

They're Back...for Six Weeks!

By: Amanda Stone Norton, First-Year Experience Coordinator

We were all looking forward to having Lauren come home for fall break, but the weekend was a nightmare. None of us had anticipated how different she would be. She was rude and ignored us most of the time. We were all hurt and disappointed. The truth is we could hardly wait for her to get on the bus back to school so that we could return to our normal family life again. (Source: *Don't Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years* by Helen E. Johnson & Christine Schelhas-Miller)

This is the opening line in Johnson and Schelhas-Miller's chapter entitled "Just When You Get Used to the Empty Nest, They're Back!" and I've heard so many similar stories from parents of first-year students over the years. The past ten weeks have been a time of change and adjustment for your student. A time when she or he has learned independence and self-regulation; therefore, the return home can often result in a culture shock for both you and your student.

In their book, Johnson and Schelhas-Miller provide a list of Dos and Don'ts to assist you in your student's transition from college to home. They recommend discussing with your student what she/he wants to do during the six-week break and how and when you all would like to spend time together. This is a time to re-negotiate evening hours to return home and as well as family responsibilities. "Don't expect to welcome home the same child you sent off to college," recommends Johnson and Schelhas-Miller. They also recommend that you avoid planning activities and events without consulting your student, feeling rejected because your student spends more time with friends than with family, and waiting on your student's every need. Don't put your life on hold just because she or he has returned. While you're thinking that you want to spend all of your free time with your student, she/he is thinking about catching up on sleep, eating familiar foods, and sharing college stories with high school friends. The important thing to remember is not to take this personally, and to talk to your student about your needs and expectations and be open to listening to hers/his as well.

Enjoy your student will she/he is home, and have a wonderful Winter Break!