

TRANSITIONING TO UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations to all high school graduates for making it through last year of high school! But your journey does not just end here - we are sure you have wondered about the transition from high school to university.



NEW ENVIRONMENT

You may be staying in the same country close to family and friends, or you are venturing away to continue your studies in a different country. Either way, you may feel anxious about adjusting to a new environment. These challenges might include:

- A new social environment and new relationships
- Possible cultural differences
- New academic challenges
- Unfamiliar physical environment



We asked soon-to-be university students what their main concerns are about going into university, and our university-student interns and clinical advisors are here to answer them!

TOPICS



MANAGING NEW RELATIONSHIPS



ABOUT ORIENTATION CAMPS ("O-CAMP")



MANAGING YOUR STUDIES



WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I COULDN'T GET INTO THE UNIVERSITY I WANT



ABOUT UNIVERSITY LIFE



WHAT IF I AM SEEING A COUNSELLOR



HOW TO DEAL WITH STRESS AND WORKLOAD AT UNIVERSITY

TOPIC 1: MANAGING NEW RELATIONSHIPS



1. Many people say it's hard to meet and keep friends, how do I maintain relationships in university?

Don't be afraid of stepping out of your comfort zone and get to know people of different backgrounds.



Michelle (First year)

My advice will be hanging out more with the group of people that you enjoy hanging out with, instead of trying to be friends with everyone.



Charlie (Final year)

Ask them out for lunch sometime, go to the library together, or go do some sports!



Ryan (First year)

I would say that regular meetups or interactions - whether online or offline - are crucial.



Natalie (Final year)

You have to take initiative to meet up with friends.



Yan (Final year)



2. Tips for making long-lasting relationships?



Clinician's response:

- Go to social events and meetups, they are there to help you get social
- Join clubs or societies you are interested in, you know you will meet people who have similar interests and passions as you
- Stay flexible and keep an open mind. High school is often a bubble, this is the time to get out of the bubble and meet a diverse group of people
- Introduce yourself to students in your course, and form study groups
- Push yourself to get out of your comfort zone!

Taking care of your mental health

The networks and friendships you make throughout university will help you foster good mental health, helping you fuel your engine to tackle upcoming challenges. University is the period of life where you are given the freedom to explore your interests with many opportunities it provides, which are the stepping stones for you to learn more about yourself. This is actually one of the main questions we received from high school students.



TOPIC 2: ABOUT ORIENTATION CAMPS ("O-CAMPS")

(Orientation camps are orientation activities organized by the university/ faculties/ societies/ clubs to welcome newcomers.)



1. Is it a must to join o-camps in the first year?

Joining orientation activities is certainly a good way to make new friends.

Michelle (First year)



Joining o-camps is a nice way of meeting freshmen and senior year students who can give you valuable advice on university life, such as course selection matters, fun societies to join and even the quality of on-campus canteens! Of course, there is absolutely no pressure to join o-camps, and if you feel nervous or anxious it's perfectly fine not to join! There are many other ways to meet new friends and learn more about your university, so make a decision based on your own feelings!



Ryan (First year)

Pro side is having a chance to meet more people and to know that there are people like you who are also worried about life in uni. Con side is it can be quite overwhelming to socialise for 3 to 4 whole days. Personally, as an introvert, I found it very tiring having to talk to people all the time.



Charlie (Final year)

I would strongly recommend freshmen to at least participate in the o-camp that is organised by the society of your major. O-camps are good opportunities for you to know people of the same major. This is important because you might attend the same classes with them over the next few years, and they could offer you support whenever you encounter problems during class. In addition, the seniors leading the o-camp activities (also called jo-ba or jo-ma, i.e. seniors with the "father" and "mother" role) could help you adjust to university life and might offer you valuable advice.



Natalie (Final year)



2. I skipped o-camps because I don't like the culture and thought of o-camps, but everyone else has already made friends, and I think I've missed out on the opportunity to make friends and can't fit in.



Clinician's response:

It makes sense that you're feeling worried about making friends and fitting in. A lot of people, whether or not they attended o-camps, probably feel similarly.

Remind yourself that there will be plenty of other opportunities to meet people, and it's likely that there are lots of people who also didn't go to o-camps. It's only one week and soon enough it will probably seem unimportant in the grand scheme of the many years you will spend at uni.

So, try to turn your focus now to other opportunities to meet people (e.g., in your lectures, through clubs), and remember that everyone is new at uni and trying to make friends.



TOPIC 3: MANAGING YOUR STUDIES



1. What if I don't know where my interest lies, I'm afraid I'll pick the wrong major.

Don't be afraid of picking the wrong major. As a matter of fact, many people's jobs aren't related to their undergraduate studies.



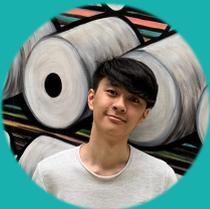
Michelle
(First year)

Many people are able to transfer to other subjects or even change universities if they are not happy with their subjects.



Charlie (Final year)

Make the best out of your undergraduate years to figure out where your true interest lies. Your undergraduate studies don't necessarily set your future career, so don't worry too much about how choosing a wrong major may affect you.



Ryan (First year)

If you do want to graduate according to plan, plan the possibilities of different courses ahead of time to ensure you can accumulate enough credits to graduate.



Natalie (Final year)

You can start by talking about it with other course mates, or read introductory books. Another tip is to make good use of the add-drop period to try out different classes. Pay attention to how you handle different things at hand, stay open-minded and bold, and try different things.



Yan
(Final year)



2. If I've been studying for a while and figure I don't really enjoy my course, and lose interest in it, what should I do?

Try looking for information online to see if you can transfer majors.



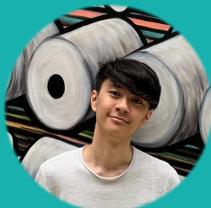
Michelle (First year)

If you encounter this type of situation in Year 1 or Year 2 when you have not yet officially declared your major, you still have time to transfer. However, if you encounter this type of situation during Year 3 or after, you should seek help from your academic advisor who may help you find out where you are at. You can consider pursuing a master's program that interests you after obtaining a bachelor's degree.

I would recommend you to get involved with things related to your major, e.g. related volunteering work, jobs, or workshops. Try and find out what you enjoy the most.



Natalie (Final year)



Ryan (First year)

Try pinpointing what you don't like and be specific and try discussing this with friends and lecturers, because we will always encounter difficulties when studying, but this does not necessarily mean you dislike the whole course. Go back to the roots of your passion.



Yan (Final year)

Note:

Oftentimes with so much freedom to explore your interests and career journey, you are building the foundation that will lead you to your career path. There are many ways of planning that and sometimes you will experience speed bumps or detours. It's important that you evaluate all decisions you make, and stay flexible and open minded.

TOPIC 4:

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I COULDN'T GET INTO THE UNIVERSITY I WANT



1. What if I got rejected from my first choice university?

Believe in yourself.
Sometimes, things happen
for a reason and "all roads
lead to Rome".



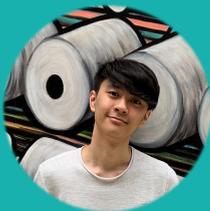
Michelle
(First year)

Being successful is not
just about getting into a
good university.



Charlie (Final year)

Prepare yourself for your upcoming university experience! Much of what we get from our university life depends on our attitudes, so if we are always thinking about how it would have been different in hypothetical situations, we would not enjoy ourselves and gain little from our university experience. Join more activities, meet new people from different backgrounds, and explore fun and unique things about your university!



Ryan (First year)

Although you might miss certain experiences at your most preferred university, you could also gain exclusive experiences in other respective universities, so focus more on what you would like to achieve at university!



Natalie (Final year)



2. I can't get over the fact that I couldn't get into my first and second choice universities. I feel so much guilt for not being able to meet my parents' expectations.



Clinician's response:

Setbacks happen, and sometimes things don't turn out the way we expect or want them to be, which can affect how we feel.



But it's important to remember that not getting into your first or second choice universities doesn't define you as a person. What matters now is how you 'solve' the situation and move forward from here. There will be many opportunities ahead of you that are there for you to grasp and excel in, if you put your mind to it.

Feelings of guilt are natural. Guilt is an emotion, just like sadness or feeling happy, but can sometimes be internalised in a way that is not healthy, and can lead to anxiety and low mood.



Communicating how you feel with your parents, may help to relieve some stress around the situation, and reduce the chances of any misunderstandings. Your parent's expectations of you are likely coming from a good place, i.e. their concern of wanting what is best for you – which may be wanting you to succeed and be happy.

So rather than allowing yourself to dwell over something that's happened and can't be changed, refocus your energy into what you can do, going forward. Set yourself some new goals, and make a plan towards how you can achieve them.



3. I feel so ashamed of not being accepted into one of the top ranked universities, I don't want to stay connected with my high school friends anymore.



Clinician's response:

Pause and ask yourself – whether this is truly a valid reason for cutting all contact with your high school friends? What would you, yourself say to a friend if they told you that this had happened to them and that this is what they had planned to do?

Not getting into a particular university doesn't have to define who you are as a person. It's quite common for students to not get accepted into a university that they had hoped to – getting into a top ranked university is a highly competitive process after all, and there are almost always less places compared to the number of individuals who apply for them. Many people graduate every year from various universities around the world that may be considered 'lower ranked', but then end up leading very successful and fulfilling lives and careers. The university ranking list is also constantly changing. What may be considered a "high-ranking" institution one year, may very well change in 3-4 years' time. And despite the fact that it may seem like a lot of emphasis is placed on the universities you attended, depending on the career route you take, it is very likely that your job prospects will actually depend on a great deal of other factors too (i.e. the grades you obtain, the interpersonal skills you develop, the people you meet, etc.)



Additionally, what are the potential consequences of cutting all contact with your friends, especially if they are some of your close friends, after you leave high school? Potentially this may lead to unnecessary misunderstandings, and even more judgement (which was what you were trying to avoid in the first place!)

TOPIC 5: ABOUT UNIVERSITY LIFE



1. If you were to go back to your freshman year, what would you tell yourself?

To spend time wisely and enjoy the last moments before stepping into the workplace.



Michelle (First year)

I would tell myself to relax a little. Don't be bothered by the most trivial things, and don't hang onto the guilt of any minor mistakes I make.

Natalie (Final year)



I would tell myself not to be afraid of failure.



Yan (Final year)



2. What were your happiest and most disappointing moments in university?



The happiest moment of my university life is that I can finally do what I have always wanted to do, studying full-time about the things I enjoy, living abroad... The worst thing is that sometimes you feel that you are on your own and you cannot fully rely on your parents anymore.



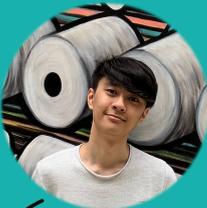
Michelle
(First year)

I'm glad that I met a few true friends from university. One major thing that I felt unhappy about was always getting grades that were lower than I expected.



Charlie (Final year)

The happiest moment is definitely getting to know a lot of friends from different backgrounds, and enjoying university life together. The most depressing moments would be needing to start working after graduation, the pressure that comes with my future and career.



Ryan
(First year)

The happiest thing is I can make good use of time to get to know myself more. On the flip side, the thing that frustrated me the most was having freeriders in group projects. In addition, finding a close friend in university is as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack.



Natalie (Final year)

The happiest thing is studying in a course I enjoy, with good educational support. The most difficult part is to do something I'm not good at, such as research, data analysis, and dealing with freeriders for group projects.



Yan
(Final year)



3. What are the things that you learned the most during university life?

Having a friend is better than having a foe, and white lies could be beneficial sometimes.



Michelle
(First year)

Being on a committee of a society, I learned so much about how to socialise with people, how to lead a team, how to deal with unpleasant people and how to work with a group of people.



Charlie (Final year)

To make yourself stand out amongst other students, you have to actively pursue learning opportunities. This involves taking the initiative to approach companies for internships and professors for research opportunities.



Ryan (First year)

First, be proactive. Self-learning and self-discipline are also key at university.
Second, enjoy! With the more flexible scheduling at university, you should make good use of your free time to explore yourself or many things outside your study.
Third, prioritise yourself. You do not have to force yourself to socialise with people and do things you feel uncomfortable with.



Natalie (Final year)

TOPIC 6: WHAT IF I AM SEEING A COUNSELLOR



1. I've been seeing a counsellor at my high school, should I continue in university?

Getting into the next stage of life sometimes can be quite overwhelming, it's a good thought to regularly check in with a counsellor to make sure you are doing well mentally.



Charlie (Final year)

I would suggest continuing to see a counsellor, at least for the first few months of your new university life. Having a counsellor to share your thoughts can be helpful and help your transition towards university life.



Ryan (First year)

I would say put your mental health first is a priority!



Yan
(Final year)



2. I've been seeing a counsellor at high school and we have a bond, but now that I've graduated, I don't want to continue.



Clinician's response:

If you are wanting to discontinue sessions with a counsellor (no matter what the reason), the best thing you can do is to communicate this with them. Counsellors are there to support you, and your needs, and they shouldn't take it personally if you decide you no longer wish to pursue sessions.



It might be the case that you've already achieved some good work together during the sessions that you have attended, and given you're now graduating, this may be an appropriate time to bring things to an end anyway. It always helps if you're able to be open and honest with your counsellor about how you're feeling and how you're finding the sessions. Therefore, if you're wanting to bring things to an end, don't be afraid to bring this up, as it will give you and your counsellor a chance to plan what you'd like to discuss or focus on, in the remaining time that you have together.



3. But what if I'm afraid that my new friends won't be friends with me if they find out I'm seeing a counsellor?



Clinician's response:

Counsellors have rules around confidentiality so it's unlikely that your new friends would find out you're seeing someone unless you decided to tell them. It's important to remember that accessing mental health support shouldn't be viewed any differently to seeing a medical professional about physical health. If you feel comfortable to do so, having open conversations with friends about mental health is one of the ways we can continue to decrease the stigma around seeking mental health support. Remember, true friends would want you to get whatever support you may need in order to feel settled, safe and fulfilled.



TOPIC 7:

HOW TO DEAL WITH STRESS AND WORKLOAD AT UNIVERSITY



1. There are so many smart people in university and I feel like I can't measure up, how do I get over feeling inadequate among my fellow course mates or new peers?



Clinician's response:

You're not alone in feeling like this. It's a big transition, and many students go from feeling like a big fish in a small pond, at high school, to feeling like a small fish in a big pond, at university. When we constantly compare ourselves to others, it can lead to self-doubt, low self-esteem and anxiety. Try to catch yourself when you do this, and then refocus your attention on more positive self-talk e.g. reminding yourself that you have also earned your place at university, reflecting on your own strengths and successes (both academic and non-academic).





2. How do I handle the stress and workload at university?



Clinician's response:

In much the same way you've already been doing! Don't discount what you've achieved - you finished high school at a really challenging time. As a result of school closures, you had to demonstrate self-discipline and independence - these skills will be really helpful at university.

Below are a few tips for managing your workload at university:



- Set a routine. A routine helps you to put structure in when things are busy. Make sure you set aside time for your academic work as well as downtime to allow you to recharge. Remember to also leave time for things that may come up unexpectedly.



- Set priorities. Organize tasks based on due dates, workload and your strengths and preferences. Map out key dates for assignments/exams and then consider how much time you will need to prepare for each. Prioritize items that are due soon or those that will take longer to complete. Knowing that you are taking care of more difficult items first will help you feel more confident.



- Create to-do lists. Daily to-do lists can help you break tasks down into manageable steps and reduce the chances of feeling overwhelmed. Being able to cross items off as you complete them will also give you a sense of accomplishment and helps you to maintain motivation.



- Try not to procrastinate. Procrastinating only causes our to-do lists to grow, which can make it harder to catch up and can make us feel overwhelmed. Of course, it's important to take breaks, but try your best to stay on track with the routine you've set for yourself. There are lots of helpful tips on managing procrastination [here](#).



- Get your sleep! When we're busy, we often compromise the amount of sleep we get, but this only causes us to be more tired and less efficient. Being tired affects our ability to focus as well as our memory. Make sure a good night's sleep is part of your routine.



- Make time for yourself. Whether it is spending time with friends and family, or doing something enjoyable yourself, it is crucial to set aside time when you are not doing work. This will help you recharge and is a great way to reward yourself for your hard work.



- Ask for help. There are people at university whose job is to help you if you are feeling overwhelmed, so remember to ask for help if you need it.

Conclusion

You might come to read this booklet with different expectations, but one thing we wish you walk away with is to remember to take care of yourself throughout your years in university.



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