

TO UNIVERSITY AND BEYOND...

So, you're in Year 12 and thinking of coming to university? Great! Finishing school and heading off to uni will be one of the most exciting and challenging times of your life, with some difficult decisions along the way. At the moment you're probably busy focusing on making it through Year 12 (no surprises there), but it's never too early to start thinking about what lies ahead after those final exams. You should take some time now to consider what life might be like for you as a uni student and the changes you'll go through when you arrive on campus.

First things first: all students, regardless of their personality or educational or cultural background, will experience a period of transition when they come to university. That's not to say that all students struggle when they get here, just that most will have to make a few adjustments in order to successfully settle into their new environment.

This booklet will explore the academic, geographic, administrative and personal transition issues that students encounter when they first arrive on campus. Read it for a clearer idea of what life at uni is really like and hints on what you can do now to prepare for later. Keep your eye out for:

- **Student tips:** Sound advice on what you can do in Year 12 to prepare for uni and what to do when you get there.
- **Urban myths:** Fact or fiction? Get the truth behind all those rumours you've heard about uni.
- **Key dates:** Important things to do and when to do them.
- **School vs. Uni:** Get the low-down on the real differences between school and uni.

Remember that although this booklet has been produced by the University of Melbourne's Transition Program, the information inside is pretty general and will be useful to you regardless of which university you want to attend.

For more information about moving from school to university, see the Transition and Orientation Programs website at www.services.unimelb.edu.au/transition/.

GEORGIA'S ACADEMIC CHANGES

When I first started uni I hadn't really considered how different the styles of teaching and learning were going to be from those at school. I had heard from my sister that classes would be bigger and lecturers wouldn't necessarily know my name, but I had no idea what it would be like to sit in a lecture with around 300 other students! Tutorials are also very different from school: we do most of the talking and we're allowed (even encouraged) to challenge other students' and the tutor's opinions!

Probably the hardest thing for me to deal with was the new level of academic independence and responsibility. I didn't have teachers or my parents around to nag me about getting my assignments done on time or to start studying early for exams, and it was entirely up to me how much work I did or didn't do. This was great for a while until I had a sneaking suspicion that maybe I wasn't using my new found freedom in the best possible way. I'd fallen behind a bit and had come close to missing some deadlines. Eventually though, I worked out that there are loads of services that are actually there to help you get the most out of your studies. When I finally used them I learned how to manage my workload and perform better.

Oh, and one more thing: you might find that you get lower grades at uni than you're used to at school. Don't be disheartened though – it takes a little while to adjust to learning at uni and to work out what is expected in an essay or report. Plus don't forget that you're now studying with a whole different pool of people to those that you were at school with. If you talk to other students in your tutorial group you'll usually find that you're actually doing ok.

"I was unprepared for the amount of reading, the standard of work expected and the drop in grades. I was used to getting straight As and it was a shock."

Georgia's top tips

In Year 12 try to develop time management skills and independent study habits so that it's not a huge shock when you get to uni. Don't wait for your parents or teachers to remind you about assessment tasks, make a plan for how and when you're going to get them done and stick to it.



At uni, as well as your tutor or lecturer, there are services that are dedicated to helping you succeed academically. For example, the University of Melbourne has a Language and Learning Skills Unit, which offers workshops and seminars that have helped me to develop essential skills for uni like essay writing, research and critical reading. All unis have services like these, so take advantage of them right from the start.

"I was right about uni being hard, but it definitely was not as scary as I imagined. Most lecturers did not throw us in the deep end, and made conscious efforts to help our transitions."

Urban myth #1: High ENTERs should not be 'wasted'

If you manage to get a higher ENTER score than your course requires, don't think you should suddenly choose a different course so that you don't 'waste' the ENTER. You should always stick with the course you really want to do. That's where you'll get the best results and the most enjoyment.

Urban myth #2: Year 12 is the hardest year ever and uni is much easier

You probably won't feel the same pressure as you do now while you finish your final year of high school, but the pace and intensity of the work at uni is still very high and sometimes higher. People who say that they cruised through first year probably didn't achieve or learn half as much as the people who took first year seriously.

"The biggest surprise was the significantly greater workload than in high school. A misconception was that after high school there would be more free time; however the amount of work required to keep up takes up much of this time."

Urban myth #3: You don't have to turn up to class

Ok, so you don't have to turn up in the sense that there's no roll call. But be careful: some subjects do have compulsory attendance or make attendance one of the assessable tasks. They sometimes have tests during class too and you really don't want to miss those. They're a good way to build up marks during the semester and get an idea of how you're going in the subject. At the start I was really tempted to skip lectures and download the notes from the web, but most lecturers give a lot more important information during the lecture. And really, you get out what you put in, so make the most of it.

"You don't have to go to class, but you don't have to pass either."

Key dates during Year 12

February: Settle into the rigours of Year 12. Maybe start to think about the way you study and whether there might be strategies to help you improve. You could try studying with a friend (one who won't distract you) or asking your teacher for some tips on how to study effectively.

June: Some universities offer Year 12 exam preparation lectures during the holidays. If you can attend these you'll not only get some great exam tips, but also become more familiar with a uni campus and what lectures are like.

November: Good luck with your exams!

School vs. Uni

Instead of being in a structured environment like school where you are told what to do and when to do it, at uni you are expected to be a lot more independent. You won't be made to do homework (although good students will always do preparation and readings) and there'll be no more reminders sent home. You have to take responsibility for getting things done, and on time too.

You might be used to teachers who have known you for many years. They know your name, your family and have maybe watched you grow up. At uni you may have teachers who are teaching another 399 students in the same class. They probably won't know your name or anything about where you've come from. They'll often expect you to call them by their first name too, which can be a bit freaky when you've never done it before!

And get this: unlike your school teachers, most of the staff who teach at university – lecturers, tutors and demonstrators – don't have formal teaching qualifications, so teaching is just one of their responsibilities. They're experts in the field they teach because they do research and write publications, so you'll benefit from learning the latest developments in the subject area.

You only have to sit in a lecture theatre to realise that classes at uni are very different to those at school, and may well take some getting used to. Lectures are the main style of teaching at uni and are usually pretty big and quite formal. Tutorials (or 'tutes') are much smaller – usually less than 20 people – and more personal. Tutes follow lectures and are the best place to discuss what went on in the lecture and ask questions about bits you didn't understand. Tutors will know your name and a bit about you and will expect you to contribute each week. Other students might also have practical sessions (or 'pracs') that are like school science lessons, or may go off on practical or clinical placements out in the real world.

"Prior to starting uni, I thought I was well prepared - as the year went on I realised more and more how ill-prepared I was. I wish someone had told me that the hard work doesn't stop at the end of Year 12 - hard work, dedication and consistency are required just to stay afloat with uni work."

Best and most challenging bits

Probably the most challenging part was how long it took me to adjust to the style of learning at uni ... not to mention the time I spent struggling on my own without knowing that there were people actually employed to help me! The best bit is having the chance to study something I'm really into and knowing that I'll hopefully be able to make it a career one day.

PAUL'S GEOGRAPHIC CHANGES

I went to a pretty small high school with about 100 people in my year, so coming to university with 40,000 other students was a huge change for me. I remember when I first arrived on campus I was completely overwhelmed by how big it was. It felt like I was walking around a town with banks, shops, cafés, a post office, gym, theatre and cinema spread out all over the place!

My classes were across the campus and I got lost so many times in the first few weeks because I was too nervous to stop and ask someone for directions and too embarrassed to look at my map. I really wish I'd just taken a look around; I would have seen loads of other new students in same position as me. Now I'm pretty familiar with most places on campus but I still have to pull my map out sometimes ... and no one looks twice at me when I do.

Luckily I knew the city pretty well from holidays with my family so I didn't completely freak out at the size of it, but I have friends who had never even been here before they arrived for Orientation. They had to work out where to shop for cheap groceries, which parts of the city were good for eating, going out, movies etc and safe places to walk at night. For a couple of them this was their first time in Australia too so it was even more difficult because they had to negotiate everything in a second language!



Dealing with public transport was a bit more of a challenge for me. When I was at school I usually just relied on Mum or Dad to drive me places, but suddenly I had to be responsible for getting to and from uni. It took me a while to work out whether I should get a bus or train, how long would it take to get there, how much it was going to cost each day ... you get the picture. Now I've got it down to a fine art.

"Travelling over an hour to uni was tiring and I found it limited [my] social opportunities since I had to rely on public transport by myself at night."

Paul's top tips

In Year 12 when you're checking out your course options, don't just read the glossy brochures. For a real insight into what uni is like, talk to people in the know: your friends, brothers, sisters, anyone who's recently been to uni. You could also check out the First_year@UniMelb blog for a look at what students are saying about uni life. Also, make sure you go to as many uni events as possible. Public lectures, Open Days and even just wandering about the campus during semester will help you get used to the size and feel of the place, so it's not such a shock when you arrive. I didn't know this when I was at school, but uni libraries are open to the public too, so you could easily come and have a look around or even use the resources for your school assignments!

At uni make sure you get your timetable during Orientation and find out where all your lectures, tutes and lab classes will be. There are tours in Orientation or you could just use a map and work it out for yourself. That way you won't have to spend the first few weeks wandering about lost or rushing to get to classes ... like I did! You might also want to think about transport. How will you get to uni? How long will it take? What time will you have to get up? When will you get home?

"It was frustrating at first when there's no one there to guide you but once you work out how to find things it's a good feeling of independence."

Urban myth #4: It's sink or swim at uni

You might be thinking that because uni is so big, nobody cares about you or that help is difficult to find. Not true. There is a whole range of services at university – health, housing, finance, counselling, sport, language and learning – and people are very willing to help. Probably the only difference I've found is that you can't wait for a teacher to recognise that you need help; you have to use your initiative and find help yourself.

"Get help when you need it; there are loads of places to go, it's just that no one will come up to you and ask if you're OK. It's up to you to approach places for help."

Urban myth #5: It's not important to attend Orientation

Orientation is probably the most important event in terms of kick-starting your life at uni. At Orientation you'll be able to get an idea of what campus life is like, start meeting people and making new friends (hugely important for new students), and find out about the resources and support available at your university. And it's heaps of fun too with chances to join clubs and societies, see live music, sports demonstrations and comedy, and avail yourself of some of the freebies – why wouldn't you want to come?

"I didn't have much time to prepare before I started and I had no idea about what kind of life would be here because I missed Orientation. I strongly recommend that Orientation is necessary..."

Key dates in Year 12

July and August: Get on the Open Days trail and try to visit as many unis as you can during July and August. Ask questions, find out what a 'normal' day at uni is like in the courses you're thinking about and soak up the campus atmosphere. You could even go by public transport to see how long the trip will take if you end up there next year.

October: If you need to move out of home and haven't started thinking about accommodation, make sure you get in contact with your university's housing service. Lots of campus residences finalise applications about now, so if you want to live in a university college, get your application in early. Don't wait until you get an offer of a place at uni, because it might be too late by then.

December: By now you should have a more realistic idea of where you're going to be offered a place, so you can start thinking about whether you need to move out of home, and what your housing options are.

Key dates at uni

February: Orientation is at the end of the month. Attending Orientation is probably the best way for new students to get to know the campus and generally start adjusting to uni life. Use your university email account, check out your timetable and don't miss the library tour – it will save you heaps of time in the coming weeks.

School vs. Uni

At school you're probably used to either having a homeroom or a locker to keep your things in, but at uni you'll either have to hire a locker or carry your stuff around with you all day. Most students leave heavy things (like laptops, thick textbooks etc) at home and travel light to uni.

Some of you might have gone to a large high school and are used to a sprawling campus with lots of buildings, but universities dwarf even the biggest of schools. The main University of Melbourne campus is huge, spread across several blocks and with a staff and student population larger than many towns. Some metropolitan campuses even have their own postcode!

University libraries are usually much bigger than those at school, they often have more than one branch and a huge amount of resources are online. You might not have made too much use of the library at school, but at uni it's absolutely essential that you get to know your way around the physical and virtual library spaces as soon as possible.

"The size of the university and not feeling like I have a place (e.g. homeroom) used to bother me."

Best and most challenging bits

The most challenging bit was constantly having to rush between classes in the first few weeks because I had no idea where I was going and kept getting lost! The best bit was discovering all the cool things on campus and finally getting to the stage where I felt at home here.

CASSIE'S ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

If someone had said to me before I came to uni that I would have to be responsible for all my own administration, I don't think I would have known what they were talking about. But now I'm here, I totally get it: the University has a relationship with you and not your parents. So, unlike school where all the newsletters and other official stuff bypasses you and goes straight to your parents, at uni you're the one who'll be bombarded with forms, letters, statements etc.

I learnt to stay on top of all the admin by using my own kind of filing system. I use folders and files to store important documents and make sure these are all labelled. I also use a diary to keep track of due dates for fees, enrolment, subject changes etc. I put in assignment deadlines and group meetings too, so that I only have to refer to one place to know what's coming up. So after a few false starts, I've really got the hang of the admin thing and haven't missed a deadline since.



Another thing that you might find a bit weird at first is having to communicate with your teachers by phone or email, instead of seeing them around school every day. It's really important to stay in touch with tutors and course co-ordinators, especially if you've been sick and missed classes. Most tutors will give out their contact details and consultation times (this just means the times they can see you outside tutorials) in the first class and will expect you to use them.

"Organisational skills and planning ahead are really important."

Cassie's top tips

In Year 12 when you're researching courses and contacting unis for information, don't let your parents or teachers do all the work. You should have a go at making phone calls, sending emails and asking questions yourself. It's good practice for being a uni student. Also have a think about your IT skills and whether you need to brush up on these – you'll need them as soon as you start at uni.

"You ... have to realise that if you need to find something, it's easiest just to search for it on the internet."

At uni it's possible to feel as though you're drowning in paper and it's very tempting to toss all the letters, forms, statements, handbooks, leaflets etc in the bin. Don't! Try to get into the habit of reading everything that's sent to you from the uni and then filing it somewhere safe. Same goes for emails: check your uni address regularly and make an effort to read all the messages you get from the uni – they might have important info in them about scholarships or due dates.

Urban myth #6: If you've already got an email address you don't need to bother with your university account

At uni no one is going to tell you to stop using your hotmail or gmail account – loads of students continue to use their private accounts for personal emails – but universities do require students to activate and regularly check their university accounts. This is because universities do a lot of their communication via email and expect students to read and respond to important messages.

Urban myth #7: Staff will always chase you up for important forms etc

If you wait for someone to hassle you about handing in a particular form or paying a fee, you could miss something important. Staff at uni aren't going to spoon-feed you by sending out constant reminders, like they do at school. At uni you need to follow up on the billions of admin things that constantly come up.

"Make sure you are organised and take a more proactive role, e.g. with chasing things up."

Key dates in Year 12

March: It might seem a bit early but there's no harm in starting some research into the courses you think you'd like to apply for. You could also take the initiative to make an appointment with your school careers adviser to chat about your options. Having a goal to aim for will help to keep you motivated this year.

May: If you want to apply for a health sciences course, check with the University or your careers adviser about whether you need to do the Undergraduate Medical and Health Sciences Admissions Test (UMAT).

September: VTAC applications are due now. Check out special entry schemes and scholarships if you think you might be eligible – lots of these will be closing soon.

Key dates at uni

January: This is a huge month in which to exercise your new found administrative skills! Course offers are made. Read your offer carefully and work out all your options and responsibilities in terms of enrolling, deferring, second-round offers etc. Also, when you enrol, make sure you go to any welcomes, introductory talks or other events happening for new students. These are an excellent way of finding out important information and getting valuable course advice. You should also start thinking seriously about your housing options, and plan a budget using university financial aid 'cost of living' tables. Explore your part-time work options and your financial situation.

School vs. Uni

When you're at school you act like a kind of postman delivering letters between your school and your parents. At uni you have to take responsibility for reading and replying to all correspondence. You'll find that "I forgot" or "I didn't get the letter" are no longer acceptable excuses.

At school you're automatically enrolled in a year group and you really don't need to worry too much about your timetable. At uni you're responsible for enrolling and sorting out your own timetable and there are very strict dates by which these things have to be done ... and consequences if you don't get them done on time!

Lots of you will probably already use email or SMS to keep in contact with your mates but at uni email is the main form of communication with your teachers too. Forget about using text language or emoticons though; polite, professional language is a far better bet for keeping your lecturer or tutor on side.

"The Faculty arranged mentoring and they sent us a pamphlet but I didn't receive it. I heard from my friends and I went to check it out ... I only got the information when I went to look for it."

Best and most challenging bits

The most challenging bit was trying to stay on top of all the admin and knowing that I'd maybe missed some opportunities because I wasn't paying attention to the notices, emails, letters etc that I was sent. The best bit is definitely becoming more organised and feeling like I am really in control of my life.

ALEX'S PERSONAL CHANGES

When I was at school I couldn't wait to get to uni. I wanted to be my own person and have the freedom to make my own choices without having to consult teachers or even my parents. And it's true: at university you are treated like an adult. The only thing is that they expect you to behave like one too! This was a huge learning curve for me – I don't think I'd ever considered that with this new amazing independence comes a pretty big chunk of responsibility too.

The biggest shock for me was learning to be financially independent and working out how to manage my money so that I covered my rent, food, bills, books, clothes, transport and, of course, my entertainment. For the first few weeks money just flew out of my hands and it wasn't until I was running very low on funds that I realised I needed a lesson on budgeting ... and fast! I got help from student finance (all unis will have a service that can help you with financial worries) and ended up getting a part-time job too. At first it was a bit of a struggle juggling study and work but now I've learnt to manage my time and really enjoy the break that work gives me from the books.

I also moved away from home and into a flat with some guys I knew from school. It was crazy for the first little while – like being left at home with no parents for the weekend – but pretty soon we had to come to terms with the piles of washing up, no clean clothes, and empty fridge. It was a bit of a wake-up call, but now we're fairly domesticated ... well, sometimes!



Looking back to the start of first year I didn't really give too much thought to the whole 'making new friends' thing. I suppose having my housemates and other friends from school at uni, I didn't think I would need to bother about meeting new people. But I didn't know anyone in my course and felt a bit isolated when I sat in lectures and tutes. I really had to push myself to get involved in group discussions and department events and I joined a couple of faculty clubs too. Now a lot of my closest friends are in my course and from heaps of different backgrounds.

"I know there are a lot of students who just come to uni, go to class and then go home. When I got involved [in clubs] it really helped a lot because I had more friends and learnt a lot of things as well; it makes uni so much more interesting."

Alex's top tips

In Year 12 start thinking about your housing options and do a bit of research to find out what the costs of living will be for you if you stay at home, move into a flat or get a place in a university residence. If you're a bit on the lazy side and used to getting everything done for you, start practising for the world of domesticity that awaits you when you get to uni. Why not do some grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning – it'll make you a much better housemate next year ... and very popular with your family!

At uni get involved in campus life as early as possible. Research has shown that students who make friends and have a supportive network at uni are more likely to persist with their studies and enjoy their course. So make the most of your time at uni – join clubs, take up a sport, or hook into transition programs like mentor schemes or study groups. You'll probably make some good friends as well as experience the best of what uni life can offer.

"I moved from interstate and only knew one person in second year who attended Melb Uni. Having a friendship network made it a lot easier trying to fit in and get used to my new life."

Urban myth #8: You have stacks of free time at uni

I got sucked into believing this one too! It really depends on your course. Some of my friends have 12 contact hours each week (that's the hours they actually spend in class) and others have over 30. But then you have to factor in all the extra time you need for reading, preparing for tutorials, researching and writing assignments. Not to mention revising each week and studying for major exams. It's probably easiest if you think about uni as a full-time job and use the hours between classes productively. Easier said than done!

Urban myth #9: Uni is one big party

Yes, uni can be heaps of fun and there's enough social stuff to keep you busy 24/7. But living the life of a social butterfly – chatting, lunching and drinking coffee all day and hitting the town all night – can definitely take its toll on your marks, health and finances. It's a balancing act: enjoy yourself at uni and make the most of all the fun stuff on campus, but remember why you're here in the first place.

"You need to be organised, able to keep a schedule that is flexible and can manage study, social activities, leisure."

Urban myth #10: It's tough to make friends at uni

Some people might find it easier than others, but you don't have to be a super-confident socialite to meet new people and make friends at uni. A little effort – start a conversation with the person next to you in class, become a member of a club or society, join a sports team – can go a long way. And it helps to remember that most new students are probably feeling exactly the same way as you.

"Be proactive in making friends - introduce yourself to others, etc. Get involved in clubs and extracurricular activities. Take advantage of a wide range of opportunities."

Key dates at Uni

February: Orientation is usually held later in the month for students starting semester one and then in July for semester two students. This is a really important event for you to attend so that you make friends, experience campus life and get a taste of academic learning and teaching. Give yourself every opportunity to have a successful personal transition into uni by taking advantage of all that's on offer in Orientation.

"The clubs were good. [Orientation] was a time when everyone didn't know everyone else and they stood out like friendly faces – come and join us."

School vs. Uni

The size and diversity of staff and students at uni is probably going to blow your mind when you first arrive. You'll be in classes with students of all ages, nationalities, educational backgrounds and interests. The best thing about this is that you'll be exposed to a whole new range of views and experiences.

"I went to a girls' school so the big culture shock was being with boys. Not that I'd never seen a boy before! But I'd never been to school with boys."

By the time you reach Year 12 you're probably pretty confident – or at least comfortable – in your little environment. It's the big fish, small pond thing. All that changes as soon as you step on campus. But don't stress; soon enough you'll feel just as at home at uni as you did at school.

At school you probably enjoyed some subjects and absolutely hated others. At uni if you made the right course choice you should be studying subjects that interest and challenge you. Sure, there'll be some subjects that you prefer over others (that's life), but essentially you'll be able to focus on and learn more about an area that you have chosen and really want to pursue in the future.

Best and most challenging bits

The worst bit was those first few weeks when my flat was fast becoming a disaster zone and the realisation that I was going to have to start cleaning it! I would say the best bit of my personal transition was definitely making so many great friends and being able to have such a good social life.

By now you should have an understanding of the main academic, geographic, administrative and personal transition issues facing new students, and a good idea of how you might be able to overcome these challenges when you start university.

We hope that this booklet has helped to kick-start your preparations for university and that throughout the next year you remember that:

- **You are not alone:** every student will go through a period of adjustment when they arrive at university.
- **Help is at hand:** all universities have services – financial aid, housing, careers, language and learning, health, counselling – that are there to support you through your studies.
- **University isn't an entirely foreign place:** think of it as a progression of your education and an opportunity to build on your strengths and focus on what you are really interested in.

There are also many online resources which provide important information for prospective students and should answer any questions you may have. Get started by checking out the following University of Melbourne sites:

Transition and Orientation Programs: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/transition/>

Frequently Asked Questions, transition resources, first- and second-year student blogs and Orientation information.

Future Students: <http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/>

About the University of Melbourne, current student profiles, events, virtual tours, and course, scholarship and fee information.

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

Details of the many student services available at the University of Melbourne.

Good luck with your studies!

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DEGREES OF CHANGE