JUST after 7 on a Sunday night in late summer, Tim Foster will take the stage of a Civil War-era theater at Bowdoin College and instruct the 500 new freshmen arrayed before him to “reprogram yourselves.”

Mr. Foster, the dean of student affairs, will acknowledge that many in his audience have been consumed for years with the anxious process of gaining admission to Bowdoin or other highly selective colleges. Now that they have arrived on Bowdoin’s verdant Maine campus, he expects to say, the time has come to “slow down and live in the moment.”

“You have won the prize,” he will add. “You have the opportunity, at a key transition point, to reimagine your life.”

I reached out to Mr. Foster — and his counterparts at Grinnell College in Iowa and the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Wash. — for advice to pass on to students making the transition this summer from high school senior to college freshman.

As moderator of The Choice, The Times’s college admission and financial aid blog, I spend much of the school year transmitting “news you can use” — tips on how to write a college essay or embark on a college tour — with hopes of demystifying a secretive and frustrating process. Between the lines of the comments that readers have submitted, I
detect much anxiety from high school graduates (and their parents) about the experience that awaits them this fall.

“I don’t know how to describe my current emotional state,” Anne Paik, a newly minted high school graduate bound for the University of California, Los Angeles, wrote recently in a post to The Choice. “I’m excited at the idea of going to college, yet apprehensive about the prospect of being my own master.”

The adjustment to college is surely emotional, and entails saying goodbye as well as hello.

W. Houston Dougharty, vice president for student affairs at Grinnell, has been reminding incoming freshmen in recent years that theirs is the first generation heading off to college that will never really separate from family and high school friends — largely because of “electronic tethers” like Facebook, texting and Twitter. His advice: cut that virtual cord, or at least curtail its use.

“Every minute you spend updating the people back home,” he tells freshmen, “is time you’re not investing in developing relationships in college, whether that’s with new roommates or new faculty or new friends.”

Those going away to college for the first time are likely to encounter a degree of freedom that was previously unimaginable. Dana R. Falk, the chief psychologist and associate director for counseling, health and wellness services at the University of Puget Sound, said she tells freshmen “not to equate having fun in college with wild experimentation.”

“So many of them want to emulate ‘Animal House,’ ” she said. “They feel that if they’re not binge drinking, skipping class, being relatively unselective about romantic partners or trying their friend’s prescription medication, they are somehow not living the college life.”

There is, she emphasizes, another way. “What I like to do is offer comfort to students who have no interest in losing control, or losing their scholarships — those intent on not skidding off the road,” she said. “There are plenty of students on every campus who are looking forward to being stretched intellectually.”

But many freshmen are sure to be jarred on the first day of classes by the receipt of a syllabus that lists thousands of pages to be digested by a deadline three months away, with no suggestion of how or where to begin. Dr. Falk advises divvying up those expectations early, with an eye on pacing and due dates for assignments like term papers.

One of the biggest differences between high school and college, she says, is that professors are less likely than
high school teachers to grant extensions.

“Don’t personalize it,” she tells freshmen, “when you’re not given special accommodations.”

There are times, of course — perhaps because of a family crisis — when a professor will be moved to extend extra time. Dr. Falk advises asking by phone, or even in person, a notion that may be alien to students who have arranged so much of their lives without speaking directly to another person.

Critical to the process of preparing for Dr. Falk’s deep academic stretch, however, is for new freshmen to anticipate that so much of their days (and nights) will be for them to arrange as they see fit.

Just as this generation has been wired unlike any other, its ranks are also filled with those who have never heard the buzz of an alarm clock (none was necessary if a parent was willing to knock gently each morning) or who have been so over-scheduled they wouldn’t recognize a wide-open day on an iPhone calendar. They will have much more free time going forward, and Mr. Foster urges his freshmen not to fill that vacuum “by compulsively engaging in things.”

“In college,” he tells them, “decide what really matters to you — your academic and extracurricular passions — and pursue them. Vital engagement will be much more satisfying and fulfilling than compulsive engagement.”

Mr. Foster, in an echo of his counterparts, typically closes his first freshman talk with an elegantly simple, upbeat plea to pay attention to an aspect of their lives they may have neglected in the time leading up to college.

“Have fun,” he will say. “These can be among the best years of your life.”

**Correction: August 1, 2010**

An article last Sunday about the transition to college misidentified the location of the University of Puget Sound, whose chief psychologist commented on making the adjustment. It is in Tacoma, Wash., not Seattle.

A version of this article appears in print on July 25, 2010, on page ED12 of Education Life with the headline: Goodbye, Hello.