

College Student Development

The Journey from Freshmen to Graduation

Information below is based on Chickering's Seven Vectors (see last page for full reference). Remember that not all traditional aged college students always fit into neat categories. Other factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities influence developmental processes.

Freshmen: "I'm free! Now where do I go?"

Developmental Tasks:

- ✓ Separating from family and home life and transitioning to being on their own
- ✓ Developing and/or discovering one's likes, interests, and preferences
- ✓ Balancing social and academic demands and pressures

Common Struggles:

- Mental Health Issues
- Homesickness
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Study Skills
- Lack of connection, social life, or friends
- Family problems and stress
- Loneliness
- Confusion about major
- Using unhealthy and nonproductive coping behaviors such as binge drinking, unprotected sex, frequent one-night stands, anger outbursts, isolating self

Sophomores: "Do I stay or should I go?"

Developmental Tasks:

- ✓ Achieving competence in social and academic life
- ✓ Establishing personal autonomy
- ✓ Developing a sense identity and purpose
- ✓ Making important choices as an individual instead of as a collective freshmen group
- ✓ Declaring a major and a sense of career direction
- ✓ Exploring values

Common Struggles:

- Mental Health Issues

- Confusion
- Anxiety and stress
- Internal conflicts
- Doubting self, abilities, decisions, etc.
- Dealing with feelings of frustration, anxiety, fear, depression
- Values clash
- Family problems
- Wanting to transfer
- Relationship and social struggles
- Academic struggles
- Using unhealthy and nonproductive coping behaviors such as binge drinking, unprotected sex, frequent one-night stands, anger outbursts, isolating self

Juniors: “I’m here and I’m confident!”

Developmental Tasks:

- ✓ Choosing a career path (more focus on personal and academic life and job opportunities)
- ✓ Increased commitment to intimate relationships, including friendships and a better sense of interdependence
- ✓ Better sense of values clarification
- ✓ Increased self-confidence in purpose, role, beliefs, etc.

Common Struggles:

- Mental Health Issues
- Concerns with career path
- Relationship issues
- Struggles with feelings of anxiety, depression, and confusion
- Decision-making difficulties
- Family problems
- Using unhealthy and nonproductive coping behaviors such as binge drinking, unprotected sex, frequent one-night stands, anger outbursts, isolating self

Seniors: “What’s next after college?”

Developmental Tasks:

- ✓ Getting ready to graduate
- ✓ Making plans for personal and career life beyond college
- ✓ Deciding on job or graduate school
- ✓ Deciding on the future of intimate relationships
- ✓ Saying good-bye to meaningful relationships

Common Struggles:

- Mental Health Issues
- Anxiety about graduation and no set plans or clear path
- Lack of motivation
- Decision-making difficulties about future academic, personal, or career life
- Feelings of panic, discouragement, confusion, and/or sadness
- Disconnecting prematurely from meaningful relationships

Developmental Tasks of Young Adults (Chickering's Model)

1. Moving through autonomy to interdependence
 - Learn to separate from parents and learn physical and emotional independence/interdependence
 - Life transition phase can be difficult and can lead to homesickness
 - Conflict = parent need to be needed and struggle with letting go = students don't want to need parents
2. Managing Emotions
 - Learn to identify, express, and/ or control your intense emotions and learn appropriate responses
3. Developing and Clarifying Purpose
 - Learning to prepare for a vocation, avocation, or a lifestyle
 - Developing a career path by exploring interests, choosing a major, learning job skills, and gaining job experience
4. Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships
 - Learn to develop permanent and significant intimate relationships with friends or with an intimate partner
 - Learning tolerance, understanding, empathy, and intimacy skills
5. Developing Competence in:
 - Intellectual and academic competence
 - Critical thinking skills
 - Physical or manual skills
 - Emotional and social effectiveness
 - Living a wellness lifestyle by learning to balance social, physical, emotional, intellectual, occupational, financial, environmental, and spiritual needs
6. Developing Integrity
 - Acquiring and clarifying a value system which includes: morals, beliefs, ethics about life and personal right and wrongs
 - Develop one's own spirituality beliefs
 - Become congruent with values and acts
 - Develop cultural awareness
 - Develop responsible behavior
7. Developing Self-Identity
 - Explore who you are and what kind of person you want to be
 - Develop one's own gender role identity or sexual preference
 - Decide on one's beliefs and feelings about personal gender roles, body, appearance, self-esteem