

# Who Are You and What Have You Done With My Child?

## *The W-Curve Explained*

*Helping Parents Understand and Navigate  
Challenges Faced by First-Year Students*

*Terree L. Stevenson, M.Ed  
Director of Multicultural Student Affairs  
Ohio Wesleyan University  
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Often, I am asked by incoming students and their families to share some advice of about making the transition to college. Families may feel that since I have worked at various institutions over a number of years, I may have picked some knowledge along my journey. Yes, I can say that I have acquired some pearls wisdom to impart upon the new students and their families to help in the transition to college.

If you will live on campus, my first pearl of wisdom is you will be moving into room measuring 9 x14 with two or three other people, therefore, space will be limited. Please do not bring all your worldly possessions with you on move-in day, as you will probably take half of what you brought to campus back home. It is like trying to put a size 9 foot in a 8 ½ shoe. You can try to wiggle, stretch, or even use a shoehorn...but it will not fit! If you can, bring only the essentials and plan to deliver the rest of their belongings in two weeks after your student and their roommate(s) have settled into their new space. If you cannot return in two weeks, buy gifts cards at area stores or online for your student to make their own purchases. It will be an opportunity for them to get off campus or receive packages to their campus mailbox. In addition, nine out of ten chances they probably will not like anything that you purchased for them.

Second, when looking for a bank to open an account for your student, try to find a common bank located in your hometown and near campus. This will be helpful for you to make direct deposits to your student's account. If you cannot find a common bank, get two ATM cards – one for you and one for your student. You can use the ATM card to make direct deposits to your student's account especially since you will probably make lots of deposits and limited withdrawals.

Lastly, do not forget to bring your birth certificate and social security card with you to campus. You will need both forms of identification to complete any paperwork for possible campus employment. However, do not laminate your social security card! Although it is great idea to keep the card intact, laminating your card invalidates it...trust me. Some of the lessons learned were personal.

Usually at this time, parents pull me to the side to ask me what they should expect....I mean REALLY expect. In other words, what should they to expect and how do they prepare for the first year of college? I smile and say, "Expect a curve. The W-Curve." Usually I am met with a very curious look and which leads me to explain that The W-Curve is a student development theory that chronicles the highs and lows or peaks and valleys that most first year students experience. "However, I think The W-Curve applies not to just the first year experience, but all new experiences. Whether it is a new job, a new relationship, or a new living environment; you can see aspects of The W-Curve. Expect every year your student is in college except for senior year. In the senior year, The W-Curve happens backwards."

After that brief explanation of The W-Curve, usually the response is a face with wrinkled brows and a slight scowl. I call it 'Now-I-am-really-lost. Just-tell-me-what-to-expect-what-to-do-and-what-to-say' face? Again, I smile and say "Let me explain" and I sit down with families to share the essence of The W-Curve including what it is, what to expect, when to expect it, and, most importantly, how to survive it. I developed this handout to help explain The W-Curve to families in terms that are practical, easy to understand, and provide some 'a-ha' information to help you relate (and even tolerate) your student during their first year of college. This is only a guide. Do

not panic if one stage last longer than anticipated or if you do not see the expected changes in your student. Again, this is only guide. However, I would encourage you to keep this handy near your phone, on the refrigerator, or next to the bed for quick reference....you know, just in case.

## The W-Curve

The W-Curve is a student development theory used to explain the emotional challenges faced by first year students during the freshmen year as they become acclimated to new environment. The W-Curve theory was developed by William Zeller and Robert Moiser, who conducted an intense study of first year student to gain a better understanding of what first year students experience. Zeller and Moiser they believed that *“As students arrive on campus, there generally is a strong sense of welcoming from the campus community. Other new students quickly become friends, returning students become mentors, and staff and faculty are available to assist them through a variety of first week programs. The initial sense of freedom new students feel often is exhilarating. For traditional aged students, moving away from parental oversight and taking responsibility for one’s own lifestyle creates a strong positive feeling.”* (Journal of College and University Student Housing, Volume 23, No. 2, 1993. Culture Shock and The First-Year Experience by William J. Zeller and Robert Mosier, 1993, n.p.).

Zeller and Moiser studied a multitude of first students across the country to gain a better insight on emotional challenges students face during their first year. What they found out is that when your student arrives on campus, they begin to feel at ease in their new environment. They also begin to meet new friends, identify positive role models, develop new interests, explore new passions, expand their boundaries, and relish a new sense of freedom.

As students become acclimated to their new environment, they will begin to experience changes in their social and emotional development. They will experience these challenges in various stages.

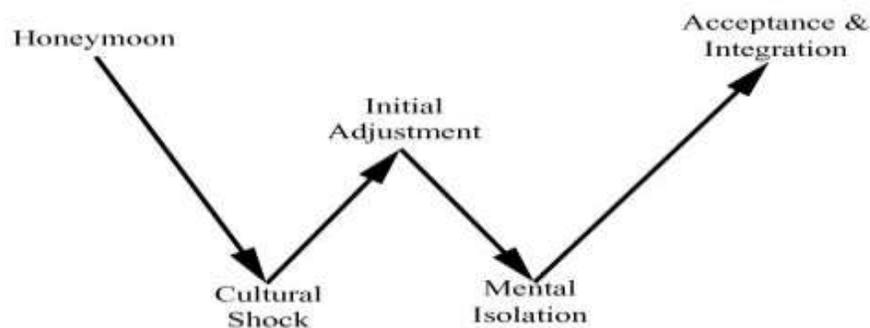
**In other words**, the student you dropped off at school in the fall will be different from the student that returns to your home over the breaks. Deep breath. Yes, your student will push boundaries, develop new interests, discover new passions, and gain new perspectives. Again, breathe deeply. It is okay...this is normal. One more deep breath. Exhale. It will be okay. Just know that change will occur in your student and this handout will help you through the stages of The W-Curve as you and your student experience them. This handout will allow you to see why emotional challenges may occur, how your student will learn from their experience, and how college is an opportunity for growth and development for your student. For students of color and first generation college students, there are additional challenges within The W-Curve that will also be outline of this handout.

Remember...it is normal (and expected) for your student to experience challenges presented by The W-Curve. Remember....you is not alone! Many other parents/guardians are experiencing

some of the same things you are. As I shared earlier, I believe that The W-Curve can be applied to every year of college (except senior year) and when entering new environments and stages of life. Trust me. All of this information will all make sense shortly. Please keep reading and, for the next year, have this handout handy at all times.

***Pearl of Wisdom:** Remember college is about attending classes, gaining knowledge, interacting with professors, and working towards a degree. However, college is also about exploring your interests, engage with others members of the campus community, learning from others and about yourself, and eating lots of pizza. As you travel along on this journey with your student, ask them questions. Many questions. Compliment them on exploring their new interests. Share in their new passions. Get to know your new (but familiar) student. By asking questions and getting to know your “new” student, you will help ease transitions and help alleviate fears that your student may have about returning home to visit.*

## The W-Curve Stages



### Stage One

**Stage One: Honeymoon:** The Honeymoon stage is first on The W-Curve. While in this stage, students will examine their value systems and beliefs, challenge their known sense of self, redefine their motivations, and incorporate elements while shedding their adolescent perspective.

**In other words:** Life could not be more wonderful! Your student will experience happiness, bliss, a sense of freedom, anxiety and excitement, define new boundaries, explore new interests, test limits, develop a new identity, and feel more mature as they are making “adult decisions”...and they will experience all of this at the same time! Life is great! They are meeting new people who may be different from their friends and family, taking classes that interest them versus a pre-set curriculum (like in high school), choosing what they want to eat (pizza and cereal), spending money on items they want (not necessarily need), and staying up or even out until the wee hours of the morning (or all night).

Some students even put on a new persona or identity. Maybe they will create a new nickname for themselves, wear their hair different, dress differently, or create two separate identities (campus and home). Some students even change their eating patterns. Your student who ate two cheeseburgers at the family cookout this summer may decide to become a vegetarian, no longer eats meat, and does not want meat in the house when they come home. They may even suggest the entire family eat Tofurkey for Thanksgiving instead of a traditional turkey (we will address that later). Residential students will feel Residence Life paired them with their Soul-Ro-Mate (soul roommate). How did Res Life know that they would fall in love with their new roomie and it would last forever..... or at least until the next stage. Either way....change will and has occurred

**For Students of Color and First Generation College Students:** This stage brings a sense of pride in their accomplishment and of achieving the dream – college! For students of color, they are experiencing feelings of excitement in the nuances of that college brings, but also anxiety when they realize they are one of a few students of color on campus. The fear of being marginalized and rejected based on their race, ethnicity, or national origin; stereotypes and societal and cultural expectations are very real. Students of color and first generation college students share with the fear of persona change in they fear their changes in and/or new interests and passions may not be accepted back home and/or in their neighborhoods.

**When and How Long:** The Honeymoon stage begins in August as the academic year is opening and until mid to late September. As students continue to explore and develop, the newness of college begins to wear off and an established routine begins to emerge. New friends become old friends, sleep deprivation is setting in, and pizza and cereal do not have the same appeal.

**How Can I Help?:** Your student may want or not want to share their college experiences with you. You must allow them to keep some parts of their college experience to themselves. I always suggest you ask your student open ended questions. This will encourage your student to analyze, articulate, and reflect on their experience as they are sharing. Simple questions like: *How was your day? What is happening in your English class? How are you feeling about the term? What is your favorite thing to eat on campus?* This will show your student that you are interested, but not nosy. **Do not** (I repeat - do not) ask questions like: *Did you do your homework? What time did you get in this weekend? Did you brush your teeth?* Your student may receive these questions as though you do not believe in their ability to make their own decisions. They want you to trust them to make sound decisions, not parent them by reminding them of what to do. Make your topics of conversations about your student's experience and growth, not parenting.

Additionally, students may experience some level of homesickness during this stage. Try not to share every detail from home (like who called, what was for dinner, what daily mail arrived at the house, so-and-so asked about them). Please do not say “*You missed a great.....*” or “*Oh, wish you were here*”. Your student may feel life should have stopped when they left and life at home is continuing without them. They may feel left out of the family dynamics and experience levels of isolation. Over sharing the daily home life could only increase these feelings and increase homesickness. Allow your student to talk and dominate the conversation. This will encourage them to share this wonderful experience with you.

If you should have a death or tragedy occur in your family (this includes any family pets or close friends), call the Dean of Students, Vice President of Student Affairs, Counseling Services, or Residential Life Office(s). Please share the information with the student affairs professionals in these offices. If they are aware of the emergency, they will reach out to offer support to your student in your physical absence. The support of these offices will make a difference as the student tries to grapple with such a loss or tragic event.

***Pearls of Wisdom:*** *Work out a calling plan with your student. Do you plan to talk daily? Twice a week? Once a month? Yearly? Set up expectations for calling or “checking-in” before classes begin. As the Honeymoon Stage develops, students may not stop their new lifestyle to call home every two hours or may not even share with you some of their new interests or friends. It is normal. Just be honest with your student in terms of what you need and encourage your student to be honest in what they need in regards to “checking in”. Compromise and find a common ground for checking-in that everyone will feel accept. Remember, this is a growth experience for everyone.*

## **Stage Two**

**Stage 2: Cultural Shock:** In this stage, students try to develop a routine to adapt to their new environment. Whether it is in or outside the classroom, students are trying to find stability and familiarity in an unknown environment. Zeller and Mosier states “*the unfamiliar territory of the college classroom also creates dissonance. Large lecture classes, unclear guidelines for note taking and studying, and unfamiliar or somewhat distant faculty may work together in producing potential adjustment difficulties for a student*”. Outside the classroom, students are interacting with others that are distinctly different, diverse, and have varied experiences upon which they base their values and beliefs. These engagements can cause students to question and compare what they knew to be true and what they know now. (Zeller & Mosier, 1993, n.p.).

**In other words,** the novelty is waning and rigors of college are being recognized. Students can become completely overwhelmed by expectations of faculty and family, the diversity of the campus community, the unlimited opportunities for campus involvement, managing the vast amounts of time between classes, and learning to live without the day-to-day physical contact of their family support system. They have lost their Soul-Ro-Mate as they begin to realize that the strangers who became friends are now strangers again. People they thought were their friends and with whom they had so much in common....well, now not so much. Students can become unsure of who they are and what they believe. Yes, even those students who are strongly self-assured will begin to question themselves. No, not your student? Oh yes, your student. Example? Sure.

For instance, your student has shared with everyone that they want to be a doctor since they were in the second grade. They have attended no less than three science camps every summer, excelled in all of their science classes, and won the National Young Scientist of the Year award all four years of high school. They may have told people on campus to refer to them as ‘Doc’ (remember creating a new identity in the Honeymoon stage). During their first semester of college, they are performing poorly in their Chemistry 101 course as the material is more challenging than they expected and dread the class. However, they enroll in a creative writing

class and find an unknown passion. They are beginning to question what they knew to be true (excelling in the sciences), what they know is true (poor performance), and what they now believe (maybe not becoming a doctor). The mere thought of answering the question everyone will pose of *'I thought you wanted to be a doctor?'* is draining. This can be extremely overwhelming as students are fearful that they would be judged or disappoint others at home for not following through with their professed dreams and goals.

During this stage, students begin to question cultural, societal, and personal beliefs. Once mesmerized, they are now challenged by their new environment. Students begin to identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as likes and dislikes. They are trying to embrace the things that are new and different while looking for things that are familiar and comfortable. Homesickness can resurface as students begin to miss the comforts and amenities of home (see, they do miss you).

There is a smorgasbord of activities, programs, and opportunities available on campus and your student may want to sample all that college has to offer. This is can be a challenge as your student may still be learning how to manage their time as well as their emotions and is unsure how to do either or both.

**For Students of Color and First Generation College Students:** During this stage, students of color experience intense feelings of isolation, particularly students of color at rural colleges where cultural opportunities and experiences are very limited. For example, the local grocery store may not offer cultural food items. Or a student who attends school in a rural area may not have access to ethnic hair care products or a hair professional who can style ethnic hair.

Additionally, students of color look for spaces and places of “cultural safety”. Cultural safety is where a student feels as though they can and will be accept for their cultural beliefs and values. In Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum’s book *'Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting in the Cafeteria'*, she states that students of color “need safe spaces to retreat to and regroup in the process of dealing with the daily stress of campus racism” (Tatum, 1993, p. 77). These spaces could be within cultural student organizations, offices where people of color work, or with offices created to support students of color. Students who identify as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered, or questioning (GLBTQ) also look for safe spaces on campus in the same feeling of safety.

**When and How Long?:** The Cultural Shock stage usually begins to occur about the 8th week of the fall term or about mid to late October. Students by this time have developed a routine, established a schedule, and found friends with common interests. They seek stability in a new environment and begin to venture away from unfamiliarity and unknowns. This stage concludes about late November as students begin to transition home for holiday breaks.

**How Can I Help?:** Continue to ask questions and limit sharing day-to-day details of life at home. Encourage your student to find student organizations and campus activities that capture their interests. By being active in organizations and activities, students will begin to meet others and build their campus support systems. Additionally, being active on campus will aid a student’s leadership development, increase communication skills through consistent interactions,

and bolster a time management skills. We will revisit how being active and involved on campus helps to aid a student's development.

Be sure your student has a planner or calendar to help record class assignments, meetings, and other important dates. I strongly encourage students not to rely on technology or cell phones to keep track of meetings and assignments. Sometimes these mechanisms are unavailable, lost, broken, or stolen. Invest \$5.00 in an alarm clock for your desk, \$5.00 in a student planner, and \$1.00 on a pencil. It will be some of your best investments ever!

***Pearls of Wisdom:** Send tangible love. Hallmark, Wal-Mart, and Target stores all sell cards for \$0.99. Buy a small stack of cards (do not forget the stamps). As you feel your student needs a pick-me-up; grab a card, write a quick note, and drop it in the mail. No matter what students say they absolutely love getting mail, especially mail not considered bills. Getting a card from home saying how much you love, how proud you are, and how much you believe in them will make a difficult time easier. Including an iTunes, McDonald's, Subway, or a gift card from area restaurants allows students to "escape" campus with a bright smile while feeling tangible love from home.*

## Stage Three

**Stage 3: Initial Adjustment:** The third stage of The W Curve is Initial Adjustment. In this stage, students are beginning to solidify their current with their past values and beliefs, establishing a sense of self, and building confidence. They are feeling more comfortable in making decisions for themselves, stronger in articulating their needs, work to strengthen campus relationships, and will seek out campus support and assistance. Students also feel they have grasp on the campus cultural norms and defining their place in the campus community. Cultural norms are defined as 'expectations and rules accepted and embraced by a culture or group. These norms help to guide the behavior of its members in any given situation. These cultural norms may vary widely across depending on cultural groups and established traditions' (Retrieved from [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_norms](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_norms) on January 30, 2012).

**In other words,** it is during this stage students are beginning to implant themselves in the campus community by participating in activities on campus, increasing their interactions with faculty, and becoming more comfortable with defining who they are while making decisions for themselves. With an increase in their confidence, they are less afraid to address challenges, share their feelings and concerns with others, and are willing to seek out campus resources for help and support. Academic, social, or professional resources are available on campus and help to provide additional support as students continue to develop (most of these services are free). They feel part of the campus community as they have begun to understand and embrace campus cultural norms including campus traditions, community expectations, and lingo thus students feel included in the campus community.

**For Students of Color and First Generation Students:** First generation students have begun to feel more comfortable in navigating the college environment on their own as they do not have any historical reference from home to fall upon. Students of color are beginning to feel more comfortable on campus as they have identified support systems, safe space, and trusted mentors.

Both students of color and first generation students still confront thoughts of doubts in their space in and outside the classroom. Feelings of inadequacies still plague these students, but as positive feedback from professors and grades help to support belief in their skills and abilities to academically compete. Socially, they begin to accept leadership positions within student organizations that they are active and feel as though they are part of the group or find themselves in diverse social circles as an accepted member.

**When and How Long:** The Initial Adjustment Stage begins in late November until about early January. This is usually when the semester is about to ending and the next transition is getting ready to take place as students are looking to go home for the holiday break. This stage overlaps with the next stage on The W-Curve.

**How Can I Help?:** Everyone wants to hear words of encouragement and praise - this includes your student. Tell your student how proud you are of their accomplishments and achievements. Ask your student what classes they expect to take the following semester, **BUT CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY!!!** You do not want to ask the question like this ‘*Why did you choose those classes?*’, but ask the question like this ‘*Wow, those classes sound interesting. What made you decided on that schedule?*’ Can you see how latter sounds a little less judgmental and little more like an inquiry? Students want you to be proud of the achievements, but they also want you to feel proud of the decisions they made for themselves.

As the time for your student to transition home for holiday breaks approaches, be proactive in your preparation. First, reassure your student how excited you are they coming home. Your student may feel left out of the family dynamics. Life did not stop when they left home and they may feel like an outsider. They may also feel guilty for not wanting to leave campus to come home, as they may have to lose some elements of their freedom and ability to make their own decisions. Your reassurance can help them feel as though they have not “lost” their place in the family or home.

Second, establish an agreement (not rules) on family expectations. Remember, your student has lived the last three-four months only with rules and expectations they have established for themselves. For example, establishing the expectation of an acceptable time for your student to come home if they are out with friends. Yes, you should have this conversation **BEFORE** your student comes home from college and not at 4:00 a.m. in the morning when you are upset that your student is just arriving home. In that moment, neither you nor your student is listening to each other or your needs. If you wait to have this conversation, it could result in you and your student experiencing a contentious holiday break. You may expect that you will eat dinner every night as a family like you used to do, but your student may have already made dinner plans that do not include you and/or the family. Sleeping until noon may not be acceptable to you, but your student may feel ‘*how many college students are awake before noon while on a holiday break?*’ It is imperative everyone talks about family expectations in order for your student to have a smooth transition home for the holidays. Ready? Set? Talk!

***Pearls of wisdom:*** ***YOU CANNOT CHANGE!!*** You cannot change anything during your student’s first year of college. You cannot change your address, employment, marital status, hairstyle, or color,....you cannot change a single thing! College is a mammoth change in a

*student's life. They have to feel some sense of familiarity. If everything is changing around them (their interests, friends, passions, perspective), they can become overwhelmed by all of the changes and unsure of their place on campus and at home. There are some things that must stay the same and those things are you and your household.....at least for next 12 months. I know you have watched hours of HGTV, bought paint, and even new furniture in anticipation of changing your student's room into a den or guest room. Your student's siblings may have even drawn straws to see who gets the room next. Even if your student says it does not matter and they do not care what you do to their room, I am here to tell it **DOES** matter! When your student comes home for break and they are staying in their "old" room, now called the guest room, they will feel like a guest and not a member of the family. It is important your student know that they have space in your family and in your home. So, keep HGTV on DVR until next year.*

## **Stage Four**

**Stage Four: Mental Isolation:** The next stage of The W-Curve is Mental Isolation. Students in this stage are usually confronting unfamiliar and unexpected changes that are occurring. It is in this stage that students begin to see fundamental differences and changes in society, friends, family, and themselves. Discovering these differences can be surprising to students in that they do not understand why the changes are occurring and they may not see how they themselves may have changed. Factors that may contribute to feelings of isolation are not always internal, but could be external factors. Situations, challenges, or obstacles faced by friends and loved ones are out of the control of students, however, a student could feel helpless, conflicted, or unsure of how to support. This could be especially true if the external situation is occurring at home. The student may not physically be at home; but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually are connected home versus campus.

Additionally, students are challenged by not knowing who they are at this stage of their life. Students also try to converge two different lives and can find difficulty in one life blending into the other. This can be specifically challenging for those students of color and first generation college students.

**In other words,** this stage will be very difficult for your student. First, students can experience conflict as they attempt to blend their campus life with their home life. Sometimes students are confused as they are treated as an adult on campus where they are fully held accountable and responsible, but when transitioning home they are treated as a child again. Your student may also not feel as though who they are on campus will not be embraced by those at home. The fear of rejection of who they are now and not who they were is so great that students sometimes live different lives - one on campus and one at home.

Secondly, students are still trying to "be there" for friends, family, and themselves while still trying to identify who they are as an individual. They try to "be" everything to everyone and feel a great sense of struggle and conflict and they feel a great sense of pressure to find this identity quickly. Sometimes situations are factors from home that a student has no control, but perceives that life could be better if they were home to address the situation. The student's body may be on campus, they their mind and spirit are at home. This type of campus disconnect only exacerbates

the situation and could lead to loss of concentration and focus, poor grades, and personality changes.

Weather is another external factor that can affect students in this stage of The W-Curve. The ‘winter blues is a common affliction for those who live in our northern climates...and characterized by feelings of sadness and depression that occur in the winter months when the temperatures drop and the days grow short.’ (Grohol, 2007, n.p.).

As the weather becomes colder, students begin to layer clothes to stay warm. The extra layers of clothing, heavy boots and coat in addition to a backpack filled with books can be weighty on their bodies and well as their spirits. The lack of sunlight, dead trees and grass, limited outdoor activities, and long periods of time indoors may contribute to the feelings of isolation.

**For Students of Color and First Generation Students:** Students of color will struggle with possible dual identities as they try to merge their old and new personas. Fear of being perceived of “acting white”, students of color often do not share their new persona, interests, and experience at home. Students of color and first generation college students also have anxiety about sharing their experience with family and friends. Exposure to opportunities and diverse people as well as new activities will expand their interests and increase their knowledge in various subject matters. This could cause feelings of guilt, shame, or superiority as they feel like they are “outgrowing” their friends and family. These students feel it is better not to share to avoid these feelings than to invite their friends and family to share in the college experience with them. This can cause feelings of isolation as they feel no one understands how they feel or will be accepting of who they are becoming.

**When and How Long:** The Mental Isolation Stage begins about early December until late March. With spring arriving and the end of the academic year approaching, students begin to feel a greater sense of accomplishment than the feelings of isolation and helping to led to the last stage of The W-Curve.

**How Can I Help?:** This stage will be difficult to aid your student. Be sure to continue your discussion on family expectations (not rules) and encourage your student to contribute to the conversation. Ask questions about how they are feeling and listen. Reassure your student that you love them for who they are and you also love the person they are trying to become. Share personal stories of times in your life when you experienced isolation, unhappiness, feeling conflicted, or had doubts. Do not tell them ‘You will get over it. It will get better’ because what is ‘over it’ and ‘better’ for you may not be the same for your student. Instead share you can understand (not know) how they feel and ask them what they need from you in terms of support. This is empowering your student to tell you what they need from you and you not telling them what you think they need.

***Pearls of Wisdom:** A good way to help your student feel reconnected to the family and reassured that you love them is for your student to have an opportunity for fun one-on-one time with everyone in the household. Whether it is going to a movie, dinner, fixing dinner together, or going out for coffee, it should be something that is special for you both. Anything you do with your student, even if it is 15 minutes, will create a memory that will last a lifetime.*

*Additionally, try one of your student's new interests or passions. Read a chapter in a book they are reading for class to discuss one-on-one. Try an exercise class or another interest. Trying a passion of your student will demonstrate you are interested in what are doing and who they are becoming. Include the Tofurkey at the Thanksgiving dinner.....you never know.....you might like it*

## **Stage Five**

**Stage Five: Acceptance and Integration:** This is the final stage of The W-Curve. According to Alexander Astin's Theory of Involvement "...students learn more the more they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. An involved student is one who devotes considerable energy to academics, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations and activities, and interacts often with faculty. Astin states that the quality and quantity of the student's involvement will influence the amount of student learning and development. True involvement requires the investment of energy in academic, relationships and activities related to the campus and the amount of energy invested will vary greatly depending on the student's interests and goals, as well as the student's other commitments. (Hutley, n.d., n.p.).

In this stage, students are connected to the campus community through active engagements in and outside the classroom. These augmented campus interactions directly contribute to a student's overall development. Through these interactions students are continuing to infuse their new and old interests while are learning how to balance their emotional, mental, and physical health. They are sharpening communication skills, discovering how to live in community (compromise), learning how their actions can affect others (accountability), and applying acquired knowledge in and outside the classroom.

**In other words,** it is during this stage students are beginning to weave themselves in the fabric of the campus community by participating in activities on campus, increasing their interactions with faculty, In this stage students are moving towards embracing who they are, who they are becoming, and their collegiate journey overall. Students are self-assured and are not looking for others to help them make their decisions. This includes creating a fall class schedule, selecting courses that interest them or advancing in a major they have chosen for themselves. Additionally, they have selected and surround themselves with people and friends that they feel serve as support system, including possibly new Soul-Ro-Mate (new roommates).

They begin to refer to campus as "home" as they feel safe and secure. Their perspective of college is different as they more mature, increased exposed to opportunities, incorporated past interests into their new persona, accepted campus norms, and have achieved true balance in various aspects of their lives.

Additionally, students feel as though college has helped them mature, enabled them to meet new people, have new experiences, discover their true identity, gain knowledge of various subjects, and help to provide safe space for growth. Students feel more relaxed to share their new identity with those at home as the additional time on campus helped to increase their confidence.

Students will begin to use the new skills and talents as they pursue their new interests and passions. They look forward to returning to campus their home and family in the fall.

**For Students of Color and First Generation College Students:** Students of color and first generation college students celebrate the accomplishment of completing their first year with the same excitement as majority students. Although, these students still struggle with dual identities, they are more comfortable sharing their new persona with their family and friends.

**When and How Long:** The Acceptance and Integration Stage usually begins about late March. Students can maintain this stage during the summer or they begin to repeat the TheW-Curve upon their return home (this is considered a new environment). No reason to worry. The W-Curve will begin repeat its cycle when classes begin in the fall.

**How Can I Help:** Celebrate! You and your student made it through the first year of college and The W-Curve! Continue to ask questions and allow your student to make decisions for themselves. Revisit family and “checking in” expectations as well as discuss goals you and your student have for next year. Do not assume that things will remain the same as the first year. Your student will be experiencing college again with a new perspective and expectations. No worries! Just flip the end of this page and start reading the packet again.

**Pearls of Wisdom:** *For residential students, every roommate should bring at least one physical/material item to the room. Whether it is a microwave, refrigerator, stereo, computer, everyone should have an investment of a material item in the room. By everyone bringing a material item to the room, you are physically making an investment in your living space. Are you collectively purchase an item(s)? Be sure that everyone has agreed to what will happen to the item if anyone decides to leave the living space BEFORE you make the purchase. This will help to insure that everyone has clear expectations and understanding of the purchase.*

After explaining The W-Curve to my first year parents, I see them smile and nod their heads as if to say ‘*Okay. It will be alright.*’ Finally, I am always asked ‘*What happens in the senior year? Why is The W-Curve different?*’

### **How Does The W-Curve Apply to Seniors:**

The W-Curve can be applied the senior year of college backwards. (When to expect stage)

**Acceptance and Integration:** Students begin to see how their collegiate experience has helped to shape their perspectives in and outside the classroom. They like the majors they chose and are looking forward to applying the knowledge learned in a future career field. (August-September)

**Mental Isolation:** Students realize that soon they will be transitioning to the “real world” and they are experiencing the “lasts” (holiday breaks, campus traditions). Campus will no longer be where they call home, they will not be living in the campus community, and will have to create new support systems for themselves. This change can be scary as students are questioning what they will do, where will they live, how will they live, and who will they live with. All of these unknowns in the middle of the middle can be frightening. (October-December)

**Initial Adjustment:** Students are actively looking for the next journey. Whether it is graduate school or seeking employment, students are excited about the future and its possibilities. (January – March)

**Cultural Shock:** Students will have to learn new cultural norms, they have heightened expectations from society, and additional responsibilities. (March-May)

**Honeymoon:** Graduation! Sending out graduation invitations, trying on their commencement gowns, and hearing Pomp and Circumstance playing signifies graduation. Students want to celebrate their accomplishments with friends, family, and campus family. (May – New Experience)

**What to Do After the First Year:** Keep this handout handy!!! The W-Curve starts all over again!

**References:**

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