



CENTER FOR THE
First-Year Experience
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Teaching and Working with First-Year Students

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Teaching and working with first-year students can be an extremely rewarding experience. As this population begins its college career, many of you will be the first faculty, teaching assistants, and professional staff members who connect with them; these first connections with the campus community have the possibility of greatly impacting how students progress through their development.

The Center for the First-Year Experience (CFYE) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has developed this resource to assist you in understanding the developmental needs of first-year students. We use the term “first-year” to describe students who are in their first year on our campus (which includes new transfer students). Transfer student needs are distinct from those of new college freshmen, so for the purposes of this resource, we are focusing on new college freshmen only.

About the Center:

The Center for the First-Year Experience (CFYE) at UW–Madison examines, informs, facilitates, cultivates and enhances the first-year experience at UW–Madison.

CFYE accomplishes this through....

- Campus wide acceptance and integration of identified first-year specific learning goals, drawn from Essential Learning Outcomes
- Effective assessment of first-year student learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum
- Forging strong departmental relationships with large first-year student enrollment academic departments and tutorial services in an effort to enhance the first year classroom learning environment
- Leading campus wide first-year initiatives, as appropriate. (current examples: review of first and second year advising, e-portfolio)
- Contribution to first-year experience research and scholarship
- Leading a summer orientation program which effectively introduces students to UW–Madison
- Creating common and meaningful welcoming experiences during a student’s first week on campus
- Cultivating a campus-wide first-year experience program during the academic year through collaboration and partnerships
- Providing new students with relevant information in a developmentally appropriate manner
- Cultivation of new courses and programs for first year students (ex: new freshman seminars, new orientation programs, new welcome programs)
- Coordinating and teaching *A Wisconsin Experience Seminar*
- Enhancing the First-Year Conference and Teaching and Learning Symposium
- Providing sponsorship opportunities to groups and businesses who share an interest in first-year students

The Millennial Generation: Born after 1982

- Special:** It has been communicated by the culture to the Millennial that they are special and vital to the future of the nation. They are also central to their parents' sense of purpose. Many of their Boomer parents delayed having children until they were financially secure, and a rising proportion went through extraordinary measures to conceive. Unlike the latchkey Gen-Xers, these young people know they are special. This is the generation of "wanted" children, central to their parents' sense of purpose.
- Sheltered:** Since the 1990s, there has been a major youth safety movement. We now see kids decked out in helmets and pads to ride bikes and strapped into elaborate car seats that would survive a nuclear explosion. Baby on Board signs and Tot-finders stickers were created for this generation. The Boomer parents of Millennials tend to be over-protective. Their well-being has dominated legislation (child restraints, home products, movie/video ratings, and campus security). They have been more supervised and watched over during their childhood with more structured playtime.
- Confident:** Millennials have a high level of trust and optimism in comparison to previous generations. They are hopeful of the future and enjoy strong connections with their parents. 90% of teens are confident and happy about the future. They are optimistic.
- Team-oriented:** The Millennials have spent much of their time working and learning in groups. As such, they have established tight peer bonds. They are used to being organized in teams and have the mentality to leave no one behind. They are cooperative team players. They believe in the future and see themselves as its cutting edge.
- Achieving:** This generation may well become the best-educated American generation. They are goal-directed and achievement-oriented, with even 16-year olds creating resumes for themselves. They are very much into setting and meeting goals. They have been subject to mandatory testing.
- Pressured:** Millennials are pushed to study hard and avoid personal risks, pressured to succeed. Most of our students have enjoyed success in literally everything they have undertaken up until they come to college. A first "B" on an exam can throw them for a loop. They are pushed to attend college and to choose careers that "pay off" nicely.
- Conventional:** As a generation, they support conventional social rules and standards of behavior. They have a willingness to accept values of parents and feel close to them. They accept authority and are rule followers.

Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation by Neil Howe and William Strauss

Ten Transitional Stages of First-Year Students

The following phases are typical of a new student's adjustment to college. Stages may not occur in the sequence described, and students may not experience all of the phases. However, this information can serve as a useful guideline to the challenges your student might face during the coming year.

Post-high school satisfaction/Pre-college elation

At this phase, students experience much excitement over the prospect of attending college. Expectations then prove to be unrealistic and are based on brief glimpses of college life from campus visits or the movies.

Early separation anxiety

As they begin to pack and prepare for college, students realize that they are actually leaving behind the support systems of family and friends.

Acute separation anxiety

As students actually leave home, they experience emotional moments with loved ones. They realize that they do not know the unwritten rules of this new campus culture. At this stage, it is especially critical to meet experienced older students, such as resident advisors and peer leaders, who can assist with the adjustment process.

The honeymoon

This is a time of euphoria as students anticipate intellectual excitement and a satisfying social life. Students feel ready to experience all that campus life has to offer.

The end of the honeymoon

After the frantic rush of orientation and welcome week activities subsides, students realize that college life consists of hard work, frustration, and disappointment. Normal events such as long lines and class schedule changes may be unsettling to a new student. Initial grades may be lower than expected, which can come as a shock to the students who "coasted" through high school. Students may work harder than ever before, only to earn lower grades. At this point, students often experience feelings of homesickness. Students should realize that this is normal and they are not alone.

The grass is always greener

Midway through the first year, students often think they can solve their problems by transferring to another institution. At this point, students should be encouraged to give the college they are attending at least a full year's try. Students should be reminded that they might have had a worse experience at another school and situations that seem impossible in the first semester often disappear altogether later in the year.

You can't go home again

A first visit home is often traumatic due to a sense that things have changed. Siblings are curious about college life and reunited high school friends tend to exaggerate college success. At this time, students may realize that they themselves have changed and may long to return to campus.

Learning to cope

Students have learned their way around campus and are expanding their circle of friends. Their self-confidence increases, they participate in more activities, and enjoy campus life.

Fear of failure

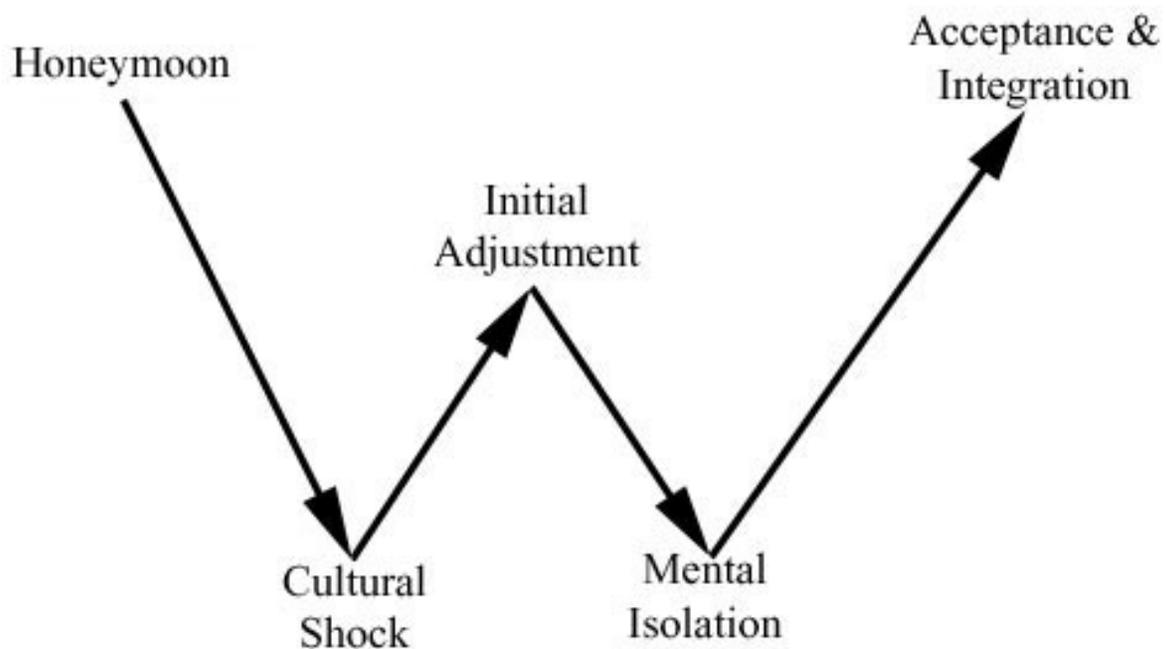
Students often panic around the time of exams as they fully appreciate the amount of work involved. Students should be reminded that thorough course preparation is the best way to ensure a good grade. Warning signs which indicate trouble are panic attacks, procrastination, sleeping over 12 hours a day, and avoidance of academic responsibilities.

Putting it all together

By the middle of the 2nd semester, students notice their classes and co-curricular activities have come together into a well-integrated lifestyle. Students are more confident, better able to make decisions, and are aware of opportunities for personal and intellectual growth.

Adapted from Zuker, F (n.d.) Transitional trauma: Predictable signs in the transition from high school to college.

The W-Curve of Student Transition



The W-Curve model was developed by William Zeller and Robert Mosier (1993) to describe the transition of study abroad participants in adjusting to a new culture; it was found to also be applicable to new students adjusting to college life.

Helping students to understand that their integration to the campus community is part of a journey that is not without its ups and downs may help them feel better about the transition.

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

William Perry's Model of Intellectual and Ethical Development

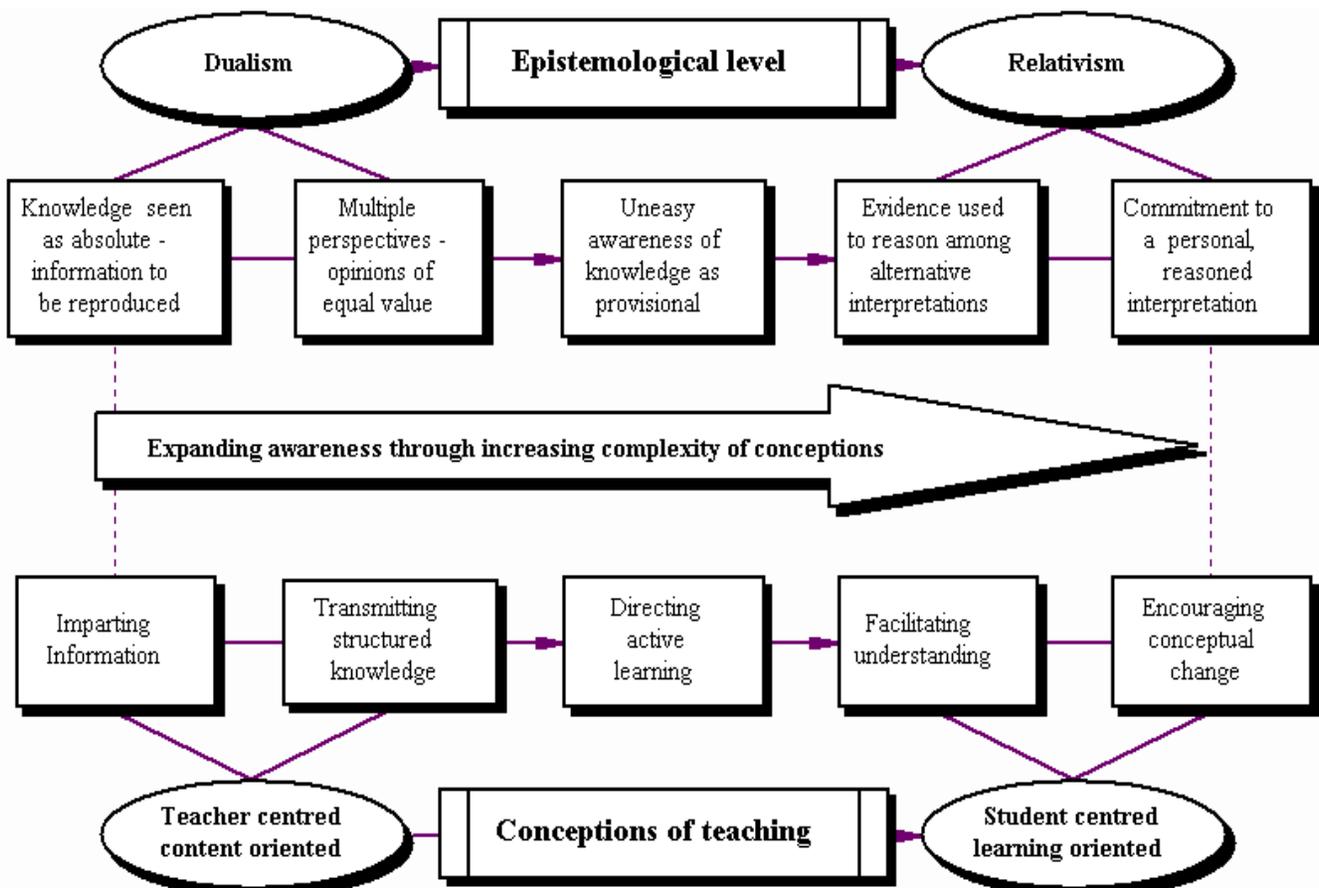
William Perry's research, which has been supported by subsequent inquiry, describes a journey of 9 positions individuals make in their intellectual and moral development.

Dualistic Thinking

- Students generally believe knowledge is certain and unambiguous: black/white, right/wrong
- Questions have immutable, objective answers
- Students generally believe authorities possess valuable wisdom that contains eternal truths
- Certainty yields to uncertainty and ambiguity

Multiplicity

- Students come to believe that where uncertainty exists, knowledge and truth are essentially subjective and personal
- Students come to realize that mere opinion is insufficient because specific criteria helps evaluate the usefulness and validity of knowledge claims:
 - ◊ methodology
 - ◊ empirical evidence
 - ◊ explanatory power
 - ◊ predictive power
 - ◊ logical consistency
 - ◊ positive vs. normative conclusions



Contextual-Relativism

- Students come to believe that even where uncertainty exists, people must make choices about premises, frameworks, hypothesis, and theories to apply; policy conclusions are not self-evident
- Students may come to recognize that even in a world of uncertainty, they must make choices (whether about ideas, hypotheses, theories, or policies). These choices require methods of critical thinking.

Context-Appropriate Decisions

- Students may come to acknowledge that choices require analysis *and* values
- Knowledge, theories, and methods are imperfect and uncertain, thus personal choices require acknowledging personal responsibility that follows from personal values

Adapted from Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito: 1998)
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Tips for Teaching First-Year Students

1. **Seat students in a circle or square**
2. **Make sure everyone talks every day**
3. **Call students by name**
4. **Ask students to write an answer to your question before you ask them to talk**
5. **Require students to visit your office hours**
6. **Start each class with a “high/low” from the week**
7. **Be very explicit about what you are doing and why**
8. **Remind students that they have to work hard**
9. **Model appropriate behavior**
10. **Start out tough and loosen up if needed**
11. **Encourage students to use tutoring and other campus academic support resources**
12. **Use group activities to help students make friends**



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