Transitions for New Students and Families

The transition to college is often a time of great excitement for students; many will discover new friendships, social activities, and academic opportunities. This transition may also represent a time of fear and anxiety; the same adventures that offer excitement may also cause some to feel uneasy about exploring their new environment. Many will have their first taste of freedom and embark on a process of self-exploration and individuation both personally and academically. Others may look forward to similar experiences, but began their college adventure at another institution and decided to continue at Salisbury University. No matter the starting point, the opportunities and tasks are the same.

One of the greatest balancing acts for students include adjusting new relationships and activities to include communication with those who are not at college with them. Many students will have loved ones who miss them and may have increased phone, texting, or web communication with these individuals. Technology may assist students with managing the need/desire to communicate, but time will still remain as a factor that must include academic demands and college life in order for students to feel successful.

Unlike high school, where one’s schedule is heavily structured by classes, assigned activities, and routine times to spend with friends and family, a typical day-in-the-life of a college student is much less-structured. Students must continually make decisions about how they will spend their time and many are unaccustomed to having this responsibility. The temptation to avoid doing work can be strong. There may be many alternatives available to students that overshadow their need to complete academic assignments. However, those who adhere to schedules similar to high school and incorporate study times during available day time hours, often feel more accomplished and have much of their evenings and weekends available for leisure activities.

In addition to the student’s transition, there is also a need for families to transition. Regardless if the student lives at home or away, parents/guardians may need to adjust expectations of their student now that he/she is at college. Family roles may change; one way to manage this change is to be open and honest when experiencing them. It’s okay to communicate your concerns, frustrations, and excitement; these feelings are natural and regardless if verbalized or not, the change is often noticed. Enlist the support of your family and loved ones. Reflection is often recommended during this time. This may be an opportunity for parents/guardians to reinvest in self, not only in those around you.

Many students arrive at college well-equipped to deal with life stressors and challenges. They also may discover that as they begin to navigate this new terrain, they need additional tools to help them succeed. SU’s Student Counseling Services staff is available to assist new students. Staff may help students establish healthy boundaries and skills to aide with transitioning to their new environment in addition to other mental health concerns. Counseling staff is available Monday-Friday 8am-5pm academic year, 8-4:30 summer. http://www.salisbury.edu/counseling/

Written by: Heather McGee, LGPC and Tasha Thomas, LCPC
Student Counseling Services