

Thinking of Leaving, Changing Your Course, or Taking Time Out?

For many reasons, students change courses, withdraw from certain subjects, take leave of absence, or withdraw from studies altogether. It can be a difficult and overwhelming step to make, but sometimes a necessary and logical one. It can seem all the more confusing when you have worked so hard to get to University in the first place.

The decision is often heavily influenced by expectations and pressures from different people, including yourself, family, friends, and faculty staff. So it's vital that you give yourself time to consider these changes, and to talk to others to make sure you are aware of all the options available.

- 1. Clarify your situation and your reasons for thinking about making a change.**
- 2. Talk it over with as many people as possible.**
- 3. Explore the options available, and understand the implications of any changes you might make.**
- 4. Follow through carefully on your decision.**

Step 1: Clarify Your Situation

Identify as clearly as possible why you are thinking about making a change. The reasons could be study-related, personal or a combination of both. Sometimes it can be very difficult to pinpoint why you are thinking about changing. Writing down the thoughts you are having, and any reasons for changing, can be a very useful exercise.

Many students go through times when they consider changing their enrolment, or when they question their commitment to studying, but then keep going. You may be facing:

- problems settling into university and understanding the best way to approach your studies.
- courses not suited to your interests or career needs.
- problems with studying effectively or keeping up with the work load.
- the feeling that university is too big, unfriendly or just disappointing.
- personal problems, including family or relationship difficulties.
- financial difficulties.
- physical or mental health problems, either your own or those of other family members.
- problems living away from family and friends, particularly if you come from overseas, interstate student, or a rural community.
- a struggle to balance the demands of study, family, social life and employment.
- a sense that it is just not the right time in your life to be studying at university.

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Step 2: Talk it Over

The best decisions are made when you have all the facts, and can make an informed choice. Within the University, many people are able to help you explore the issues around any decision to change course or to leave. In your faculty, these include teaching staff, who can help with academic concerns, and administrative staff who will help you follow correct procedures. While it is sometimes daunting to speak with someone about your concerns, it can often be very useful and save a great deal of worry.

Talking about academic concerns:

Within your faculty there are people able to help you directly with queries relating to your course, or specific subjects. They can assist with questions relating to:

- assignments and examinations.
- assessment dates.
- special consideration.
- withdrawal, and leave of absence.

As each faculty varies in these specific areas, you will need to speak with them directly. However, each faculty tends to function in the following way so that:

If you are dealing with your issue at a department level -

Then the most appropriate people to speak to are:

- your tutor or demonstrator.
- the lecturer in charge of the subject.
- the Department course adviser.
- the year co-ordinator.
- the Head of Department.

If you are dealing with your issue at a faculty level -

Then the most appropriate people to speak to are:

- faculty course advisors.
- the Manager of Undergraduate Programs.
- the Associate Dean (Academic).

Other valuable resources are -

- the undergraduate handbook, where all regulations are recorded.
- your Student Diary, which has specific information relating to these issues.
- Faculty/Department websites.

Talking about concerns around study skills:

If you are having problems studying effectively, the Language and Learning Skills Unit (LLSU) may be able to help with independent learning strategies to:

- maximize your success through effective study strategies.
- organize your time efficiently.
- write essays and reports.
- prepare for assessment.
- study in the Australian university system.

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The LLSU offers individual appointments, and conducts study skills seminars. Please see <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/llsu/> Ph: 8344 0930.

For specific course selection and career concerns:

The Careers and Employment Unit provides careers counselors who can talk through the issues with you and provide information about the career implications of your decisions.

If you wish to change courses, then accurate information about selection into other university and TAFE courses is vital in learning your options. Remember you may no longer be considered in the school leaver category by university and TAFE selection officers. The Careers and Employment Unit houses an extensive careers resource library for your use. You can also check out their web site

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/careers/>. Ph: 8344 6686.

Talking about other concerns:

The University understands that personal, relationship, health, financial and a range of practical problems can occur in the lives of students, and have a significant impact on capacity to study. A number of services can assist you at such times. Please see:

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au> .

Step 3: Explore All the Options Available

These could include:

Continuing your current load of study, having reviewed your difficulties

Through using university support services and your own personal support networks, you may decide to continue your course without any changes.

Withdrawing from a unit of study

Reducing your workload to part-time by withdrawing from one or a few units of study may be possible within your faculty. This can then give you the time to deal with your current situation. Each faculty has different regulations on withdrawing, and there are time-limits for withdrawing without penalties, so check the details with your faculty advisors. Check also how this affects HECS, Austudy, Abstudy and Youth Allowance arrangements - the advisors at Student Financial Aid can help you understand what these

implications might be. You can find their web site at:

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/finaid> Ph: 8344 6053.

Also talk to someone at Student Administration to clarify issues with HECS and other fees. Ph: 8344 4772.

Changing faculties

This is sometimes possible within the university, but you will need to check procedures with the relevant faculties. Remember that your marks in your current course may significantly influence your chances of being accepted. It is helpful to get support from your current faculty for the move.

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Taking leave of absence from study

This means you take time out from your course, but keep your place with the option of returning later. The period of leave is usually limited to one year. You need to apply for this at the faculty office. If you are an international student you may not be able to study part-time or remain in Australia if you take a leave of absence. Also, only a partial refund of fees may be possible if you withdraw. Please check with the International Centre.

<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/international> Ph: 8344 4505

Discontinuing your course

If you withdraw from study, you give up your place in that course altogether. If you then wish to return to the same course later, you would need to re-apply through the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC).

This is a major step to take, and, if considering this option, you are strongly advised to talk with faculty academic staff, faculty advisors and the various student support services available to you. If you do decide to withdraw from studies, then it is vital that you take the actions listed under Step 4.

Leaving without a trace

Try not to do this. Most people who take this course of action later regret not exploring all options that are available. Also, if you decide to leave but fail to take all the appropriate action, then this may mean that when you decide to enrol somewhere else, you will not obtain credit for work you have already done. Doing this can also mean that any outstanding financial loans or library debts will prevent you from being able to return to this University. Just disappearing causes more problems than it solves, so it is vital that you communicate with the appropriate staff about any decision to leave so that you don't jeopardise your future.

Understand the Implications:

Changes you make to your enrolment can have significant implications. It is important that, before you act, you are clear about the consequences of any decision you make. Try not to act impulsively in altering your enrolment status – taking some time, talking to people, and exploring all the options, is a sound strategy.

Step 4: If you Decide to Change, then Follow Through on your Decision

Whatever you decide, it is important to follow the appropriate procedures so that you are able to re-enrol at Melbourne, or elsewhere, later on. If you have reached the point where you think you will leave your study, either temporarily or permanently, follow this checklist to make sure you have completed all the necessary stages. Forgetting to do any of these can cause a lot of hassles for you in the future.

Checklist:

Have you:

- 1) thought through your decision, and discussed it with someone in your Faculty or elsewhere at the University?**

- 2) been to your faculty office and:**

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- completed and submitted a discontinuation or leave from studies form?
- found out the closing dates for reapplying if that is what you wish to do?

3) been to Student Administration and:

- obtained a copy of all your results to date?
- asked about fee refunds and HECS implications?
- ensured they have your most recent address?

4) notified Austudy, Abstudy or Youth Allowance of your decision and:

- filled out the relevant forms?

5) paid all outstanding debts and library fines?

6) kept all the appropriate records of your study?

Life After the Decision

How will you feel?

It's sometimes difficult to imagine what the outcome of your decision will be. You may feel:

- **relief** that a decision has been made and you can move on to a different way of experiencing your study or of working.
- **disappointment** or a sense of failure at not achieving a goal you had set.
- **regret** and wonder if you have been too impulsive in your decision making.

These are normal and understandable reactions to what can be an extremely stressful period of decision making.

What now?

If you are taking some time out from study then it sometimes helps to turn this into a really good decision, by having goals for what you will do now. These might be things like saving money, travelling, trying other study, getting well, helping out your family, or having a time in mind when you will return to your course.