

GETTING STARTED

AT UNI

Experiencing ‘Culture Shock’? Here are some survival tips:

Explore your new environment

Entering university can be like entering a foreign country. Both experiences can lead to ‘culture shock’ with associated feelings of alienation, helplessness, and loss of confidence. To help you feel at home, get to know as much as possible about your new environment, its people and places. Take a library tour, wander around the campus, make contact with departments, and find out about the various sections of the University and their functions. Familiarise yourself as much as possible with this strange new world; it’s up to you to inform yourself.

Know who can help and what academic support is available

At university you are expected to be an independent learner and responsible for managing your own studies, but that does not mean that you have to handle the load without support. There is a lot of help provided for you at university so make sure you know what is available, where to go, and who to ask for assistance. Use the *My Otago First Year* website:

[Academic Support](#)

Check out the *For Current Students* tab on the University of Otago website homepage or make an appointment to talk with us at the Student Learning Development.

Make friends

One of the keys to surviving in any new culture is to develop a network of friends and acquaintances not only for a healthy social life, but also because it is helpful and reassuring to be able to chat about lectures, tutorials, and assignments, and to discuss tutorial or laboratory problems. Discussion with others is also an important part of the learning process and this can be as valuable over coffee or lunch as in the tutorial room. Many others will also be new to the university environment; so don’t be afraid to chat to the people in your courses.

Join a peer support programme

If you are an international student, the international office has mentoring and language-match programmes available for you. The Maori and Pacific Island Centres have peer-mentoring programmes, and the Student Learning Development runs the “Locals” programme for first-year students not residing in a residential college. Come into the Student Learning Development or email us for more information regarding any of these support networks.

Balance work and play

It's important to find time in your busy student schedule for social and leisure activities. The University offers programmes and equipment on a range of hobbies, social events, and sports. Check out what's available at Recreation Services, Unipol and OUSA Clubs and Societies.

'Tune in' to course work

Make sure that you read the course handouts and guidelines for each of your papers as soon as you get them to get a sense of the 'big picture'. Know what the learning outcomes are for each paper and use these as a guide to help organise and prioritise your study. Make lecture and tutorial attendance a priority. Prepare for lectures by doing the background reading and prep required for each lecture so that you are off to a good start in terms of understanding the topic and recognising key points during the lecture. This in turn will help you to make more useful and meaningful notes. Also, prepare for your tutorials by completing the prescribed reading and set tasks.

Employ effective study and learning approaches

Part of adapting successfully into a new environment is to feel that you are in control. At university, this includes being able to manage the workload and meeting assignment deadlines. You will need to be as effective as possible in your reading, writing, note-taking, time management and exam preparation. Student Learning Development offers workshops and individual assistance in all these areas and more. Staff can help you to identify your current learning styles and study approaches, assist you to build on your strengths, and adapt or change your current practices where necessary.

Academic and social support

The University provides a huge array of support, details of which you will find in a number of locations including the University's website, the Prospectus, the OUSA, and Student Learning Development.

Any questions, email Student Academic Skills: sas@otago.ac.nz