

## Every Student is a Hero

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Appreciative advisors are charged with helping students become effective agents for their own lifelong learning and personal development (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008). Part of this process involves helping students realize that they are the hero of their own story and that all heroes are on what Joseph Campbell (2008) termed the “Hero’s Journey.” There are three components to the Hero’s Journey: departure, initiation, and return. Campbell (2008) posited that life is a series of these Hero’s Journeys and armed with this knowledge, Appreciative Advisors can help ease the transition to college for entering college students by helping students realize that they are embarking upon their own Hero’s Journey. The purpose of this article is to suggest that Appreciative Advisors use the “Hero’s Journey” as an analogy to help first-year students understand they are the hero of their own journey and to educate them about the stages they will be experiencing as they transition into their new collegiate home.

### Departure

The journey of an entering college student starts as soon as they receive the acceptance letter. This moment of departure can be compared to the “Call to Adventure” phase of the Hero’s Journey. With so many curiosities and unknown experiences ahead, the student is filled with many different emotions. According to Campbell (2008),

... whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. (p. 56)

For first-year college students, this “dying and a birth” (Campbell, 2008, p 56) refers to saying good-bye to their old high school self, and embracing their new identity as a college student. Campbell (2008, p. 56) also found that “the familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand.” In other words, the student leaves their comfort zone behind, including family and friends, as they prepare to embark upon their college adventure.

### Initiation

However, leaving comfort zones is not always easy. Campbell (2008) coined the next phase as the initiation, which is also known as *The Road of Trials*. In this stage, the student faces challenging experiences throughout their first year. Campbell (2008) found that once someone transverses the threshold, they move in a foreign landscape of curiously fluid and ambiguous forms, where they must survive a succession of trials. Once the parents drop the student off at the residence hall, the student must now begin to adapt to the new environment. However, with time, the student gains confidence by overcoming the challenges they face. Campbell (2008, p. 87) states: “dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed—again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and

momentary glimpses of the wonderful land.” Students can accelerate their adjustment to college by joining student activities and organizations, accessing appropriate campus resources, building relationships with faculty members, and creating friendships with their fellow classmates.

### Return

The return phase, or *The Freedom to Live* phase, is where the student celebrates the changes and challenges they have experienced in the departure and initiation phases, and returns home to share what they have learned with others back home (Campbell, 2008). This is where the student has conquered change and is embracing their new life at the university, yet the circle is not complete until they can share their story with others. This triumphant return home to share their story can occur at the holiday break for some and for others may not occur until the end of the year. Advisors can help students recognize their accomplishments and encourage students to use the skills and resilience they have gained to conquer their next challenge.

### Conclusion

Accepting change and embracing a new experience is an important part of the first year of college. Leaving behind their families and high school friends is not easy. By teaching students about Joseph Campbell’s “Hero’s Journey” as an analogy for their transition into college, students can begin to understand that what they are experiencing is a normal part of the human experience and something that they will experience many times throughout their lives. Advisors may want to hold a showing of the movie *Finding Joe* (Solomon, 2011) to educate students about Campbell’s Hero’s Journey and then lead a discussion of how this relates to what they are experiencing as new students. After all, we are the heroes of our own journey.

### References

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- Campbell, J. (2008). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Chicago, IL: New World Library.
- Solomon, P. T. (Director). 2011. *Finding Joe* [Motion Picture]. United States: Pat & Pat, Inc.