

So They're Off to University:

A Handbook for Parents and Other
Supporters of First-Year Students at
Ryerson University

**Ryerson
University**

**Centre for Student
Development & Counselling**
Student Health & Wellness

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Portions of this material were adapted from the following:

- *University of Windsor Parent/Family Handbook*
http://ctl.uwindsor.ca/parents/system/files/7754%20Head%20Start%20Parent%20handbook_201_SINGLEES.pdf
- *St. Mary's University - Making the Transition:*
A Parent's Guide to the First Year of University
www.smu.ca/webfiles/SMUParentsGuide2011.pdf
- *Purdue University* - www.purdue.edu/parents/index.html
- *Northwestern University Advice for Parents*
www.northwestern.edu/orientation/families/family-publications/index.html
- *Hampden-Sydney College*
www.hsc.edu/Directories/Constituents/Parents.html
- *University of Guelph*
www.studentlife.uoguelph.ca/parents/
- *Southwestern University*
www.southwestern.edu/parents/fy_monthly.guide.html

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Because...

Because, to your amazement and surprise,
They've been transformed before your eyes,
Now here they are with changing lives.

Because, today they'll reach out for your hand,
And then tomorrow take a stand,
They'll want to know you understand.

Because, they're going to call you in a fright,
You're going to ache to put things right,
Hold out a flame, call forth the light,
And chase the darkness from their night.

They've reached a new beginning place,
Where they can dream, test, dare, explore.
With your love, trust and encouragement,
They'll do all that and maybe more.

Because, when they go crashing out the door,
They're going to stumble, maybe fall,
And even sometimes break your heart.

Because, you want to keep them from the storm,
From disappointment, pain and harm,
And hang a star to guide them home.

Because, the shaky times will help them grow,
And find the selves they'll come to know,
Though you may wish it wasn't so,
You're going to have to let them go.

Because. Because.

- Rosemarie Volpe July, 2006

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Congratulations!

You've reached this important milestone. Going to university is a passage marked by change, exploration, growth and self-discovery. Both you and your student will be faced with the challenge of "letting go" as they mature, assert their independence, and step out of the final stages of adolescence and into adulthood. At times, you may be the first person to whom they turn with a problem; at others they may fiercely resist your efforts to intervene. Old expectations and patterns of interacting will give way to new roles, understandings, and ways of relating.

Over the coming months and years your student will be required to stretch themselves academically and personally. No doubt you will share in (at least some of) the laughter and tears, triumphs and setbacks, acts of courage and anxieties they are likely to experience along the way. They will want to know they can count on your wisdom, encouragement, advice and support.

How to use this Handbook

As your student prepares to begin their studies, you may find that you're juggling many different feelings - pride, excitement, apprehension, "empty nest" blues, even perhaps a little relief. What follows are some common transitional issues typically faced by those entering university for the first time, whether they are living at home, in residence, or off campus. These are presented in the context of common scenarios in relation to which you might receive a cry for help. Each section contains perspectives based on a survey of what students at Ryerson thought caregivers most need to know. As well, we have provided related tips on how you might assist your student in adjusting to a new environment, and in managing the increased freedom and responsibility that come with it. For those who prefer a linear view, we have added a calendar indicating important happenings and issues which arise at particular junctures in the academic cycle. Included, too, is a list of Student Affairs and campus supports as well as some other key resources which are available to help students during their first year and throughout their academic career at Ryerson. Encourage your student to access these useful sources of assistance first sign of difficulty.

Part 1:

Common
Scenarios

Common Scenarios

Scenario 1: “Help, I’m not doing as well as I expected! I think I might be in the wrong program.”

It’s October. Your student, who had an 85% average in high school, returns from classes one day and tells you that, for the first time ever, they failed an exam. They express that a number of their courses don’t interest them and that they’re beginning to question whether they chose the right program of studies. They’re starting to lose their motivation and are feeling panicked. This is your first experience with a young person attending university, and you are not sure how best to help.

Transitional Issues in this Scenario:

- Shifting gears from high school and adjusting to the demands of university studies
- Concerns about academic success
- Learning appropriate study skills
- Establishing an educational direction

Students Say:

“It’s very different from high school... It was very difficult to adjust to the huge increase in reading...”

“Don’t expect kids to do great first year because they’re still learning...[understand] that study habits acquired from high school like overnight crammers and last minute studying do not help.”

“Studying is like working two jobs because 1) you have to go to class to know what’s going on and 2) you have to keep up with your readings and homework at a different time - getting an average grade is not that easy.”

“Minimize pressure to go into a specific program. I’ve noticed that if there’s no interest, students won’t succeed.”

How You Can Help

- Realize that the demands of university academic life are very different from those of high school. Have reasonable expectations. A significant drop in grades compared to high school is common, and an “F” in one exam or even a course does not, in itself, signal an inappropriate program choice. It is, nevertheless, a call to determine what went wrong and how to do better in the future. Performance usually improves with time and Ryerson provides many resources to help students develop the study skills required at a university level.
- Encourage your student to access the various academic supports on campus such as Student Learning Support, to take part in study groups with other students, and to visit professors and instructors during their office hours if they need assistance or clarification.
- Show interest but don’t put too much emphasis on grades. Support your student even if their academic performance is less than hoped for or anticipated.
- If your student lives at home, help them to set up a suitable study space.
- If your student lives in residence, encourage them to connect with their Academic Link (AL). Every student in residence has been assigned an AL in their faculty who can offer both group and one-on-one support.
- Encourage your student to take advantage of opportunities in the classroom, on-campus and in the larger community to explore their interests, skills and values. These activities will help them to focus their career direction while gaining valuable self-knowledge and resume-building experiences.
- Recognize that it is not unusual for students to have misgivings about their choice of academic program even as early as first year. Sometimes students decide to pursue a program of study for which they are ill-suited due to mistaken assumptions, lack of direction, limited self-awareness, or the desire to conform to others’ expectations. As a result, their motivation, academic performance and, not infrequently, emotional well-being are likely to suffer. Switching programs, or even sometimes educational institutions, is not uncommon. Offer your student support in making informed educational choices that are consistent with their

interests, skills and values, even if different from your aspirations for them. If in doubt about their program of studies, suggest that they attend a career planning group or seek individual career counselling at the Centre for Student Development and Counselling.

- Be mindful too that it is becoming more and more common for students to take longer than four years to complete their undergraduate education. For example, they may reduce their course load in order to accommodate part-time employment, health or personal challenges, or academic setbacks. In other cases, as noted above, they may decide to switch programs.
- For some students experiencing uncertainty about their educational path, a well-orchestrated gap term or year can help them to find their career compass. Internships, taking individual courses, volunteering and/or engaging in occupational exploration during this time are just some of the activities that can help clarify their direction.
- At times, students enter university having already been diagnosed with a learning or attentional disability. At others, it is not until they have reached an advanced level of study that such difficulties are brought into focus. Should your student suspect this is the case, Academic Accommodation Support can help by facilitating a psycho-educational assessment.
- One of the most common sources of student stress is outside employment. The expectation that one can assume a full course load in addition to working 20, 30 or even more hours per week is not only unrealistic, but also is almost certain to compromise academic performance. Ensure that your student has adequate funds to meet educational and other expenses before embarking on their studies. Be aware, too, that OSAP alone is unlikely to cover all costs associated with their studies.
- At times, it is in the best interest of students who are struggling with certain courses to reduce their course load, provided they do so by the stipulated deadlines (see “Significant Dates” on the Ryerson website). Before taking this step, students should consult with their program department as there may be academic implications involved. As well, they should speak with Student Financial Assistance to determine whether dropping a course or courses will affect their financial aid and/or scholarship. Course drops will be considered after the final deadline based on medical or compassionate grounds, and must be supported by verifying documentation.
- While it is natural to be concerned, be aware that, in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, students’ academic records are confidential. Therefore, Ryerson cannot release specific information about a student (e.g. application status, grades, academic standing) to anyone, including family members, without express written permission by the student.

Scenario 2: “Help, I’m feeling homesick! Will I ever fit in?”

Your family resides outside of the Greater Toronto Area and your student lives in residence on campus. During a visit home you notice that they seem unusually quiet and withdrawn. This is their fifth visit over six weeks. When you ask, they initially deny that there's any problem but later admit that they're missing their family and old friends and are having trouble establishing new relationships at Ryerson. Indeed, they tell you that they're feeling insignificant and out of place and that they're worried about being able to fit in.

Transitional Issues in this Scenario

- Separating from familiar people and places
- Adjusting to a new environment
- Developing an identity on campus
- Establishing new social support systems

Students Say

“[One of the biggest challenges is] trying to be social, meet different people, fit in.”

“It’s hard to feel that you matter when there are so many other people competing for grades, professors’ attention, and respect. I found it difficult to ‘break in’ and earn my keep at first.”

“[Parents and other supporters need to know] we still love them and miss them and like getting mail, e-mail, text messages, [and] phone calls every now and then.”

“Parents need to encourage their children to fit in and make new friends since these are the people they will see every day for four years.”

How You Can Help:

- Empathize. Be available and willing to listen. Be prepared for mixed emotions, especially during the first few weeks. Pay attention to your student’s feelings and try not to trivialize their concerns, e.g., “But, these are the best years of your life!”
- Rather than giving direct advice or trying to step in and solve the problem for them, inquire about what steps they have taken or could take to feel better. Demonstrate trust and confidence in their ability to handle this very big change in their lives.
- Ryerson offers a vast array of opportunities outside the classroom to get connected with other students and the community. These include interest and cultural groups, a tri-mentoring program, leadership development, athletic and recreational programs, experiential learning opportunities, and academic program-based initiatives. Encourage your student to get involved and shape their education beyond the lecture hall.
- If your student is living away from home, avoid asking whether they’re homesick. If they are (even just a little) being reminded of it can make things worse. Use phone calls, e-mails, text messages, Facetime/Skype, social media, and letters (in moderation) to stay in touch (even if they don’t respond immediately). Visit (but not too often). Send pictures and “care packages” of some of their favourite things. The majority of students - even the most seemingly fiercely independent - need the security of family ties.
- Encourage your student to connect with their Residence Advisor. Residence Advisors are trained live-in upper year students who can help them connect with resources, opportunities and other students on their floor, in residence and the university community.
- Try not to worry too much or to overemphasize what may be a temporary problem. Understand that it takes time to adjust to new surroundings. Encourage your student to be patient when it comes to making new friends and let them know that others are probably feeling the same way. If, on the other hand, there is an extreme change in their mood, behaviour, appearance, or academic performance, it may indicate a need for more intervention or counselling. If you are concerned about your student’s adjustment and/or well-being do not delay in encouraging them to seek timely assistance. You may wish to refer them to the Centre for Student Development and Counselling, Medical Centre or other relevant support service (see resource list at the end of this handbook). Except in cases of significant risk of bodily harm, information related to your student’s physical and/or mental health is held in the strictest confidence unless they provide express written consent permitting the release of information.
- With the development of new social systems and interests, romantic relationships formed in high school and long-standing friendships may be challenged or even end. Be aware that, should this occur, it can be a very tumultuous time emotionally for your student.

Scenario 3: “Help - this place is stressing me out!”

You know that mid-term examinations are approaching and assignments are due. Your student seems unusually tired and anxious. You overhear them telling a friend that they're feeling overwhelmed and stressed out. They indicate that they just can't seem to get a handle on the system and to manage the workload along with everything else that's expected of them. They're wondering whether they have what it takes to succeed at university.

Transitional Issues in this Scenario

- Adjusting to university culture including changes in academic demands, structures, and responsibilities
- Understanding academic and administrative policies and procedures
- Managing greater freedom and flexibility in combination with independent learning and increased personal responsibility
- Learning time-management skills

Students Say:

“It's very hard for a student to balance school work, social life, family life...”

“The change from high school to first year university is VERY demanding and incredibly stressful as the workload more than triples.”

“It's like having a job. There is a lot of stress that comes with going to school. Encouragement is the key.”

“Understand that my life is insane. When she visits, my mom is always bothering me about things I really don't have time to do. When I actually have downtime (ha! never!), I like to do nothing.”

How You Can Help:

- Encourage your student to familiarize themselves with the university's academic policies and procedures. Become aware of them yourself. They are outlined in Ryerson's on-line undergraduate calendar, Undergraduate Student Guide (which is a must-read) and program handbooks. Having knowledge ahead of time can prevent poor decision-making later on and it is the expectation of the university that students acquaint themselves with this information.
- Resist the urge to “rescue” or “fix it” as doing this will deprive your student of the opportunity to develop their own problem-solving skills, resources and resilience. Rather, offer suggestions or direct them to campus services such as Learning Support, and the Centre for Student Development and Counselling for help with stress, performance anxiety, and time management. Decrease responsibilities and pressures at home, especially at high stress times during the academic cycle such as mid-term and final exams.
- Demonstrate empathy and be non-judgemental. Accept and understand the high's and low's associated with university studies. Acknowledge your student's strengths and successes. Let them know that it's OK to make mistakes, that failure is sometimes part of the learning process, and that your support is there even when the results are not ideal.
- Recognize that, unlike high school, the university lifestyle often requires students to be on campus beyond the “9 to 5” routine. They may have classes or labs that start as early as 8 a.m. or end after 9 p.m. As well, group and, particularly, studio work often take place in the evening or on weekends, sometimes extending into the early morning hours.
- Be aware that, when overwhelmed by multiple demands, students can sometimes be tempted to take what seems to be the easy way out by cheating or plagiarizing. These are forms of academic misconduct which the university treats very seriously. Familiarize yourself with the information on Ryerson's academic integrity website and encourage your student to do likewise. Discuss the importance of honesty in all their academic pursuits.
- Remind your student of the role of “the three R's” when it comes to self-care and stress management - Relaxation, Recreation, and Relationships. All of these help to create a balanced lifestyle and to recharge one's mental, emotional and physical batteries.

Scenario 4: “Help - I’m running out of money?”

Your student is living off campus in a shared apartment. While they received some government financial assistance, it was a lower amount than anticipated. You agreed to pay tuition fees with the understanding your student would be responsible for other expenses. They saved some money from summer employment but are not currently working in order to focus on their studies. It is now November, and you receive an email indicating they are low on cash and asking for a money transfer to pay next month’s rent.

Transitional Issues in this Scenario

- Learning to manage financial resources
- If living away from home, adjusting to a more restrictive budget and greater financial independence

Students Say:

“Money is a big issue.”

“The financial strain makes studying and succeeding in classes very difficult.”

“Parents should encourage [their] child not to have a part-time job first year, if possible, because it’s a lot to handle and the student could concentrate better if they don’t need to work as well as go to school.”

“Adding on work to 20+ hours of school is very stressful. Although students may not ask for it, they always need and want help.”

How You Can Help:

- Talk about money matters before school starts. Help your student draw up a realistic budget and discuss with them a financial plan that will ensure sufficient resources to cover expenses. Revisit the budget created at mid-year and year’s end. Address the responsibilities and consequences associated with using credit cards.
- Work with your student to develop strategies for resisting overspending and for ensuring that they have savings should an emergency arise.
- Discuss the impact of working part-time on their studies. It is generally not advisable for students carrying a full course load (five to six courses), particularly those just beginning university, to work more than 12 - 15 hours a week. In cases where it is necessary for your student to work more than this, explore the possibility of a reduced course load.
- Be clear and open about the amount of financial support you are able to offer and for what purposes (e.g. tuition, books and supplies, rent).
- Ensure that your student has accurate information about the payment of fees and any consequences related to having an outstanding debt to the university. Details can be located on the Office of the Registrar Fees page.
- Check out the sources of financial aid and awards on campus and in the broader community and encourage your student to do so as well. Make certain that they are aware of application deadlines for scholarships and bursaries as they may be earlier than expected.
- Suggest that your student investigate Career Boost and other on-campus employment opportunities. These are offered both during the academic year and over the summer months. Working on campus develops valuable life and employability skills. Additionally, as an employer, the university typically accommodates students’ academic schedules.
- Ryerson’s “OneCard” (the university’s official ID card) can be pre-loaded with money for meals at any of Ryerson’s eateries which can sometimes be preferable to giving your student a food allowance. The OneCard can also be used for other services such as photocopying, duplicating and printing.

Scenario 5: “My student is living on their own for the first time and I’m worried about their safety and well-being.”

You’re from a small community outside of Ontario. Although you had hoped that your student would get into residence, they applied too late and are now living with a friend from high school in an apartment a half-hour commute from campus. As they have never before been away from home, you’re concerned about their adjustment to big city life, their overall safety, and whether they have the discipline needed to manage the many challenges and responsibilities associated with their new-found independence.

Transitional Issues in this Scenario

- Managing increased personal responsibilities
- Adjusting to living independently
- Adapting to an unfamiliar environment
- Letting go

Students Say:

“Going from the structured routines of high school is difficult enough; having to do that and adjust to a new city and taking care of yourself (cooking, laundry, etc.) makes this a much bigger challenge.”

“University is a time for young adults to spread their wings and discover who they really are.”

“Share [your] wisdom. Share [your] experiences. Tell the truth about these things.”

“Parents need to know that it’s important to have a social life, and that having a social life doesn’t mean that we are irresponsible and don’t care about school.”

How You Can Help:

- Ask your student whether they would like to learn more about the basics – nutrition, meal planning and preparation, doing laundry, cleaning, money management, paying bills etc. – before they leave home. Be responsive to their needs even if it means providing a “crash course” in independent living.
- If your student has never been to Toronto, a family visit, if possible, can help to ease the transition. Plan to do some sightseeing and to experience the city’s transit system. Check out local amenities and shopping facilities, particularly those that offer goods at a discount.
- If you are concerned about underage drinking, be open to discussing this issue with your student. In accordance with Ontario provincial law, Ryerson’s Student Code of Non-Academic Conduct specifically prohibits students under the age of 19 from possessing or consuming alcohol anywhere on the university premises. Additionally, the university’s Residence Contract stipulates that underage residents cannot consume alcohol in or near the residence building. Those violating these conditions are subject to penalty. Alcohol awareness is a common focus of the university’s Health Promotion unit.
- Encourage your student to familiarize themselves with and avail themselves of the variety of supports available through Ryerson’s Security and Emergency Services. These include safety planning, a “Walk Safe” program in which Security Officers will accompany students to locations on campus or to the Dundas subway station, self-defense training, and emergency telephones. The main security operations centre is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week so someone is always there to answer a security inquiry.
- Help your student to view their university experience as a time of self-discovery and personal growth. Let them know that change is almost always difficult, that you believe in them, and that they can count on your support. Share your own challenges with becoming independent and how you coped.
- Encourage your student to be open with you about what they’re experiencing. If they indicate that they’re overwhelmed by their new responsibilities, let them know that this is not a sign of weakness, failure or immaturity. Assure them that, with time, they’ll begin to feel more adept and comfortable. Even then, expect that they’ll call from time to time with a new question or concern. Recognize that your student’s new-found personal independence is likely to be demonstrated in their behaviour and attitudes while at home. Rules and regulations that were once accepted without question may be disputed and your well-intended inquiries may be considered intrusions. Consider this as an opportunity to openly dialogue about your changing relationship.

Part 2:

International
Students

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Supporters of International Students

International Student Support provides transitional support, immigration advising, personal development support and much more to international students attending Ryerson University. International Student Support's mission is to empower so that people realize their infinite potential. Our office acts as a home away from home and provides a sense of community and belonging for those who are new to Canada. In order to set students up for success from the very beginning of their time at Ryerson, ISS requires first year students to attend mandatory check-in appointments. Once a semester, first year international students meet with an International Student Advisor to discuss their goals, aspirations and interests. During these appointments, International Student Advisors engage in conversation with students about goal-setting and progress, encourage students to access different resources on campus and advise on techniques and strategies students can implement to empower themselves to meet their goals. We also encourage students to reflect on their first year transition to Ryerson at the end of the Winter term so that they can reflect on the status of their goals, recognize their successes and identify areas where they can improve.

As parents and guardians of international students often have unique inquiries, advisors from International Student Support (ISS) have compiled the following list of frequently asked questions to support those who have students studying abroad at Ryerson University.

Q: My student might need help applying for immigration documents. Who can my student contact for support with applying for or renewing their immigration documents?

Answer: International students can contact the International Student Support office to get advice, resources and support in applying for or renewing their immigration documents, such as study permits or temporary resident visas. The International Student Advisors at International Student Support are licensed to provide immigration advice. We recommend that students schedule a one-on-one appointment with an advisor anytime from one to three months before their immigration status will expire to learn how to begin the renewal process. Students can also book Skype appointments with an advisor prior to arriving in Canada if they have questions by contacting issask@ryerson.ca. International Student Advisors are pleased to support and guide your student in maintaining a valid immigration status throughout their studies in Canada.

Q: English is not my student's first language. Where can my student go if they need help developing their English language skills?

Answer: English Language Support serves multilingual students and provides the opportunity for students to make a successful academic transition to English as the language of instruction in postsecondary education. Students who use English as an additional language are invited to access writing, listening, speaking, reading and oral presentation support through individual appointments, group sessions or language labs.

Students are also encouraged to further develop their language skills outside of the classroom by participating in social events! International students are encouraged to attend monthly socials hosted by International Student Support, as well as join our Glocal Links program, which promotes intercultural learning and dialogue and provides students with an opportunity to share their own culture while learning about others. Getting out and interacting with others in a social setting will help students develop oral fluency, enhance comprehension and expand their vocabulary. Students can learn more about programming offered through ISS by dropping by our office and speaking to our peer mentors or by visiting www.connectru.ryerson.ca, a Ryerson platform that shows students upcoming events and provides them with information on clubs and organizations on campus.

Q: My student might need an official letter to confirm their enrollment at university or for other purposes. How can they request this type of letter?

Answer: Students can request letters of a non-academic nature, such as confirmation of enrolment, statement of annual educational expenses, letters for Canadian immigration purposes and other types of letters, by stopping by our office in person. These types of letters are called “Status letters” and students can fill out a form to request the specific type of letter they need. These letters can also be requested via email by emailing issask@ryerson.ca. The standard processing time for a letter is five (5) business days. If the student needs the letter urgently, they can pay an additional rush fee and the letter can be prepared in two (2) business days.

Q: My student may need to seek medical attention while in Canada. How does my student get access to their health insurance plan?

Answer: Full-time undergraduate, graduate and Ryerson ESL Foundation international students at Ryerson are automatically enrolled in the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP). UHIP is mandatory health insurance for international students and the fees for UHIP are automatically charged to international students’ tuition, so you do not need to worry about making any additional payments. International students can obtain their UHIP coverage card by visiting the ISS office anytime from Monday to Friday, from 9:00am to 5:00pm. ISS offers information sessions for international students to learn more about how their health insurance works in the first few weeks of classes, so please encourage your student to attend!

Q: My student is not sure where they will live in Toronto. How can I support them in finding a place to live on or off campus?

Answer: Priority for on campus housing is given to students entering first year, as well as those who are geographically the furthest away from Ryerson University so, if incoming international students have a good chance of getting a spot in residence if they are interested. Ryerson has three on campus residences available for students. Pitman Hall (PIT) is the largest residence building and has single, double and apartment style dorms with a community kitchen and lounge on each floor.

O’Keefe House (OKF) has double and triple room options with one large community kitchen. The International Living & Learning Centre (ILC) features single and double rooms with a community kitchen and lounge on each floor.

If your student would prefer to live off campus, or was not offered a spot in residence, Ryerson has an Off Campus Housing office that can provide support. Please contact offcamp@ryerson.ca for assistance.

Q: My student has never lived away from home. Will my student be safe on campus?

Answer: Absolutely! Ryerson offers many security measures to ensure that students are as safe as possible on campus. Our “walk-safe” program, where security guard can escort your student to nearby parking lots, another location on campus or to the nearest subway station, is offered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Ryerson also provides the opportunity for students to book a one-on-one safety talk with a representative from campus security where they can learn about basic safety principles related to living in Toronto.

Q: My student has dietary restrictions. What are their food options on campus?

Answer: Ryerson offers food sources suitable for all diets courtesy of our RU Eats department. We serve halal, vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free dishes. Food prepared on campus is diverse and nutritious as the RU eats staff work hard to ensure all ingredients are fresh. Students can eat fresh food at our residences, Oakham cafe, and other cafeterias on campus.

Q: My student may get homesick. Where can they go for support?

Answer: Studying in another country is a big step and we understand the significance of the transition that international student experience. We encourage international students to get as involved as possible as this will help familiarize them with their home away from home and begin building a sense of community. A great starting point for meeting new people is participating in International Student Support programming, such as peer socials and our Glocal Links program. International students are also welcome to book an appointment with one of the International Student Advisors when having difficulty with any aspect of their transition to Canada.

Question: My student might need counselling or mental health support. Where can they go?

Answer: Ryerson is committed to student mental health and wellbeing and emphasizes the importance of self-care. The Centre for Student Development and Counseling has multidisciplinary team of counselors, psychologists and social workers who offer one-on-one and group counselling so students have a safe and confidential place to discuss their mental health.

Q: University will be a big transition for my student. What can they do if they are struggling in their classes?

Answer: We understand how difficult it can be to adjust to post secondary education, especially in a different country, and Ryerson offers many programs to support your student academically. Students can book appointments with Student Learning Support (SLS) or attend individual or group sessions to improve their math, writing, and study skills.

Q: My student has a disability and will need some extra support to succeed academically in university. Where can they go for support?

Answer: Ryerson gladly accommodates students with mobility issues, learning disabilities and mental health disabilities in a variety of ways through Academic Accommodation Support. Some of the supports available include "RU noted" program, which provides students who may have difficulty taking their own notes with access to course notes taken by another student. Ryerson also offers a test centre where students requiring an accommodation can write their tests at their own pace in a peaceful environment. To register with Academic Accommodation Support, please contact aasadmin@ryerson.ca.

Q: My student might have difficulty meeting new people and making friends. Are there opportunities for my student to get involved on campus?

Answer: Ryerson has over 200 clubs and organizations for your student to choose from, so they will definitely be able to find something that interests them! Your student can also get involved in cultural groups on campus for a sense of familiarity and belonging. Examples of these groups include the Chinese Students Association, the Muslim Students Association, and the African Students Association. There are also many sports, spiritual, music, faculty-specific, arts and professional interest groups for students to join. For more information on how to get involved on campus, students can view a full list of all our organizations on www.connectru.ryerson.ca.

Contact International Student Support

- Location: POD 50A, Lower ground level
- Phone: 416-979-5000 x 6655
- Web: www.ryerson.ca/internationalsupport
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RyersonISS/>
- Twitter: @RyersonISS
- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/RyersonISS>

Part 3:

Month to
Month Guide

A Month To Month Guide to Help Your Student Achieve Success

There is a particular rhythm to the academic year for all university students. Certain events that emerge during the year will generate student stress and transitional concerns. As a parent or supporter, understanding when these events occur can help prepare you to assist your student throughout each semester. What follows is a month-by-month guide on the transitional issues which might arise as Ryerson's academic year unfolds. For specific dates and deadlines see the Significant Dates page of the most current undergraduate calendar.

August/September

A week-long, campus-wide orientation begins during the final week of August through to Labor Day. The Department of Student Life conducts a rich array of orientation activities during that period as do many academic departments. Orientation typically involves a number of organized events that are designed to help students meet others on campus while providing an opportunity to get acclimated to the city and to campus life and to learn more about their program of studies. There is also a session offered for family, friends and supporters of first year students. Not all students will have the same experience during orientation. Some may focus on making friends and attending social events, while others may look for particular activities that appeal to their interests. A Week of Welcome, hosted by the Ryerson Students' Union, follows Orientation during which students will be introduced to the variety of student groups on campus.

Classes begin on the day after Labour Day. As classes progress, first year students often realize that they need to learn how to handle new academic responsibilities (e.g., meeting deadlines, reading several chapters in one week). At the same time, many will understandably want to participate in social activities such as campus clubs and organizations. In some cases, misgivings about program suitability might arise as early as the first few weeks of classes.

Happenings in September:

- Labor Day (University Closed)
- Classes commence for full- and part-time undergraduate programs.
- Final date to drop an undergraduate class and be eligible for a full refund (if this results in a lower fee range).
- Final date to withdraw from an undergraduate program and be eligible for the majority of fees to be funded.

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Homesickness
- Meeting new people
- Adjusting to a new environment
- Financial adjustment

October

During this month students face two major issues. The first is the challenge of meeting the requirements of their coursework. Term papers, mid-term exams, presentations, and group projects are often due by the middle to the end of the month. Quite naturally, your student will feel rather stressed. They will be tested not only on course content, but also indirectly on their learning skills (e.g., note-taking abilities, study habits, and time management). The second involves students' recognition that their lifestyle has changed within a short period of time. This is especially evident around the Thanksgiving long weekend. Those who go home may be unable to partake in all holiday activities. They may have to study or have a lot of reading to do. Some may discover that they cannot wait to get back to university, while others may find it hard to return. Relationships initiated in high school may be strained or renegotiated.

Happenings in October

- Final date for full- and part-time undergraduate students to drop a Fall term class and be eligible for a 50% fee refund, if applicable.
- Final date to withdraw from an undergraduate program and be eligible for a 50% refund of Fall fees.
- Thanksgiving (University closed).
- Fall Study Week for undergraduate students except B.Eng.

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Test anxiety
- Time management
- Academic adjustments
- Homecoming blues
- Shifting social networks

November

Grades for coursework such as mid-term exams and major assignments tend to come in at this time. Students' academic performance can decrease by a letter grade if not more, and for some, worry about disappointing important people in their lives may develop. The final deadlines for dropping Fall term courses in good academic standing typically occurs at this time. Your student may be assessing their progress, contemplating dropping courses in which they are not doing well, or even considering an alternate educational direction. Students begin to gear up for final exams. Although some will be feeling comfortable with their student role on campus, others will be wondering if they fit in. Financial concerns may arise as students find that their summer earnings or first-semester loans are starting to run out. Your student may also face issues regarding their roommate or living situation.

Happenings in November

- Final date for full- or part-time undergraduate students to drop a Fall term class in good academic standing (no fee refund). A failing grade will be assigned if students simply stop attending classes after this deadline.
- Final date to withdraw from an undergraduate program for the Fall term in good academic standing (no refund of fees).

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Academic pressures
- Pre-final exam anxiety
- Social life re-evaluation
- Economic stress
- Relationships with roommates

December

Fall semester classes end this month and final exams are written, some of them in large lecture halls and gymnasiums.. Some students study all night and develop poor sleep hygiene a. Staying late on campus and joining or creating study groups is not uncommon. Students living in residence typically have 24 hours after their last exam to vacate their rooms.

Some out-of-town students may eagerly await the return home for the winter break. Others may find it difficult to adjust to changing dynamics in relationships with old friends and family members. During the break, they may continue to keep to their atypical schedules and may resist attempts to enforce previous sleeping habits and curfews. Final grades and academic standing will be posted on RAMSS (Ryerson's academic portal) during the latter part of the month and may cause stress for those who have performed below their expectations.

Happenings in December

- Fall term undergraduate examination period including Saturdays
- Mid-Year Break begins with the University closing and re-opening in January
- Issuing of Fall semester grades and academic standing

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Exam stress
- Time management
- Seasonal obligations
- Family obligations
- Anxiety about fall-term performance

January

While, students who have adjusted to the university system are likely to return to class feeling confident, others may experience the post-break blues after leaving home again. For some, questions may come up as to whether they can handle the responsibilities of being a university student or whether, indeed, they are on the right academic path. Those contemplating transferring programs or schools will need to investigate application deadlines as they can arise in the next couple of weeks or months. In some cases course selection adjustments will be made to accommodate an impending change in educational direction.

Reconnecting with friends on campus and accessing the appropriate student supports can help your student ease back into the academic routine. Opportunities to become more involved in campus life become available (e.g., joining the executive of clubs or applying to be residence life staff). The applications for summer internships can be due this early.

Happenings in January

- Classes commence for full- and part-time undergraduate programs.
- Final date to drop an undergraduate class and be eligible for a full refund (if this results in a lower fee range).
- Final date to withdraw from an undergraduate program and be eligible for a full fee refund.

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Post-holiday blues
- Questioning their university student identity
- Future academic planning
- Exploring opportunities on campus and in the community

February

The search for summer employment often begins now. As well, students living away from their family home may start to consider living accommodations for next year. Stressors associated with intimate relationships may arise. For some, these matters may be sources of anxiety and preoccupation. Reading week occurs this month. This time may be used to catch up on readings, do term papers, prepare presentations, work on group projects, or study for mid-term examinations scheduled for after the return to classes. Other students may choose to go on vacation while deferring their academic responsibilities.

Happenings in February

- Final date for full- and part-time undergraduate students to drop a Winter term class OR withdraw from their program and be eligible for a 50% refund of Winter term fees if applicable.
- Family Day (University Closed)
- Winter Reading Week

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Uncertainty about and planning for housing arrangements for the next year
- Relationship issues
- Determining how to spend Reading Week
- Summer employment hunting

March

As the winter term moves into its final stages, the stress will most likely increase for your student. Based on the results of their assignments and mid-term examinations, some students may contemplate dropping winter semester courses. Typically final drop deadlines for winter courses occur toward the end of this month. Additionally, students may face uncertainties related to upcoming course intentions for the next academic year. Your student will likely be preparing for their final exams, but may feel more comfortable because they have experienced this before. The search continues for summer employment and accommodation for next year.

Happenings in March

- Course intentions for the following academic year occur
- Final date for full- or part-time undergraduate students to drop a Winter term class in good academic standing (no fee refund). A failing grade will be assigned if students simply stop attending classes after this deadline.
- Final date to withdraw from an undergraduate program for the Winter term in good academic standing (no refund of Winter fees).

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Anxiety over final exams
- Course selection/decision-making regarding academic path
- Summer planning begins
- Financial pressures as resources diminish

April

Winter term classes end. Final assignments will be due and final exams will take place. Some students who have lived away from their families during the academic year will be excited to return home. Others may feel anxious about separating from new friends made at Ryerson. Students may attempt to orchestrate their move back home for the summer while simultaneously preparing for and writing final exams. Some may register for summer courses at the Chang School for Continuing Education in order to make up dropped/failed courses or to get a jump start on second year. Individuals may be facing financial strain because of unexpected expenses. Those who have not already secured summer employment may feel pressured to find it. The stress students experience at this time of year can be reflected in cramming, not sleeping well, and having poor eating habits.

Happenings in April

- Classes end for full- and part-time undergraduate programs.
- Winter term undergraduate examination period including Saturdays

Potential transitional challenges at this time:

- Handling academic stress
- Saying “goodbye” for the summer
- Summer employment hunting
- Planning for Fall housing

Summer Term

From May to August, students may be enrolled in Spring/Summer classes. If your student is living away from home, they'll need to consider summer housing and work options. Spring/Summer courses can include compressed learning schedules, and thus the workload may be heightened compared to the academic year.

Part 4:

Ryerson Student
Affairs & Campus
Supports

Ryerson Student Affairs, Student Wellbeing, and Other Campus Supports

There are a variety of campus supports ready for your incoming student. Whether they are looking for ways to connect with other students, in need of writing support for an essay, looking for assistance in dealing with mental health challenges, seeking a mentor that will introduce a first-generation student to university life, wanting to register for academic accommodations, or interested in learning about safety and security on campus, Student Affairs, Student Wellbeing, and other campus supports are available to help.

Student Affairs

www.ryerson.ca/studentaffairs is your first stop to learn about the resources available to students. For a glance at the services, see below:

Learning Support

This eclectic group of dedicated professionals share a love of learning and come from a variety of backgrounds – education, counselling, teaching, academia, mentorship, coaching. They teach essential academic skills and study techniques that help students to more effectively express their intelligence, apply their knowledge and communicate their ideas. Many of the Learning Support services are located on the 4th Floor of the Student Learning Centre. Learn more at www.ryerson.ca/sls

English Language Support

For students who use English as an additional language and who need assistance with their writing, reading, listening, speaking, and oral presentation skills. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/english-language-support/

Graduate Student Support

For students enrolled in one of Ryerson's Master's or PhD programs seeking help with developing advanced academic skills including thesis completion. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/graduate-student-support/

Math Support

For students needing comprehensive math support, guidance in their math-related courses, or simply to develop their math skills. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/math-support/

Study Skills and Transition Support

For students who want to create effective study habits, develop their study skills, and are looking for academic support in their transition to Ryerson. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/study-skills-and-transition-support/

Writing Support

For students wanting to improve their writing skills and receive feedback on their writing assignments. Learn more at www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/writing-support/

Student Life

Student Life helps students to realize their full potential by connecting them to unique opportunities on campus, across the broader Toronto community and globally. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlife

Tri-mentoring Program (TMP)

The Tri-Mentoring Program is a centralized model that offers mentorship opportunities to students of all identities across all faculties. They facilitate student's learning, leadership and employment through mentoring, on-campus involvement, and social interaction. The program matches first year students with those in upper years in the same program or with similar interests in order to facilitate a successful transition to Ryerson. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlife/trimentoring/

RU Leadership

Committed to the development of the whole person, RU Leadership encourages students to use their experiences on campus and in the community to enhance their personal and professional leadership capacity. Programming is focused on experiential learning and reflection. Learn more at www.ryerson.ca/studentlife/leadership/

International Student Support

International Student Support is the home away from home for all students studying internationally, offering a comprehensive range of programming and supports dedicated to students' transition and personal growth. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlife/internationalsupport/

Orientation and Campus Events

During Orientation Week and the first six weeks of classes Student Life offers opportunities for incoming students to make friends, get connected to the supports needed for a successful transition to university, and develop a sense of community and belonging at Ryerson. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentlife/programs/

Career and Co-op Centre

The Career and Co-op Centre encourages students to maximize their potential as skilled professionals, ready to develop meaningful careers. They work with campus and external partners to offer tailored programming and weave career education into the entire student experience and continue their support for alumni up to five years after graduation. Co-op facilitators support students seeking co-op placement opportunities and work with employers to broaden Ryerson's co-operative offerings. The RCCC services include access to on- and off- campus employment. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/career

Student Housing and Community Care

Housing provides student residents a thriving community rooted in empathy, inclusion, connection, learning, and support. The Off-Campus Housing office helps students living off-campus to find apartments and understand their rights as a tenant. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/housing/. Student Care and Conduct upholds and promotes community standards of respect, civility and safety. We support students who are in distress or who demonstrate disruptive behaviour. We believe students can grow from difficult or negative experiences so they remain successful in their academic and personal lives while at Ryerson. The

Thrive RU

This initiative seeks to encourage student excellence by fostering mental wellbeing and resilience. Through events and programming the program seeks to nurture the whole student, and strengthen the link between academic success and a healthy lifestyle. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/thriveru

Health and Wellbeing

Health and Wellbeing, in the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students, supports the Ryerson community through responsive, collaborative, and innovative medical care, personal and career counselling, health education, and community development. There is a multidisciplinary team focused on fostering students' resilience and maintaining the health and well-being of the Ryerson community. Learn more at www.ryerson.ca/healthandwellness/

Health Promotion

Health Promotion is a catalyst for the Ryerson community to develop a flourishing environment. Their goal is to provide current, effective and relevant health information events and programs which inspire and support students, staff, and faculty. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/healthandwellness/healthpromotion/

Medical Centre

The Medical Centre is an on-campus, medical clinic offering quality family physician services to Ryerson students, staff, and faculty, including treatment of illnesses, routine examinations, sexual health, and mental health assessments. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/healthandwellness/medicalcentre/

The Centre for Student Development and Counselling

The Centre for Student Development team includes psychologists, social workers, registered psychotherapists, psychiatrists and doctoral and masters interns dedicated to enhancing students' emotional and social well-being, personal growth, academic success, and career development through a range of interventions and resources. Both same-day and book-ahead appointments are available. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/healthandwellness/counselling/

Academic Accommodation Support

For students living with disabilities and looking for help with their academic accommodations. Download (PDF) AAS Student Handbook. Learn more at www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/academic-accommodation-support/

Test Centre

For students and faculty, this service assists in facilitating the scheduling of make-up and accommodated tests and exams. Learn more at: <http://www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/test-centre/>

More Campus Supports, Services and Resources

Ryerson ServiceHub: Office of the Registrar

In one location known as the Service Hub the Office of the Registrar (RO), provides essential services to students including Ryerson's Administrative Management Self-Service System (RAMSS) support, Admissions, Enrolment and Records, Student Fees, Student Financial Assistance, class and exam scheduling, transcripts, academic advising and more. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/registrar/about/

Ryerson Online Undergraduate Calendar

The Undergraduate Calendar is the official statement of new and revised programs and courses approved by the Senate of Ryerson University. It's the definitive guide to Ryerson's programs, policies and procedures. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/undergraduate/calendars

Student Financial Assistance

Student Financial Assistance administers a number of financial assistance programs including OSAP, scholarships and bursaries. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/currentstudents/financialaid

Ask Ryerson

This web-based Q and A resource for Ryerson community members is available 24/7 and can be the first step for students seeking immediate information about the university's policies, procedures, services, and resources. Learn more at <http://ask.ryerson.ca/>

OneCard Office

The OneCard is the official photo identification card for Ryerson University. As The OneCard will be the single most important piece of ID for Ryerson students it should be carried with students at all times when on campus. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/onecard

Undergraduate Student Guide

The Undergraduate Student Guide is the official companion to Ryerson's Undergraduate Calendar. This online guide summarizes the policies, fees, procedures and services of which Ryerson students need to be aware. The section on "Academics" is a must-read. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/studentguide

Athletics and Recreation

Athletics and Recreation's diverse programming includes CIS, OUA and competitive Club teams, many of which are nationally ranked; recreational and fitness programs world class facilities; and an extensive outreach program that both immerses our student-athletes in service activities and invites the community onto campus to utilize our facilities. Learn more at: www.ryersonrams.ca

Integrated Risk Management (Safety and Security)

Security services on campus work to ensure that safety and security is everyone's responsibility. Safety and Security also operates the WalkSafe program at Ryerson, a free service available to all Ryerson community members 24/7 seeking an escort to various campus locations including some off-campus ones. Learn more at: <http://www.ryerson.ca/irm/>

Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

The Office of EDI infuses the values of equity, diversity and inclusion into all aspects of campus life and supports community members who are engaged in advancing these principles. The Office includes several units: Aboriginal Initiatives; Accessibility, Education and Awareness; Human Rights Services (which administers the Discrimination and Harassment Policy); and Strategic Planning, Assessment, and Special Projects. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/equity/about/

Aboriginal Student Services

Ryerson Aboriginal Student Services - also known by its acronym R.A.S.S. - provides a culturally supportive environment and serves as a place to balance academic learning with traditional teachings and culture. The role of this office is to promote academic excellence, provide specialized services for First Nations, Metis and Inuit students on campus, and develop a mutually productive relationship between Ryerson and the Aboriginal Community. Learn more at: www.ryerson.ca/aboriginal

Office of Sexual Violence Support and Education (OSVSE)

The Office of Sexual Violence Support and Education works from the premises that consent comes first and that university processes should be survivor-driven and empowering. The office provides options and supports to survivors including facilitation of access to counselling and medical services, safety planning, academic and work accommodations, self-care resources, and advocacy. OSVSE also provides resources, training, and education to the Ryerson community. Learn more at www.ryerson.ca/sexual-violence

Ryerson University Library and Archives

The library offers a variety of services including resource borrowing, facilities booking, and research and instructional services. Learn more at: <https://library.ryerson.ca/services>

Ryerson Student Union (RSU)

The Ryerson Students Union's mission is to empower students and build the campus community. They advocate for student rights, support student groups, events and initiatives, and provide discounts on local transportation and entertainment events. There are a variety of Equity Service Centres operated out of the RSU as well. Learn more at: www.rsuonline.ca

RSU Good Food Centre

The Good Food Centre works to enhance food security for all Ryerson community members. By providing emergency food relief, developing meal preparation skills, and offering sustainability education the Food Centre contributes to the RSU's mission of ensuring equitable access to post-secondary education . Learn more at: www.rsuonline.ca/good-food-centre

Academic Integrity Office

Being a member of the Ryerson Community means students are expected to uphold the academic integrity values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, courage and trustworthiness. The Academic Integrity Office seeks to ensure that academic integrity is carried out in a just and transparent manner. Learn more about Academic Integrity: www.ryerson.ca/academicintegrity/students/what-is-integrity-and-misconduct/

Just a Few Final Words:

The first year of university is an important milestone for many students and their families. Whether your student is going to live on their own, on campus, or commute from home, this sudden change of expectations and environment can be both a source of anxiety and excitement. No handbook can ever provide you with complete knowledge of what your student may encounter during their first year at university, but we hope that some of the suggestions we've made can make your journey and that of your student a little bit smoother!

To learn more about
services and supports
available to students at
Ryerson University, visit
ryerson.ca/studentaffairs.

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