Adjustment to College Theory
at East Carolina University

Adjustment to College and Readjustment to Home Culture
31st Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience
February 19, 2012
Karen S. Smith, Associate Director
Office of Student Transitions and First Year Programs
smithka@ecu.edu
East Carolina University

- 4-year, public institution
- Approximately 28,000 students
- Around 4,000 freshmen each year
- Located in Greenville, NC
- Carnegie Classification: Doctoral/Research University and Community Engagement
Adjustment to College and Readjustment to Home Culture
(The W-Curve Hypothesis Model adopted from Gullahorn and Gullahorn)

Entry into the university

Return to home for visits

High

Honeymoon

doing OK but somewhat dissatisfied

LEVELS of Comfort, Satisfaction, and Effectiveness

"Home" culture (work, community, and family)

Culture Shock ("foreign" university culture)

Mental Isolation

TIME

Beginning of 1st Sem.
1st 6 Weeks
Midterms
Thanksgiving
End of 1st Sem.

Low

"Home" culture

Acceptance & Integration

adaptation

readjustment to the university

synthesis

search for meaning

adjustment

Hope

shock

disconfirmation

confusion

recoil

self-doubt

adjustment/adaptation

awareness, experimentation, practice, connection, hope

recoil
Stage A: Honeymoon

• Prior to arrival and during the first few days
• Students are enthusiastic
• Students want to meet new people and start out on their own
• University is welcoming
Student Concerns - August

- Homesick
- Long-distance relationships
- Campus familiarity
- Loss of identity
- Values
- Diversity
- Money management
Stage B: Culture Shock

- Hard to adjust to new surroundings
- Difficult adjusting to roommate
- Expectations and values differ from prior experiences.
- Excitement wears off, people withdraw
Student Concerns - September

- Roommate conflict
- New study habits
- Relationships
- Still homesick
- School is not “new”
- Alcohol
- Greek Life & Organizations
- Time Management
Stage C: Initial Adjustment

- Physical adjustment occurs
- Confidence increases
- Gap between home and university customs and values persists
Student Concerns - October

- Roommate/Hall conflict
- Midterms
- Fall break
- Halloween
- Values
- Alcohol
Stage D: Mental Isolation

- Some things still stand out as “different”.
- Feeling that getting to know others is hard.
- Feeling alone.
- Values are challenged
- Critical time period for many students
Student Concerns - November

- Health issues
- Projects
- Depression/Suicidal
- Alcohol
- Finals are coming
- Thanksgiving break
Stage E: Acceptance and Integration

• Students feel they are a part of their new environment.
• Home values reconciled with university values.
Student Concerns - December

- Returning home, especially after Thanksgiving
- Holidays
- Social isolation
- Money
- Final exams, papers, projects
Programs

- New Student Orientation
- Convocation
- Plunge Into Purple
- Pirate Read
- Freshman Seminar (COAD 1000)
Adjustment to College and Readjustment to Home Culture
(The W-Curve Hypothesis Model adopted from Gullahorn and Gullahorn)

Levels of Comfort, Satisfaction, and Effectiveness

Initial Adjustment

Acceptance & Integration

Orientation

Convocation

Freshman Seminar

Plunge Into Purple

Pirate Read

Culture Shock

Mental Isolation

TIME

Beginning of 1st Sem.  1st 6 Weeks  Midterms  Thanksgiving  End of 1st Sem.

East Carolina University
Program Assessment

- New Student Orientation
- Convocation
- Plunge Into Purple
- Pirate Read
- Freshman Seminar (COAD 1000)
W-Curve Research

• 43% said they had visited home 5 or more times since move in
• Exams/Test caused greatest stress
• End of semester has been highest period of stress
Future Programs

• Expand programming throughout November
• Freshman Seminar guide
• Implement Freshman Tradition with Homecoming
• Continue Research
Questions & Answers

Thanks for coming!