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Guest Column

Transitioning to college is a big challenge

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Adjustment to college can often feel like a rollercoaster with the excitement of making friends and beginning your academic career while also experiencing challenges like a failing quiz grade or a relationship break-up.

We know that you have a lot to juggle when you first start classes, so here are a few suggestions to help you navigate these early weeks.

Acknowledge that “highs and lows” will occur and create realistic expectations. This will better prepare you for the normal obstacles you encounter and will help you learn how to cope when difficulties arise.

This won't come quickly. But it needs to be a priority. Many students have built up in their minds that the college experience will be “the best years of their lives.” After all, college is about amazing football games, late-night conversations in the residence halls and friendships that last a lifetime, right?

That's part of it. However, the reality is that many of you will also question your choice of major, struggle with finances, have an argument with a roommate and oversleep and miss an important class, too.

Did you know nearly 75 percent of first year students feel lonely or homesick during their first year? So understand that this is a perfectly natural feeling.

Don't be afraid to challenge yourself by stepping outside your comfort zone. Make connections and friendships with others in your residence hall, classes or even through other friends.

Did you know ECU has nearly 500 student organizations? Yes, we do. Go to a student involvement fair or explore opportunities on ECU OrgSync. The key is to get out and engage.

Stay in touch with family and friends from home, but try to balance this with making connections on campus as well.

One of ECU's top priorities is safety. One of the areas that you may face is making safe choices about alcohol and drug use. The safest option is to not drink alcohol or use other drugs; however, if you do choose to consume, be aware of the risks associated with this choice.

First year students' risks are higher due to being away from home for the first time, inexperience with alcohol/drugs and new-found freedom. We encourage you to know what you're drinking, be attentive to your beverages, do not mix alcohol and

other drugs, and, of course, make the safest decision to not drink/use drugs. Research shows that the more a student drinks, the more academic performance is negatively affected.

On every college campus, sexual assault is a serious issue for all students and particularly for those who are most at risk, first year students during their first semester at college. Though sexual assault is never the fault of the victim, it is always a good idea to be aware of your surroundings and to travel in groups.

ECU provides many campus resources to assist students who experience sexual assault. Confidential counseling, advocacy and information on options for victims is available through ECU's Victim Advocates. Even if you choose not to report, Victim Advocates can provide emotional support and ongoing therapy to assist you in your healing process.

Remember that these weeks and years will likely be filled with ups and downs. Connect with resources that can provide support and skills to help during the "rollercoaster" of the first semester. Know that the adjustment process will continue throughout the first year as students learn to navigate their new environment and further develop independence.

Need help? Don't know where to go? The Center for Counseling and Student Development and Dean of Students offices offer many resources and services to address the issues mentioned above.

Counseling Center (252) 328-6661 or www.ecu.edu/counselingcenter

Dean of Students: (252) 328-9297 or www.ecu.edu/dos

You are not in this alone. We are here to help make your college experience successful.

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