Well, you made it! After SATs, application forms, campus visits, and those unforgettable “mailbox jitters,” you’re finally starting college. Despite some anticipation, you’re probably tired and confused by all the conflicting advice you’ve received. It’s natural to feel proud of what you’ve accomplished and excited about all that awaits on campus. It’s also natural to feel scared and overwhelmed, even though nobody talks much about those feelings. But let’s be honest….you’re leaving home, saying goodbye (for awhile) to family and friends, moving away from familiar places and comfortable roles and relationships, and heading into…the unknown! Who wouldn’t be nervous?!

Even though you’ve been making some decisions for yourself for some time now, college catapults you into young adulthood. Expect to be challenged intellectually, personally, socially and emotionally. Here are some tips to help you survive (and even thrive!):

• Be prepared… Plan ahead!
Successful adjustment starts before you arrive. First, figure out what you need to bring (clothes, toiletries, linens, computer stuff, etc.) and what you need to leave home (your pet python and your candle collection). Residence Life staff can help with hall policies (e.g. no halogen lights, microwaves, incense etc.) and general advice. Contact your roommate ahead of time, if possible. It’s a great way to get acquainted…and you won’t end up with two of everything. Don’t forget reminders of home. Favorite pictures and photos can help ease loneliness and will remind you that the folks who care are still "out there."

• Have realistic expectations.
Students who are usually earn As and Bs often earn Cs. New friends really DO await, but just as it took time to form close bonds with your friends at home, it will take time at college too. Remember, don’t compare your “insides” with everyone else’s “outsides.” No matter how together others seem, all first year students feel out of place, and all are as eager to make friends as you are. Reach out, connect, try new activities, join clubs, get involved in your hall or do community service. It works!

• Life 101
If you don’t know how to budget, now is the time to learn. Talk over financial matters with your parent(s) before you get to school… don’t wait until you’re overdrawn. Be careful with credit. “Plastic” is easy for students to get but much harder to pay off. While you’re at it, if you don’t know how to clean your room or do laundry, learn now.

• Life 102
Take care of yourself. Exercise, rest, eat healthy foods, make time for “down-time” as well as study. Think through decisions about alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and sexual behavior. Whatever your choices, you can be sure to find others who share your values. If you need more information or someone to talk to, consider the staff at the Counseling Center.

• Stay in touch.
Write, email, call friends and family. Staying in touch makes the transition to campus life easier.

AND DON’T FORGET!!! The first year of college is stressful for everybody. If you are feeling overwhelmed or are experiencing any of the above problems, please feel free to speak with a counselor at the Counseling Center. It’s free and easy!