



Teaching & Engaging **New Students**



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

TEACHING AND WORKING WITH **NEW STUDENTS**

Teaching and engaging first-year students can be an extremely rewarding experience. As students begin their 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).

ABOUT THE CENTER

The mission of the Center for the First-Year Experience is to understand and improve a student’s first year at UW-Madison.

The Center for the First-Year Experience is the campus leader and primary resource on the subject of student transition to UW-Madison. CFYE supports students in self-reflection and active learning inside and outside the classroom as they create the foundation for their Wisconsin Experience. We facilitate this process through a long-term inclusive strategy of intentional programming, on-going services, communication, and collaboration with faculty and staff.

CFYE core programs include: faculty development, course offerings (e.g., Counseling Psychology 125: A Wisconsin Experience Seminar); Student Orientation, Advising, & Registration (SOAR); Transfer Transition Program; and Wisconsin Welcome.

TEACHING AND LEARNING **OUTREACH**

The Center for the First-Year Experience offers Teaching and Learning workshops, trainings, and consultation for faculty, teaching assistants, and departments.

Sample topics include:

- Teaching first-year students (freshman & transfer students)
- Creating a learner-centered syllabus
- Integrating active learning into your classroom
- How student development can impact learning

Contact Carren Martin, Director, for more information:

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608-263-0363

newstudent.wisc.edu

For a detailed listing of campus Teaching & Learning resources visit tle.wisc.edu

Learn about campus-wide initiatives:

At Risk, suicide prevention: uhs.wisc.edu/umatter • *Tonight*, sexual assault awareness: uhs.wisc.edu/tonight
Alcohol Edu: uhs.wisc.edu/alcholedu

TIPS FOR TEACHING FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

- » *Be very explicit about what you are doing and why*
- » *Remind students that they have to work hard*
- » *Ask students to write an answer to your question before you ask them to talk*
- » *Start out tough and loosen up if needed*
- » *Model appropriate behavior*
- » *Encourage students to use tutoring and other campus academic support resources*
- » *Use group activities to help students make friends*

TIPS FOR LARGE COURSES

- » *Challenge students to participate in large lecture*
- » *Give students time to work on problems or discuss prompts with the person next to them*
- » *Repeatedly encourage students to visit faculty and TA office hours*
- » *Use technology to gauge student understanding*

TIPS FOR TEACHING SMALL COURSES

- » *Call students by name*
- » *Require students to visit your office hours*
- » *Start each class with a “high/low” from the week*
- » *Use group activities to help students make friends*

Tips are from interviews with faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants across campus.



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 students might face during their first year.

1 *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.

2 *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.

3 *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.

4 *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.

5 *The end of the honeymoon*

After the frantic rush of orientation and Wisconsin Welcome activities subside, 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.

6 *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.

7 *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.

“Initial grades may be lower than expected, which can come as a shock to the students who *“coasted”* through high school.”

8 *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.

9 *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 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 avoiding all academic responsibilities.

10 *Putting it all together*

By the middle of the second 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.

KNOW THE SIGNS OF **STUDENT DISTRESS**

From the Dean of Students Office and University Health Services

Faculty and other staff who interact a great deal with students may become aware of students who are experiencing emotional distress. This is not uncommon as student experience normal stress due to their academic experience. However, sometimes the problem is or becomes pervasive or severe, affecting the ability of the student to function successfully. Some examples are:

- Serious academic performance issues, particularly if there is a change from past performance.
- Student appears depressed or manic.
- Student makes statements about death or that are suicidal in nature.
- There is a marked change in personal hygiene, dress, or appearance.
- Rambling, incoherent speech, or disjointed thoughts.
- Irrational suspiciousness or claims of persecution.
- Behavior that is bizarre or inappropriate to the situation.

Troubled/distressed students should be referred to the Counseling and Consultation Office at 333 East Campus Mall, 7th floor. There is no appointment needed, students can “drop in” during business hours M-F.

See uhs.wisc.edu/services/counseling/ for details.

Crisis Services & Consultation

If you are ever concerned about a student who seems particularly depressed or distressed, please feel free to call Counseling and Consultation Services, University Health Services (UHS) for consultation. Our staff is available during business hours, and the mental health crisis intervention services are also available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to students and to people concerned about students' mental health: 608-265-5600 (select option 9).

UHS:

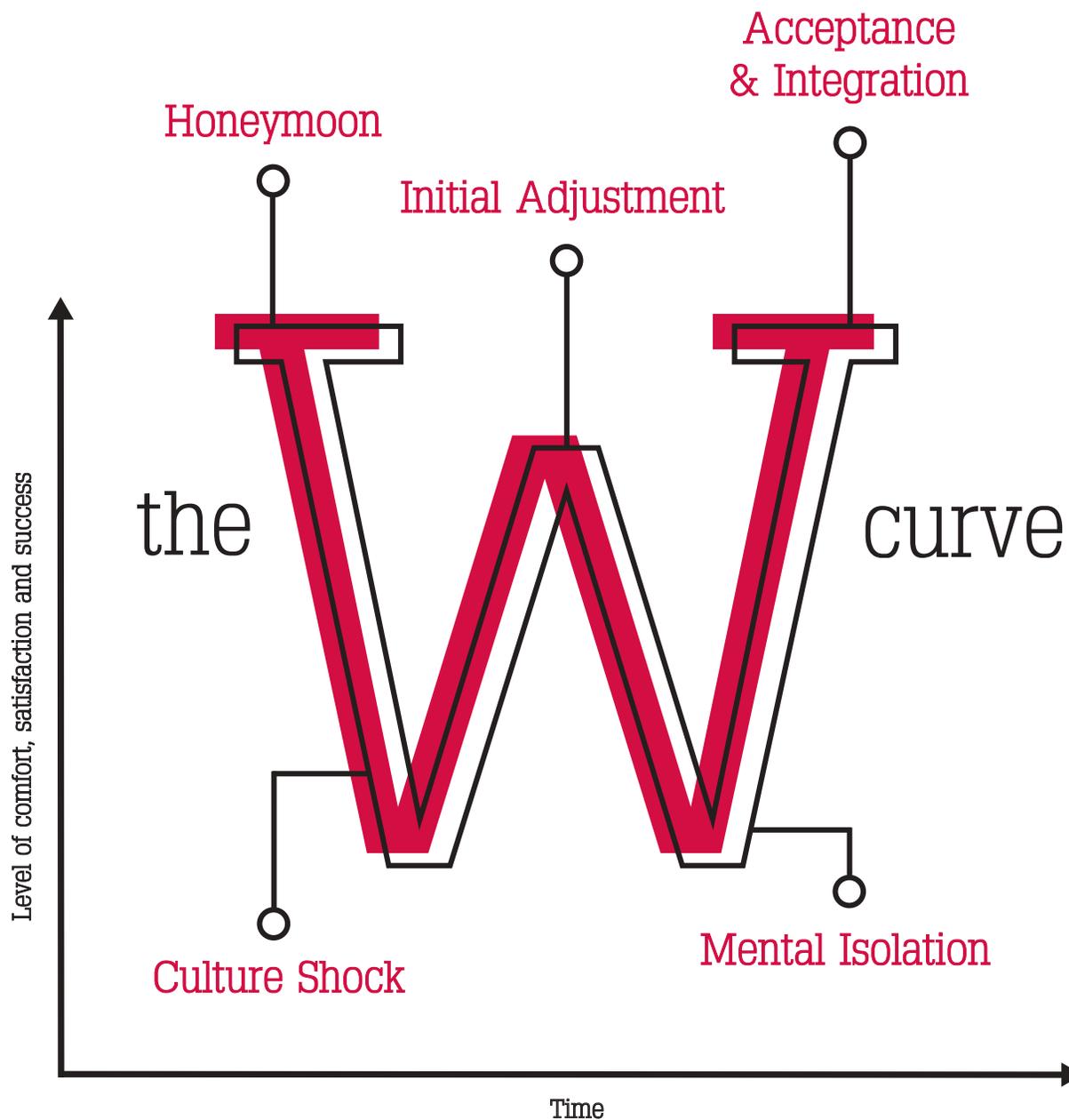
333 East Campus Mall, 7th floor
608-265-5600 (select option 2)

The Dean of Students office can also consult and assist with situations involving students who may be struggling. Call 263-5700 and ask for the on-call dean.

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 & ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

William Perry's research, which has been supported by subsequent inquiry, describes a journey of nine 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

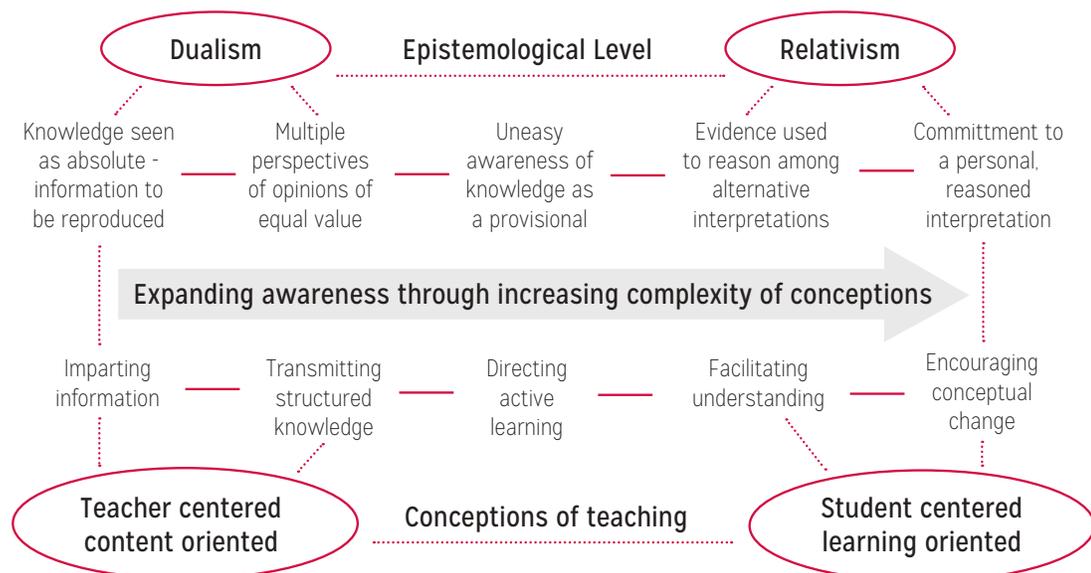
Contextual-Relativism

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) & <http://www.lib.uconn.edu/~mboyer/burcha2.html>



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