

Imagine

“Sometimes the strength within you is not a big fiery flame for all to see, it is just a tiny spark that whispers softly ‘You got this, keep going.’”

Unknown

Disability Information & Support Newsletter: Issue 2 2019



Welcome to 'Imagine', Disability Information and Support's newsletter. This is our last edition for the year and I think you will find this both inspiring and informative. Our vision is to work in partnership to promote an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and empowers individuals with impairments to achieve their full potential. You will see many examples of our vision in action throughout this newsletter.

2019 has once again been a very busy year for our team. To date, 1460 students have received some form of academic learning support through our service. Historical data indicates that the number of students with disabilities at the University of Otago increases every year. In fact, student numbers have doubled since 2012, something I was delighted to share when showcasing our model of student support at the Tertiary Education Commission's conference – Ōritetanga Tertiary Success for Everyone. During the conference, learner success for **all** was noted as being paramount to a successful and thriving New Zealand, something that resonates well with our service. I was also delighted to share that students with disabilities studying at

Otago are passing and graduating at rates not too dissimilar to their non-disabled peers.

One thing our graduates tell us is that there is benefit to accessing support early. We welcome visits from intending students and are certainly open to answering questions via email. Disability Information and Support is well aware that all students have individual needs and we strive to ensure students with disabilities have the ability to compete on a level playing field by implementing reasonable accommodations to alleviate disadvantage. Students regularly provide feedback on the services we offer and recent surveys indicate high levels of satisfaction, again something we are incredibly proud of.

As the year draws to a close, we wish students all the very best for the remainder of the academic year! For those about to embark on a period of transition, we hope to hear from you soon.

Melissa Lethaby
Manager

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Get Excited! Plan your transition to Otago now.
- Live, Learn, Play: Living in a residential college or the local community.
- 'Message from an Outdoorsy Guy'.
- Transition to University: Maximise your potential.
- Scholarship recipient: Surpassing expectations.



Get Excited!

Plan your transition to Otago now

Getting accustomed to a tertiary education setting is an important part of the transition from high school to university. There are many different support systems in place both before enrolling and after to ensure this process goes as smoothly as possible.

Greg Heller from the Schools' Liaison team on the University of Otago Dunedin campus explains that their role is to help "students to successfully navigate the transitional pathway from the school system to tertiary education. For many, it is a natural progression. For others, there are a number of barriers (perceived or otherwise) that can block that pathway." School's Liaison provides "information, guidance and advice, and reassurance to help overcome those barriers."

Prajesh Chhanabhai from the Wellington Schools' Liaison Office further reiterates this. "The Schools' Liaison Team introduce high school students to the opportunities available at University. They then work with the students in a group setting or individually explaining the major difference between what they know and what they are heading to." Significantly, "we help them answer the questions they did not think to ask as well as those they ask in droves. We basically break down the beast that is University into a language they can understand."

The Ministry of Education also provides transitioning support for secondary school students who receive specialist services due to the nature of their impairment. This may include receiving support from a Ministry of Education Lead Worker who helps with education planning

through the school years, including planning for post-school life. It is recommended that all students plan their move to tertiary study carefully. Depending on the level of support required, planning could start two years prior to the move to tertiary and include visits and experience in lecture settings, disability assessments, financial planning and orientation.

Organising visits to tertiary settings are important, particularly for students who have accessibility or mobility requirements. Visits such as these may help reduce concerns potential students have about navigating campus. In addition, students, their family and whānau are encouraged and welcome to contact Disability Information and Support to discuss their individual requirements.

Nathan, a graduate from the University of Otago, suggests that students be specific about the supports they want in place. "Sometimes departments don't realise what they can do... they don't know how to help, or they don't even know that they can help." He has found that support is available when you ask for it.

Henny, another graduate from the University of Otago, headed to university to strike out on her own; "I wanted to move out of home to prove to myself I could live independently." Having support from Disability Information and Support helped her to get into the swing of university and what was required of her. She also found that lecturers and tutors were really good; "they just treated me like all the other students. That's how I wanted it to be."

continued over page >>



Prajesh meeting with students from Rongotai College.

Get Excited! Plan your transition to Otago now

Greg suggests that students transitioning into a tertiary environment should “listen to advice from those who have walked in those shoes already. Seek support when things aren’t going well and maintain a good balance between your academic studies and life in general.” Prajesh emphasises the importance of making sure students find what works for them individually; “Don’t be afraid to ask questions. It’s okay not to know what you want to do; just ensure you give yourself all the options for when you finish up at school.”

Prajesh gives all the students he sees the following advice and tips for making the most out of their time at university: “It’s okay to be nervous; Take papers you feel/ know you might be interested in; Ask for help; Learn how to take notes, and also check in with Student Learning Development to ensure you know “how” to study; Go to all your lectures, even if they are available online – go to them and you will always learn something in them; One low mark at University is not the end of the world; Make sure you get enough sleep; Go to any career talks the University holds; Learn how to manage stress, know what your productive outlets are and use them; Don’t forget to have fun!”

“This is not just about the learning but also about the living,” says Prajesh. As such, students should also plan to be a part of the social settings associated with the University. For social and fun activities outside of lectures, Henny was

involved with Parafed Otago; she participated in many Parafed ski weekends and played Boccia – a Paralympic sport that is a cross between bowls and petanque. Darius, a current student at the University of Otago, is making the most of the opportunities offered through Otago University Students’ Association Clubs and Societies, which offer over 80 recreational opportunities.

The University of Otago Recreation Centre, Unipol, is another space where students can focus on their physical and social wellbeing. The manager, Dan Porter, believes that balance between all aspects of life is key to success, including “healthy body, healthy mind.” Unipol focuses on giving all people the ability to participate in activity and play space, focusing on the enjoyment of activity, not just the competing and rigorous training.

Overall, a variety of support is available and students are encouraged to engage in the support offered by their schools and the University Schools Liaison teams and, if relevant, the Ministry of Education. Once on campus students can talk about support options with their lecturers, tutors and the team at Disability Information and Support. Students can also develop support networks by getting involved with the many recreational and social supports available on campus and within the wider Dunedin community.

University of Otago Liaison Team. Back Row: Cheryl Caldwell, Kitiona Pasene, Karyn Floyd, Greg Heller, Diana Patterson, Grace Latimer. Front Row: Sandra Spence, Prajesh Chhananbhai, Rhonda Brodie.



Live, Learn, Play: Living in a residential college or the local community

Otago is famous for its residential college communities. Residential colleges are a perfect place to find like-minded people and discover lifelong friendships, and they combine the right living and learning environment where students can thrive. However, if in your first year you choose to live in the local Dunedin community instead (either at home, flatting, or boarding) you can become part of the Locals Programme. Like the residential colleges, the Locals Programme provides pastoral care and access to academic, social, sporting, and community-based opportunities. The university is committed to assisting students with disabilities and the residential colleges and the Local Programme pride themselves on their inclusivity.

Jamie Gilbertson, the Arana College Warden and Otago University Colleges Senior Warden, says that students with disabilities can be confident that “colleges see the ‘whole person’ when it comes to resident support.” The Colleges staff “work with individuals and their families according to any resident’s particular needs.” Each resident has their own set of individual needs, and through “working with a variety of Otago University and community agencies, College staff are well placed to make excellent plans for pastoral care and emotional, social and physical support.”

If a student is considering attending a college they should “apply like any other student” for a place and make sure to explain if any specific support or help is required. Additionally, “any applicant and their family can talk to College staff and are always welcome to visit Colleges to check out facilities and support.”

When you disclose your disability during the application process this is simply to ensure the College can meet your specific needs, as with any student. “The College will take note of any issues as disclosed and depending on the situation may make contact with the applicant to discuss arrangements and support,” Jamie explains. “Any information is held confidentially by the staff team at the College.”

In fact, Jamie says that disclosing this information early can be beneficial; “I think early disclosure is a good idea as it helps the College to make the best arrangements for the applicant if they decide to make an offer of a place.”

Jamie believes that it is important to “spend some time talking to family and friends about making the change from home and school to a College and university environment.” He says to especially “take the advice of your school staff team” and if there are any particular needs, “be up front and engage with prospective Colleges so the Colleges can become part of the applicant’s support team.”

continued over page >>



Live, Learn, Play: Living in a residential college or the local community

Additionally, Jamie suggests getting in touch with the Disability Information and Support team to take their advice. He also emphasises that “all of the Otago Colleges provide excellent pastoral care and support and each College has its own character. Some are larger, some are smaller, yet all of them will provide that top level support.”

For students who decide not to reside in a residential college the Locals Programme offers excellent academic support, social events, volunteering opportunities and pastoral care. “The Locals Programme is a community for all first-year students at the University of Otago who are living at home, flatting or boarding,” Maya Turner, Deputy Head of the Locals Programme explains. “It was created by a group of staff in 2011 because they noticed that there was a lot of support for students living in residential colleges but little support for students living locally.” This is significant because “a quarter of all of our first-year students are a part of the Locals community.”

The Locals Programme ensures that students living locally have plenty of opportunities to ask questions and receive support; “We run events throughout O-Week that give heaps of helpful tips about University, and give students opportunities to ask questions,” Maya explains. “Our team of student volunteer staff are always available to help first year students with anything they need.”

Additionally, first-year students living locally have plenty of exciting events and opportunities to participate in; “We always run a huge range of events throughout the year from beach conservation trips, to flashback movie nights, to Q&A’s with lecturers, to offer students the best student experience that we can.” The focus is on making sure a student’s first year is unique, and one to remember. The Locals Programme gives you the opportunity to meet new people “so that you don’t have to go through the transition to university alone.” Through this programme, “you will be surrounded by other people going through exactly what you are, and you will have our team of Locals staff there to help guide you.”

Luckily, as Maya explains, being a part of the Locals community is easy; “You don’t even need to fill out a form. You will start getting emails from us in January and then all you need to do is come along to our O-Week events. It is even free!”

Regardless of your living situation there are plenty of options to get support, meet new people and experience new things – all making your first year at university exciting and accessible.



‘Message from an Outdoorsy Guy’

Darius is a student currently in his first year at the University of Otago. After a lot of contemplation, Darius chose to move from Auckland to Dunedin to study at Otago. There were a number of factors that contributed to his decision to move, including becoming closer to family; “I have a large amount of family in Southland/Canterbury that I was keen to get to know a bit better. Coming from Auckland, the only time I got to talk to them was at Christmas.” Another motivating factor was the strong desire to move on from his time at high school; “I was well and truly over school,” he explains. “I just wanted something new.”

To start exploring his options, he looked into trades and considered the possibility of Victoria University and the University of Otago. When it came down to choosing between the two universities Otago began to look more and more appealing, considering its distance from Auckland, “plus Otago has a huge amount of outdoor activities that I was keen to get stuck into.” In the end he was excited about the shift down south; “It seemed like a match made in heaven when I got accepted into my course.”

Darius is studying both Law and Commerce at Otago now; “I chose Law because I wanted to challenge myself and Law seemed to foot the bill. In truth I selected Commerce because the competitive nature of Law entry meant it seemed wise to have a backup plan, in case I didn’t get in.”

As a self-described “outdoorsy guy”, Darius is making the most of all the outdoor opportunities available to him nearby in Dunedin and the wider area. “Growing up in Auckland it was really hard to find ways of getting outside the city, so it meant I had to jump on any and every opportunity,” he explains. “When I came to Otago this attitude managed to quickly fill up my calendar. My spare time is pretty much taken up with anything and everything outdoorsy: hunting, trail running, normal running, tramping, mountaineering, swimming, spear fishing, paua diving, rock climbing, a bit of trapping and even a spot of fishing on the side, and sometimes a bit too much video games,” he adds. “We all have our vices.”

He is making the most of the services and opportunities offered to him through Clubs and Societies; “I didn’t do nearly as much before I came to Otago. The massive and diverse range of clubs made it easy for me to just sign up and start doing anything and everything.” So far, the biggest challenge has been “being able to say, ‘nah I can’t go out, I have an assignment due.’ It’s a real test of willpower for me.”

Before beginning study at Otago, Darius had people supporting him and encouraging him to take on University. His philosophy teacher played a significant role in this and often made time for him when he needed it. In addition, his mum played a massive role in keeping him focused in his final year of high school. “I can’t thank her enough.

Darius on Hump Ridge Track, Fiordland.

continued over page >>



‘Message from an Outdoorsy Guy’

Year 13 was a real struggle for me and there was a good chance I wouldn't pass the year. I was smart enough, just not interested enough." His mother told him that it didn't matter how well he did, he just needed to ensure he got University Entrance. "With her cajoling I managed to go from a path of failing all my level three exams to merits. It was really tough but an amazing feeling when I got my grades back and managed to pass," he said. "That was when it finally struck me that 'I'm going to University.'"

Once he arrived at University, Darius found Disability Information and Support staff very helpful, as well as the AskOtago helpdesk. Additionally, he found his residential college Facebook page helpful because of the useful information posted.

For a successful transition from high school Darius suggests signing up for "everything and put yourself out there, if you want to have fun join any clubs that seem cool, if you want friends, go talk to somebody... Sit in the front of lecture halls if you want to make friends and sit at the back if you don't." Additional practical advice is to put all your assignments in a calendar as "lecturers don't really remind you of upcoming assignments, it's up to you, so make sure they are written down."

He also emphasises the importance of seeking and asking for assistance when you need it; "If you need help with anything at all, bang on some poor lecturer's door, but most of all annoy your Disability Information and Support Student Advisor with any and every question you can when you first meet them. University is a lot more self-driven, you have to be confident enough to make things happen."

For Darius, his interactions with Disability Information and Support have been some of the most positive experiences of his time at University so far. "My handwriting is pretty shoddy (unreadable) and so I've always needed a writer for my tests. Back at school I had to fight tooth and nail for the support I needed so when I came into the disabilities office, I was ready for a battle. I had a script in my head and signed paperwork by a nationally renowned doctor specialising in learning disabilities, I had done as much research as I could about disabilities, this was going to be a battle to the death," he said. "But after a quick read of my doctors writings regarding me, my Student Advisor gave me all support I could ever need; extra tutors if needed, a proof reader, notes for the classes I was taking, extra time in exams and most importantly, a writer for them."

Darius feels that the service offered by Disability Information and Support at the University of Otago is "hands down the best in the country (I swear they are not paying me for this). They made getting into the swing of university 1000 times easier than I thought it would be." Overall, Darius wants any potential Otago students to know: "If you're scared of University or worried that Uni won't support you, Disability Information and Support has your back, they will get you though."

“If you need help with anything at all, bang on some poor lecturer's door, but most of all annoy your [Disability Information and Support Student Advisor](#) with any and every question you can when you first meet them. University is a lot more self-driven, you have to be confident enough to make things happen.”

Transition to University: Maximise your potential

UNI 101: Welcome to Otago.

Get a head start on your first year by accessing UNI 101 in mid-January before the academic year starts. (Requires your student ID and password)

Healthy habits. Incorporate healthy habits into your schedule. Your body needs fuel to keep your brain working so eat well. Good sleep is essential for physical and mental well-being so plan on 7 - 9 hours sleep per night. Mood and productivity are enhanced with a change of scenery so take time to get outdoors.

Talk about it. If you are feeling stressed talk it through with a friend or whānau member. However, at times it may be easier to talk things through with someone else. There are a number of support services that can help. For example, Student Health, Disability Information and Support and OUSA Student Support.

Exercise. From archery to water polo - Otago University Students Association (OUSA) has over 30 sporting clubs you can join. Unipol Recreation Services offers a huge choice of recreational activities - cardio and weights, group fitness, social sport and outdoor adventures.

Ask for help. Talk to your lecturer or course coordinator. Or speak with someone from AskOtago. They are all available to assist you.

Experience your own success. The University of Otago ranks first in New Zealand for helping students succeed in their study. Learn how to succeed from the start. Read up on what you need to know at <https://www.otago.ac.nz/first-year-students/index.html>

Well-being. Taha hinengaro, taha whānau, taha tinana and taha wairua are important dimensions of well-being. Otago has many resources to enhance and/or support students' mental and emotional, social, physical and spiritual well-being. For example, Chaplaincy Services, Unipol, Queer Support, Student Health, Disability Information and Support, the Maori Centre and the Pacific Islands Centre.

Plan for fun and embrace new experiences. OUSA offers over 70 short recreational courses and over 160 clubs and societies. The Social Impact Studio enables students to create positive social change through volunteering and leadership.

Peer groups. Take time to meet other students and discuss ways you can support each other, especially when times are stressful.

Scholarship recipient: Surpassing expectations

Becks Mercer fell in love with Dunedin on her first visit, and had already decided that the University of Otago's academic reputation and disability support services meant she would like to study there.

After receiving a University of Otago Donna-Rose McKay Entrance Scholarship valued at \$6,000, Becks was thrilled to be able to pursue her studies down south with the extra financial support.

Named in honour of the former head of Disability Information and Support at Otago, the Donna-Rose McKay Entrance Scholarship supports students who may not otherwise be able to pursue university study due to the financial implications of living with impairments or long-standing illness.

As a former student of Hagley Community College in Christchurch, Becks says she had enrolled as an adult student with "minimal pass rates" from high school and with help and support from the teachers there, developed the motivation and learning tools she needed to move on to Otago.

After completing a Foundation Year at Otago in 2016, she's now studying in Health Sciences First Year and plans to eventually major in biomedical sciences – infection and immunity. She wants to become a virologist, and says studying with a disability can make things difficult financially.

"The scholarship really helped take the immense financial pressure off for my first year of Health Sciences in terms of quality of living and extra tuition to suit my learning needs."

Becks says learning about the human body is a "wonderful thing", and that the best thing about her first year is having a variety of lecturers and teaching styles.

"The lecturers are all incredibly helpful and strive to push their students toward their ultimate goals. They reflect the value of the departments and the whole course is well put together."

Outside of her study, Becks enjoys playing sports at the Unipol sports centre, such as basketball with friends or weight training.

"I find it relieves study stress in the height of exam times, and it's easily accessible and affordable."

Now settled in at Otago and living in a student flat, Becks says the campus has far surpassed her expectations, and calls it accommodating and well ahead of other learning institutions.

"I knew Otago was a good university, but once I got here and settled in I saw just how much of an academic powerhouse it is. It is a place where you can fulfill your academic learning potential and really grow as an individual."



Scholarship information

N G Stewart Scholarship | \$1,500

One scholarship | Closing date 15 January

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/otago0146531.html>

University of Otago Donna-Rose McKay Entrance Scholarship \$6,000

Varies | Opening date 1 July, next closing date 5 December

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/otago033024.html>

John F Ward Southland Entrance Scholarship | \$6,000

Varies | Opening date 1 July, closing date refer to the following website as TBC

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/search/otago713692.html>

Article: Communications Office, University of Otago

Photo: Sharron Bennett

Internship Opportunities



Be Lab offers a unique programme called Be Internship in which they find meaningful work experience for tertiary qualified New Zealanders living with access needs.

To apply for a
Be Employed
Internship
contact:

Aimee@beaccessible.org.nz
Sarah@beaccessible.org.nz



WHAT

- Up to 12 weeks paid internship
- Professional and personal development
- Gallup Strength Assessment – (brand image)
- Mentoring throughout placement



WHO

To be eligible you:

- Are living with an access need or disability
- Are in either penultimate or final year of tertiary study
- Have completed your study in the last 12 months
- Are a New Zealand Citizen or Resident
- Are not in receipt of ACC payments

Be Internship is a career pathway programme, designed specifically for New Zealand's tertiary qualified access students.

Their team facilitates 12 week paid employment opportunities for undergraduates and graduates looking for meaningful work experience in their areas of study and/or aspiration.

73% have gone on to secure permanent employment.



HOW

They seek students from all fields of study and match them with leading employers across all sectors and industries to create employment opportunities that include:

- Work experience and internships
- Career pathways
- Skills development

Check out DI&S's website

If you are interested in reading more about the experiences of other students at Otago, have a look at the profiles on our website.

otago.ac.nz/disabilities/index.html

DI&S provides learning support, advice, advocacy and information to students who have a disability, impairment, injury or medical condition that affects their study for a period of four weeks or more. Please look at our website for information about the services we provide.

otago.ac.nz/disabilities/services/index.html

If you would like to provide confidential feedback on our service, please click on the following link.

otago.ac.nz/disabilities/questions/feedback/index.html

Contact Details

Please contact us directly if you have any enquiries.

Disability Information and Support
University of Otago
PO Box 56
Dunedin 9054
New Zealand

Tel: 03 479 8235

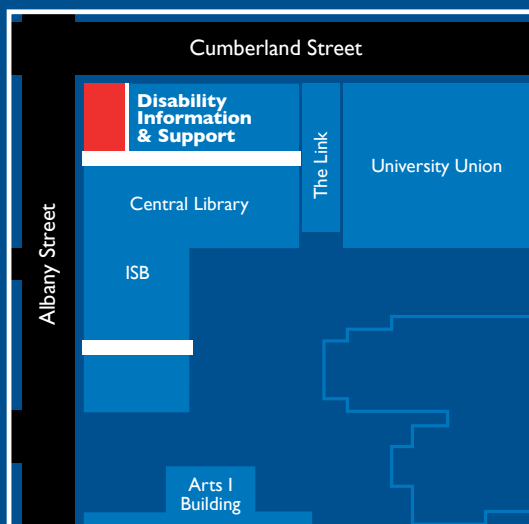
or 0800 80 80 98

Fax: 03 479 5873

Email: disabilities@otago.ac.nz

Web: otago.ac.nz/disabilities

Office Hours: Monday – Friday 8.30am – 5.00pm



Our physical address is:
Disability Information & Support
West Lane
Information Services Building
Cnr Cumberland and Albany Streets
Dunedin