a few months of independence

December

- Social and academic demands during finals
- Preparing for exams, finishing papers & projects, and concern about end of semester grades
- Preparing to leave new friends and new independence for a long break

The second semester brings its own anxieties that can be different from the first. If the student didn't make connections with new friends or groups, the feelings of isolation can affect academic success as well.

January

- Readjusting to the routines of school after a lengthy break
- Reconnecting with campus friends
- Facing the reality of first semester grades if they don't meet expectations. If this is the case, anxiety about abilities to succeed may grow. Instead, determine what didn't work well, and how best to change the patterns.

- Uncertainty about the major that seemed so perfect a few months earlier
- Evaluating the whole first semester

February

- The routine may become “boring”
- The winter weather
- Making plans for spring break
- Determining whether or not to join a fraternity/sorority

March

- Preparing for mid-term exams and early assessment grades
- Spring break expectations
- Lack of money

April/May

- Spring fever
- Preparing for finals
- Registering for fall classes
- Determining whether to take summer courses or not
- Social activities as the semester draws to a close
- Leaving friends for the summer
- Feeling pressure to find meaningful employment for the summer
- Readjusting to home for an extended period
- Anticipation or anxiety about the semester grades

These are just a few of the new issues your student might face during the first year of college. You can help by continuing to listen to concerns, offering words of encouragement, and keeping the lines of communication open. Many students will base their choice of major on the perceived expectations of parents and family members.

Money Issues:

Many college freshmen have had minimal experience dealing with money. Consequently, some students will have problems managing their money wisely and can end up spending more money than they have. In order to avoid this problem, here are some helpful practices to encourage:

- ✓ *Set a budget!* Most students will need to set a budget for each month. They may think they don't need money for food and other things, but it does miraculously add up. Having a set budget will allow them to gain confidence as they learn to manage their own money and expenses. Soon, they will need to be doing this on a larger scale with rent, utility bills, car

payments, student loans, etc. If they learn the skills now, they will manage money better later.

- ✓ ***Balance a checkbook:*** If your student has not had to balance a checkbook before, or has never had a checking account before, it is now time to learn. It takes practice to keep track of transactions, and you want to help them avoid a bounced check and penalty fees.
- ✓ ***Avoid credit card lures!*** At Muskingum University, we do not encourage solicitation of students by credit card companies. Many students fall into the same danger as some adults when it comes to misconceptions about credit card debt. When credit cards are used wisely, as in the case of an emergency, and then paid immediately, they can be beneficial. How each person perceives “an emergency” is the real issue. Unless your student has a strong sense of money management already, it may be best to leave the credit cards alone for a while.
- ✓ ***The starving student syndrome:*** This is a real phenomenon because many students arrive on campus with champagne taste on a ramen noodle budget. The adjustment is hard, but real. Managing a monthly budget can help reduce this problem, and an extra \$20 in the care package doesn't hurt either!

The key to good money management is communication, and knowing the differences between wants and needs. The more students know about these things, the better off they will be now and in the future.

Academic Advice:

What exactly is an academic advisor?

Academic advisors know about Muskingum University policies and procedures, so they can assist your student with navigating and interpreting requirements of the Liberal Arts Essentials (LAE) curriculum and major programs. This role goes beyond the basic course scheduling, however, and becomes an integral part of the student's academic process. The advisor will get to know the student and serve as guide along the pathway to a college degree.

Advisor Responsibilities:

- ✓ Help students define and develop realistic goals
- ✓ Identify special needs
- ✓ Connect students to available resources and make appropriate referrals
- ✓ Assist students in planning consistent with their goals, interests, aptitudes, and limitations

- ✓ Monitor progress toward goals and offer encouragement
- ✓ Discuss the linkage between academic preparation and careers
- ✓ Be accessible to meet with students at designated times and by appointment
- ✓ Communicate University policy and procedures
- ✓ Assist students in understanding decision-making skills
- ✓ Maintain confidentiality

Advisee Responsibilities:

- ✓ Gather relevant decision-making information prior to meeting
- ✓ Clarify goals, interests, and values
- ✓ Become knowledgeable about programs, policies, requirements, and procedures
- ✓ Be aware of important dates and deadlines (i.e. last day to withdraw from a class)
- ✓ Accept responsibility for decisions you make
- ✓ Schedule regular appointments
- ✓ Be on time for appointments
- ✓ Be an active learner by participating fully in the advising experience
- ✓ Ask questions if you don't understand an issue or have a specific concern
- ✓ Follow through with referrals made by the advisor
- ✓ Keep a personal record of advising meetings and ALL important documents
- ✓ Keep an advising portfolio
- ✓ Recognize that it is ultimately YOUR responsibility to keep track of all information, policies, and procedures related to your college work

Parent Responsibilities:

- ✓ Encourage your student to schedule regular appointments with the advisor, not just when there is a problem
- ✓ Point out skills or an ability that you know the student has consistently demonstrated. Sometimes students will overlook these and need a reminder
- ✓ Support the student's exploration of new areas of study and interests
- ✓ Keep the lines of communication open by talking about courses that are enjoyable and asking how well the student is performing in those classes, too. Don't just focus on the problem area
- ✓ Encourage the student to talk to professors during scheduled office hours, utilize tutoring, and meet with an advisor
- ✓ Celebrate your student's successes and encourage him to seek help to tackle problems
- ✓ Help your student to advocate for himself and take responsibility for solving issues and problems

- ✓ Encourage your student to get involved on campus. The more connections a student makes, the more meaningful the entire college experience will be.
- ✓ Encourage your student to talk with one of the campus counselors to discuss any personal issues which are interfering with school
- ✓ Understand that sometimes withdrawing from a course might be the best action, but it **MUST** be done before the deadline, and realize that it may effect other areas, such as financial aid, depending on the resulting credit hours remaining

FERPA (The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act):

The best way to find out how your student is doing academically is to maintain clear communication. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits the disclosure of private information like grades, even to the student's parents. A student must sign a FERPA Release form in order for any University representative to disclose information to parents or anyone else. Please understand that we are very limited in what we can discuss with you. That's why it is important to maintain open lines of communication with your student.

Smart Choices and Self-Responsibility:

Although you will want your child to share as much of their college life with you as possible, it takes time to develop a more adult, mature relationship. When your student feels he's being treated in a more adult manner, he is more likely to respond in the same way. Consider the following food for thought in your on-going efforts to encourage smart choices and self-responsibility.

- Ask questions that show you're interested, not intrusive. They have enough quizzes in class.
- Instead of asking about the grades, ask what your student is *learning*. After all, the goal is learning, not just making the grade. Students want you to feel proud of what they know and what they think.
- Taking risks leads to growth, but it can also lead to the occasional "mistake." If a student is too afraid of disappointing you, she may avoid taking a risk that could have turned out to be very positive. Encourage your student to discuss difficult decisions with you, but always reassure her that you'll be there with continued support if the risk doesn't turn out as expected.
- Don't try to "fix" things. "Helicopter parents" don't teach students to learn problem solving skills. These skills are crucial in all aspects of life. There are plenty of faculty and staff at Muskingum to help students when something happens.

- Student involvement in clubs and organizations is not only a way to find positive ways to “fit in,” it can also facilitate better time management and coping strategies out of necessity. Involved students generally show greater academic success and develop much closer bonds with the college. Success and involvement are directly connected.
- Allow and accept new ideas and opinions. College students are going to be exposed to a diverse group of students, faculty, and staff with different views and beliefs. They may learn things in class that cause them to think differently than they did before. This is all part of the growth process. Listen to what your student has to say, and encourage independent thought, even if you don’t always agree. They have years of learning ahead of them, and plenty of time to continue to grow in their world view.
- Remember that you are a role model. Find out what your student is learning, and do some learning on your own. This will show that you’re interested, you care, and want to talk.
- The student who feels mistrusted will often avoid talking about problems with parents, and will likely seek support outside of positive avenues. Avoidance doesn’t help parent or child and keeping secrets about academic, personal, or social problems will only allow them to grow into bigger problems. TRUST is the key to keeping the lines of communication open!

Contact Information for Specific Concerns:

Please note that all phone numbers are preceded by (740)826-

Concern or Issue	Contact Information
Academic Standing	Registrar's Office x 8164
Alumni & Institutional Advancement	Development Office x 8131
Bookstore	Main Number x 8170
Campus Police	Main Number x 8155
Tutoring Services	Student Success Coordinator x 6154
Career Services	Student Life x 8080
Computer Issues	CNS x 8085
Counseling Services	Student Life x 8080
Degree Audits	Registrar's Office x 8164
Disciplinary Cases: Academic	Academic Affairs Office x 8122
Disciplinary Cases: Residential	Student Life x 8080
Immigration	International Admissions x 8127
International Program Opportunities	International Office x 8127
Leadership Opportunities	Student Life x 8080
Leave-of-Absence	Academic Affairs Office x 8122
Library	Circulation Desk x 8152
Medical Concerns	Wellness Center x 8150
Billing & Payments	Business x 8111
Registrar	Registrar's Office x 8164
Religious Life	Campus Minister x 8120
Residential Hall Concerns	Student Life x 8080
Student Absences	Academic Affairs Office x 8122
Financial Aid, Scholarships, Grants	Student Financial Services x 8139
Transfer & AP Credits	Registrar's Office x 8164
Vice President for Academic Affairs	Academic Affairs Office x 8122
VP for Student Affairs/Dean of Students	Student Life x 8080
Withdrawal from the College	Academic Affairs Office x 8122