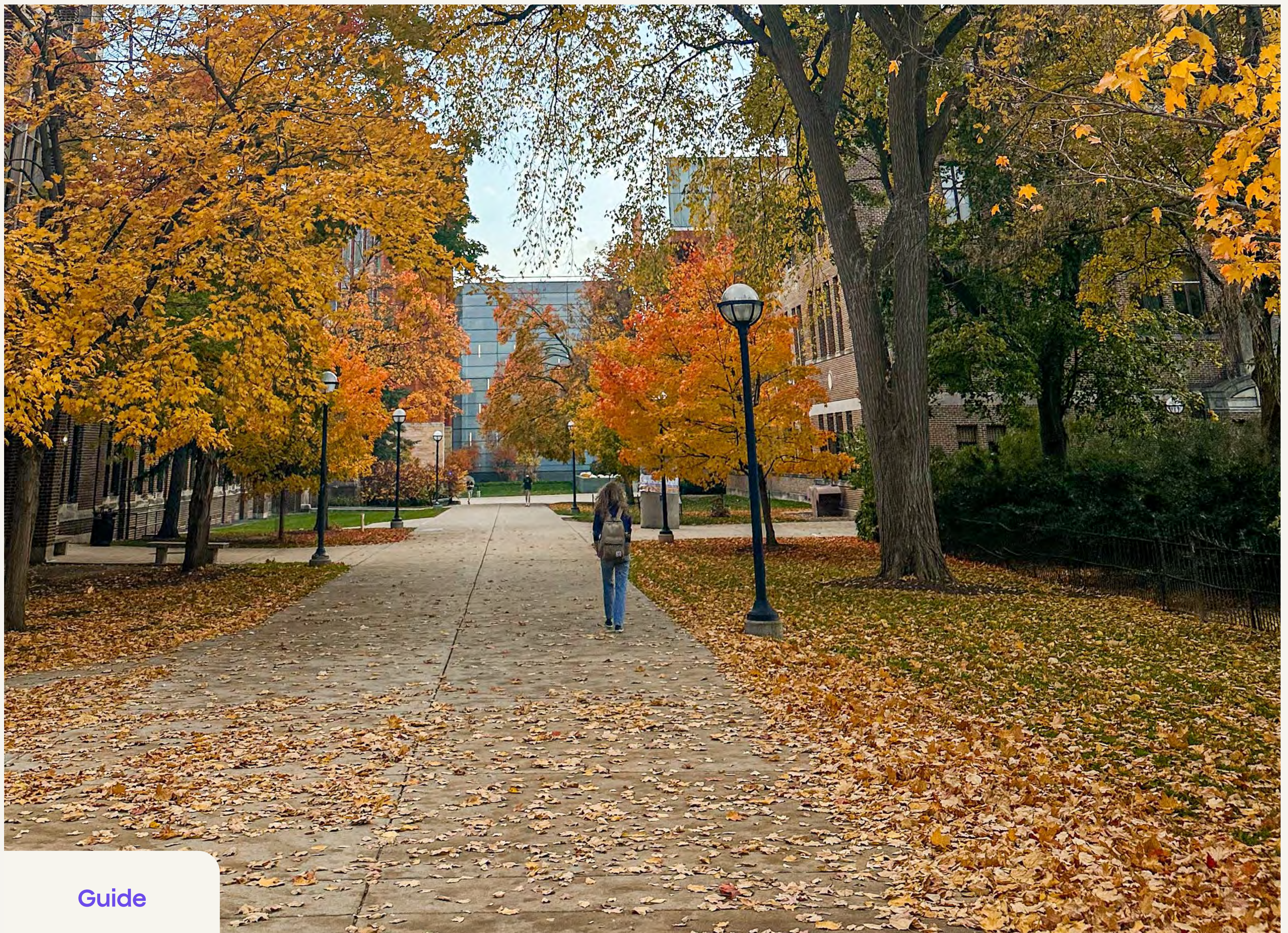


## Freshmen orientation: Beyond the campus tour

The unofficial guide to navigating the emotional side of your first semester



Starting college comes with a lot of to-dos: get to class on time, meet your roommate, join a club — oh, and don't forget your shower shoes.

**What people talk about less is how weird it can feel to start over.**

You might be excited to be on your own and miss home at the same time. You might finally have the freedom you've been waiting for and have no idea what to do with it. You might be meeting new people every day and still wonder where you fit in.

That's all part of the transition.

If you don't feel completely settled right away, you're in good company. Most students are figuring it out as they go.

Starting college means building a new life from scratch, and that takes time.

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# What to expect during your first few weeks

College can look effortless from the outside. Everyone seems busy, social, and fully settled.



In reality, most people are figuring it out as they go.

The first few weeks often come with:

- ✓ Too many new names, places, and expectations
- ✓ A schedule that no one is managing for you anymore
- ✓ Pressure to make friends quickly
- ✓ Classes that move faster than expected
- ✓ Random waves of missing home

The challenge is that all of these things happen at once. You're learning how to live independently, build new relationships, and succeed academically — all while adjusting to a completely new environment.

## Give yourself permission to be new

One of the biggest misconceptions students have is that they'll feel settled right away. The first few weeks aren't a test of how well you're doing — they're a period of adjustment.

**Instead of asking:**

"Why don't I have this figured out yet?"

**Try asking:**

"What would help me feel a little more comfortable this week than I did last week?"

Give yourself permission to grow into this experience instead of mastering it all at once. A few weeks from now, things that feel overwhelming today will probably feel a lot more manageable.

**Focus on small wins:**

- Finding your way around campus without Google Maps
- Introducing yourself to someone new
- Attending office hours
- Establishing a routine
- Making it through a tough day

# Missing home doesn't mean you made the wrong choice



Homesickness gets a bad reputation, but it's really just a sign that something mattered to you. It's something most students go through (even those who look like they're thriving).

## A few things that can help:

- Set up regular calls or texts with people from home
- Create small routines that make campus feel more familiar
- Add personal touches to your room that make it feel like your space
- Find a few go-to spots on campus where you can recharge
- Let yourself miss home without feeling guilty about it

You don't have to choose between staying connected to where you came from and building a life where you are. There's room for both.

# Real connection takes time

It's easy to look around and assume everyone else has already found "their people."

Maybe your roommate is always out with a group. Maybe people on your floor already seem close. Maybe your feed is full of dorm photos, game-day posts, and group dinners that make it look like everyone's social life clicked overnight.

But college friendships rarely form that fast, even when it looks like they do.



Most real friendships are built through small, repeated moments: sitting next to the same person in class, showing up to the same club more than once, studying with someone before an exam, grabbing food after a meeting, or realizing you keep laughing at the same things.

You don't need one perfect conversation. You need a few small reasons to keep crossing paths.

Try starting small:

- Say yes to one invitation, even if you feel a little awkward
- Ask someone from class if they want to study together
- Go back to a club or event more than once before deciding it's "not for you"
- Invite someone to grab coffee, lunch, or a snack after class
- Spend less time measuring your social life against what people post online
- Look for people who make you feel relaxed, not just people who seem popular or busy

Making friends might take longer than expected, but that doesn't mean your behind. Belonging usually takes shape gradually, through consistency, openness, and time. Start by finding places, routines, and conversations that make campus feel a little more familiar.

# Feeling out of place is normal — but be cautious of isolating

Most students experience moments during their first semester when they feel awkward, uncertain, or like they haven't quite found where they fit.

You might walk into a dining hall and wonder where to sit. You might spend a weekend feeling like everyone else has plans except you. You might question whether you're doing college "right."

Those experiences are more common than they seem.

The challenge is that sometimes, when we feel disconnected, our instinct is often to pull back. We skip the club meeting. We stay in our room. We tell ourselves we'll try again next week.



Sometimes a little alone time is exactly what you need. But if isolation starts becoming your default, it can make feelings of loneliness, stress, and self-doubt even harder to navigate.

Pay attention if you notice yourself:

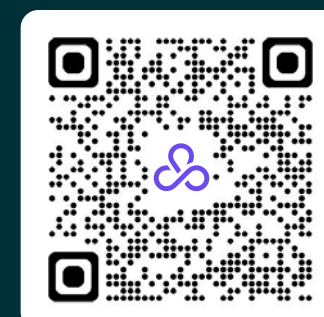
- ✓ Avoiding most social opportunities
- ✓ Spending nearly all your free time alone
- ✓ Skipping classes because everything feels like too much
- ✓ Ignoring texts or calls from people who care about you
- ✓ Feeling like you don't belong anywhere for an extended period of time

These are signs that you may need more connection and support.

## Find care with Rula

Rula provides personalized therapist recommendations based on your needs, with appointments available as soon as the next day.

Scan the QR code or visit [www.rula.com](https://www.rula.com) to find care





## Reach out before things feel urgent

One of the biggest myths about asking for help is that you have to wait until things are really bad. But waiting until you're overwhelmed is only going to make it harder to reach out for the support you need.

Sometimes the most helpful thing you can do is let one person know how you're doing.

### That person could be:

- A roommate
- A resident advisor
- A professor or academic advisor
- A friend from home
- A campus counselor
- A mental health provider

Sometimes, it can be hard to describe what you're even struggling with. But you don't have to wait until you have the perfect words. You might be surprised to find how well others can relate to what you're going through.

# Academic pressure can sneak up fast

College can be challenging — even if high school came easily.



The workload is different. The expectations are different. The structure is different. And suddenly, no one is reminding you about every deadline, checking whether you've started an assignment, or helping you manage your time.

For many students, the biggest adjustment isn't the difficulty of the material — it's learning how to manage everything on their own.

You may find yourself wondering:

- ✓ Am I studying enough?
- ✓ How is everyone else keeping up?
- ✓ What happens if I don't do well on this exam?
- ✓ Am I already falling behind?

Those questions are common, especially during your first semester.

## Don't wait until you're overwhelmed

A lot of students assume they should be able to figure everything out on their own before asking for help. But the reality is that college is designed with support systems built in for a reason.

**Remember:**

- Asking questions is part of learning, not a sign that you're struggling
- Office hours are for students who want guidance — not just students who are failing
- One bad grade rarely matters as much as it feels like it does
- Rest, exercise, and downtime are part of academic success, not distractions from it

Learning how to use the resources around you will lead to more success than trying to do everything perfectly on your own.

**Successful students aren't the ones who never struggle — they're the ones who know when to ask for support.**

# You're not in this alone

Most students experience loneliness at some point during their first year — even students who seem busy, outgoing, or constantly surrounded by people.

Starting over means leaving behind familiar routines, relationships, and support systems. It takes time to build new ones.

Feeling lonely from time to time is a normal part of that adjustment. But if you find yourself feeling disconnected most of the time, or if sadness, anxiety, or overwhelm are making it difficult to enjoy your daily life, it may be time to reach out.



## Pay attention if you notice:

- ✓ Persistent sadness or anxiety
- ✓ Difficulty getting through daily responsibilities
- ✓ Loss of interest in things you usually enjoy
- ✓ Feeling hopeless, numb, or constantly overwhelmed
- ✓ Pulling away from other people for an extended period of time

## Build your support system (and actually reach out)

A support system doesn't have to be one perfect best friend or a huge group of people.



## In fact, the strongest support systems are usually made up of several different connections:

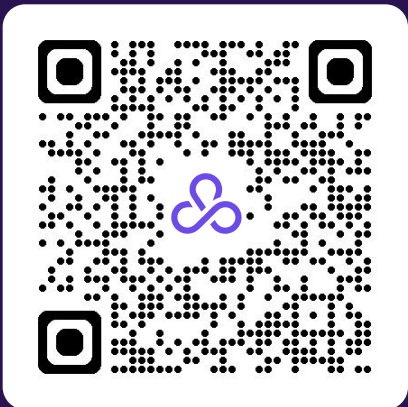
- ✓ Friends and roommates
- ✓ Family members
- ✓ Resident advisors
- ✓ Professors and academic advisors
- ✓ Student organizations and campus communities
- ✓ Campus counselors and mental health professionals

The goal is to know who you can turn to when you're having a tough day, a tough week, or a tough semester. Building support early can make college feel a little less overwhelming — and a lot less lonely.

# Navigating what's next

If you're feeling overwhelmed, lonely, uncertain, or simply trying to find your footing, you're not the only one.

Rula can help you find a mental health provider who understands what you're going through and can support you through this next chapter. You can schedule an appointment in as little as 3 minutes, with many providers having availability as soon as tomorrow.



Scan the QR code or visit [www.rula.com](https://www.rula.com)  
to find care with Rula

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