



FRESHERS WEEK 2021

TalkCampus Connect

Riding the Roller Coaster of Your
First Year at University/College



intro



Transitioning from school to university or college is incredibly exciting, and no doubt you are going into it with some expectations! The ‘student experience’ you see on social media can leave you with high hopes for your new found independence, social life and a big step towards an exciting career. It may also have you feeling slightly anxious about the change and what that might look like for you, especially in the current global situation.

And while university and college usually start with a bang with all of the Fresher’s Week festivities, once the excitement settles and your new reality kicks in, what do you do if suddenly you feel like this new experience isn’t quite what you imagined? In the age of social media, everyone only shows the ‘on top of the world’ moments, and so it’s hard not to feel like you are alone in your feelings during your first couple of ‘this is the pits’ moments.

So we’ve listed some of the many common emotions that might pop up, and we’ve asked our TalkCampus student community to give some honest feedback about riding the roller coaster of emotions during their first year.



one

The teaching style may take some adjusting to

University or college can often provide a more relaxed or informal style of teaching, which can take some adjusting to! Some of our TalkCampus community said that they found the amount of detailed material they received overwhelming, whereas others felt like the material they received often wasn't detailed enough. Adjusting to a new style of learning that usually demands a lot more self directed study can take a while, but just know this is normal! Eventually you will get into the swing of things, so don't let it knock your confidence too much.

“For me, I initially saw my degree as a continuation of what I was learning at highschool, and I had an expectation that the teaching styles would be the same. When someone in my class asked me how I was getting on with our first assignment, I had no idea what they were talking about!”

I was used to being reminded constantly at high school of any upcoming assignments, instead our lecturer had barely mentioned anything - we were just expected to know. It knocked my confidence, I am used to feeling on top of things and in that moment I felt so underprepared!”



two

Your grades might take a knock initially - but don't panic!

With a different learning style comes a different grading style, and many students say that they struggled in their first year to keep up with the grades they received at school. The good news is that, often the education staff will know this and are on hand to help you back on your feet. So don't be afraid to reach out and ask for support!

“During high school my favourite thing was writing essays because I always did well with them! My first semester at uni was a different story. I struggled so much, I thought I would hand in a great assignment only to get a really average grade. It was really hard and I started to doubt myself, but by the third semester I started to have an understanding of where I was going wrong and what they were looking for. I also had to get over my fear of asking my tutors where I was going wrong!”

A close-up photograph of two people shaking hands. The person on the left is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, and the person on the right is wearing a red t-shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a building facade.

three

Little fish in a big pond effect

For many new college or university students, it's likely that your new place of learning may be a little (or a lot!) bigger than your highschool. You may have known all of your teachers personally, and this new style of teaching may feel less personal. Maybe you were at the top of your class at your school, but now you are at a huge university campus where you feel like an average Joe.

It can be hard to not start doubting yourself, but remember that university and college are places where thousands of students come together from across the world globally, and many will be experiencing these same emotions. Try and reframe your thinking, and remind yourself that the big pond can be really exciting and filled with endless possibilities and a lot of room to grow!

'I went to a very small school where I knew everyone, so when I started at a huge university I felt unsettled, out of my comfort zone and struggled to find my groove. Initially, I felt like there was no real human connection, there were so many people that I would run into once, and then never see again! But actually, everyone's in the same boat looking to make friends and figure things out - which helped me feel more comfortable!'



four

Studying remotely

Many students are struggling with the challenges of the new virtual medium, and it can be incredibly disappointing if you had different expectations for your university or college experience.

Remember that this is temporary, and although your expectations may not have been met, find small ways to make the best of it. Try to keep in contact with your tutors, take part fully in your classes and make a list of things you would like to do once you're back on campus!



Experiencing homesickness

For those of you that are moving away for university or college - it's a big transition whether you've come from the other side of the world or half an hour down the road. If you're suffering from homesickness, just remember you're definitely not the only one.

Feeling homesick is really normal, especially in the first few months of university. Those around you are probably feeling the burn too, but are just not forthcoming on sharing those feelings! Although there are lots of ways you can distract yourself from the feeling, the most important tip we have is to let yourself feel what you're feeling.

Feeling homesick isn't a weakness, nor is it something to beat yourself up about. Missing home is something that affects most students – you'll only make the situation worse if you think of it as something to feel guilty about.

Look to start a conversation with any of those around you that have also moved away from home. You might find that if you are vulnerable with how you're feeling, they will feel like they can open up to you too.

'When studying abroad, I experienced homesickness for the first time. While I initially felt embarrassed, I realised that many other students felt the same way. Once I reached out, it was like a weight was lifted, and I could enjoy my time abroad more fully.'

And the big one... having doubts about what your course or degree

It's not openly spoken about, but it's incredibly common to experience existential dread when it comes to your studies. Doubts creep in - "have I chosen the right degree?" "What can I even do with this?" "I don't even like geography!"

Pause, take a big deep breath and know that you are not alone. Here are some quick tips from us for productively conquering your uni or college course doubts:

Bring yourself back into the present. Remind yourself as to why you chose the course, what do you still like about it, and if there is something that's currently happening to make you feel this way. Write it all down to help clear your head.

Remember that your degree doesn't lock you into your career! It is estimated that only half of graduates get jobs that directly relate to their degrees! Your future employers don't only look at the type of degree you have, but they will also recognise the plethora of other skills that you gain through study— people, time management skills, etc.

Remember you can always review your options. Talk to the student success team and see how they can support you - sometimes all you need is a sounding board, or maybe there is another degree you can switch to.

And the big one... having doubts about what your course or degree (cont.)

Remember that no one has a stress free university experience, and learning to cope with these challenges, academic or otherwise, is an important part of your experience. With each difficulty, think back to how you have dealt with difficult situations before. Ask yourself, 'what could I have done differently, and how can I deal with it better now?' Whilst we cannot control every situation, or get the best outcome each time, it is how we deal with it and move forward that matters.

'I did have doubts about my course in my first year and was unsure if it was right for me. During my second year, I made the effort to speak to my academic advisor who gave me some advice on choosing the right modules for me, which allowed me to make my academic career more suited to my interests.'

Remember that there will be times that you mess up, forget things last minute, or don't understand something. But knowing why you messed up, learning to be on top of it and asking "why?" is only going to make you more confident, resilient and successful. Finding success is not a straight shot to the finish line, instead it's a roller coaster.

And finally, remember that university goes beyond those first few weeks. Your experience of the next few years won't be determined solely by how many friends you make or how many books you've read in the first week. Take a breath, and remember it's all part of the journey.