

STUDENT STRESS CYCLE

Each year students deal with regular and calendar-based stressors in addition to whatever might be happening in the larger world. These are some items to consider when creating messaging for students. Not all students will have the same types of discomfort or stressors, students hold many identities that will mean they experience different challenges, or the same challenges in a different way.



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
**Student Success &
Retention Innovation**

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER

- Homesickness, particularly for new students.
- Roommate conflicts — new roommates or having a roommate for the first time can disrupt schedules, and create conflict over expectations and communication.
- Overwhelmed feelings start as students are inundated with information, class schedules, opportunities to get involved, and transitioning into college life.
- Values crisis — students are confronted with questions of conscience over value conflict areas, such as drug and alcohol experimentation, morality, race, politics, religion, and social expectations.
- In Loco Parentis Blues: students feel stress because of real or perceived restrictive policies and regulations of the institution, rather than the total freedom they expected.
- Imposter Syndrome — students feels like they may not deserve to be at the institution or don't deserve their success.
- Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority develop because of the discrepancy between high school status and grades and initial college performance.
- International students may not be able to access the same foods and goods and begin missing events or holidays.
- Balances after financial aid is disbursed create concerns about affordability and returning for the next semester.
- Financial challenges start for many students as their basic needs may not be met, or they realize they have different financial situations than their peers.

OCTOBER

- First-year students begin to realize life at college is not as perfect as they thought. Social media, movies, and television have made college appear a certain way.
- First-generation students — struggles to explain the demands of college life, or new social experiences to family or supporters
- Loneliness develops as students worry that others around them have found their group or place on campus.
- FASFA filing date opens, students have to consider finances for the following year.
- Increased academic pressures which may result in feelings of failure and loss of self-esteem.
- Sexual conflicts and confusion result when confronting, often for the first time, different sexual orientations and conformity to different standards of sexual behavior.
- Job search stress begins for December graduates.
- Homecoming activities often create stress for college students because of the desire to be involved, while dealing with midterms and other academic stresses.
- Family weekend activities — students can be excited to participate and welcome family members, be concerned about welcoming family, or have no supporters to join them for activities.
- Time management becomes an issue; students are unused to unstructured days. Even upperclassmen have to readjust to this, especially if they worked over the summer.
- Illness increases during times of academic stress

NOVEMBER

- Academic pressure is beginning to mount because of time management, increased difficulty of work, or unawareness of academic resources.
- Incidence of depression and anxiety increases because of feelings that one should have adjusted to college by now.
- Economic anxiety: funds may have started to run out or have been depleted, first semester meal plans begin running low.
- The ability/interest or inability/disinterest in celebrating holidays with family/supporters
- Increased worry about registering for spring semester which could be attributed to holds on their account, lack of funding, past due balances, belonging, concerns about major or degree plan and unawareness of resources.

DECEMBER

- Extracurricular time strain: seasonal parties, concerts, social service projects, and religious activities may deplete student energy.
- Anxiety, fear, and guilt increase as final examinations approach.
- Fear of discussing final semester grades, changes in major or other expectations with family/supporters.
- Pre-holiday depression, especially for those who have concerns for family, those who have no home to visit, and those who prefer not to go home because of family conflicts.
- Financial strain because of holiday gifts, basic needs, and travel.
- Students struggling with housing or food insecurity may be displaced over the extended winter break.
- Pressure increases to perform socially because of the approaching vacation and extended separation time.

JANUARY

- Post-holiday depression due to again being away from the security of home.
- Significant time spent socializing because of perception that academics don't really begin until the second or third week of classes.
- Self-image issues as people hit the gym as a new years resolution
- Anxiety about course work if they didn't do as well as expected in the fall semester
- Students who became Academically Ineligible at the end of the fall semester must appeal to remain, and quickly determine if they can remain at Arizona.

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FEBRUARY

- Many students experience optimism because second semester is perceived as going downhill.
- Depression increases for those students who have failed to establish social relationships or achieve a moderate amount of recognition.

MARCH

- Drug and alcohol use may increase significantly before, during, and after spring break.
- Academic pressures continue as midterms are taken and the results are received.
- Extracurricular/job crisis for juniors (Will I get an internship?) and seniors (Will I get a job? Have I really learned anything? Was my major a mistake?).
- Eating Disorders and body image issues become more prevalent because of the ensuing summer and spring break holidays
- Decrease in motivation after spring break, as many classes have projects or exams right before spring break.

APRIL & MAY

- Frustration and confusion develop because of decisions necessary for advanced fall course registration.
- Past Due account balances impact reenrollment, students face pressure to clear balances while seats are still available in needed fall courses.
- Pressures emerge as students begin planning for summer work or classes.
- Academic pressure increase as the semester end approaches, but motivation to study decreases if weather changes and become warmer.
- Concerns continue to grow for students looking for work or internships.
- Anxiety rises as classes end and work is due.
- Graduating students may be concerned about full-time work or additional education.
- Many anticipate conflicts with family over the summer.
- Year ends in a rush: summer job decisions, papers, exams, vacation, anxiety over changed relationship with parents, etc. Students leave college before all their concerns are effectively managed.
- Students without a support system are concerned about stability or resources until they return in fall
- Students are making choices about returning to the institution, transferring or stopping out.
- Students may face programmatic changes or becoming academically ineligible to return to the university.
- Many realize their academic performance could mean loss of financial aid or merit-based scholarships.

SUMMER

- Many students continue to have classes, now in condensed, faster-paced formats.
- Additional jobs or work hours help ease academic year financial burdens, but increase current time constraints.
- Adjustments to living situations due to conflicts with family, roommates, or challenging living situations.
- Inability to see or regularly engage with the same friend group can increase loneliness.

RESOURCES

- The **SOS program** exists to answer questions and connect the Arizona community with resources. Find a searchable list of student support resources on the SOS website and contact SOS for assistance.
 - 520-621-2327
 - sos@arizona.edu
- The **Student Assistance** staff in Dean of Students office is a central support hub for all students aiming to assist with various challenges including personal crises, life traumas, health issues, and academic struggles.
 - 520-621-7057
 - DOS-deanofstudents@email.arizona.edu
- **Counseling & Psych Services (CAPS)** at Campus Health supports student mental health through a variety of services, resources, and tools. From virtual on-demand mental health options, free resources, and groups and workshops to urgent care mental health model, survivor support, and short-term medication management, there are many paths to supporting your mental health. View the full CAPS Care Pathways menu of services and resources here.
 - To speak with a counselor or get started with other CAPS services, you can schedule an urgent care Counseling & Consultation visit online through PatientLink or by calling CAPS at 520-621-3334. For crisis support, drop by CAPS Main or CAPS North during operating hours or call CAPS 24/7. After-hours crisis callers may speak with a Crisis and Access Specialist by pressing 1 when prompted by the automated message.

Larson, P., & Laramie, W. (1976). A model for identifying and responding to stress periods of students. NASPA Journal, 14(2), 44-49.
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