

Be bold when you make the leap!

The University of Pretoria will help you to make a smooth transition from high school to university

by Anthea Pretorius (Editor)



For many Grade 12s the excitement of obtaining a place at a South African university is tempered by a measure of trepidation and anxiety as they do not know what to expect, or are apprehensive about how they will cope and whether they will find their feet academically and socially.

There are distinct differences between school and university and it is important to be aware of and prepared for the additional demands of life at a tertiary institution. Coming from a close-knit school with classes of 30 to 50 learners it can be utterly daunting to find yourself on a campus with 60 000+ students and classes of 500 to 1 000 students. You will move from being a dependent learner to becoming an independent learner.

It is a fact that the new surroundings pose social, personal and intellectual challenges to every new first year student, but the better prepared you are, the easier you will adapt to your new environment. This article will explain the main challenges faced by most first year students, and how they can be addressed.

What are your expectations?

- Do you hope to have fun, meet new friends and participate in sports?
- Are you hoping to find a partner with values that are similar to your own?
- Do you want to live and study in a city far from your home town?
- Do you want to see the world?
- Is obtaining a decent qualification your only purpose?
- How adaptable are you?
- How confident are you in your abilities? This intrinsic attitude strongly correlates with performance, motivation, emotional resilience, the ability to persist and be tenacious in overcoming obstacles, and achieving academic success.
- How strong are you in terms of self-regulated learning and goal mastery?
- Is your general knowledge reasonably good?
- Are you disciplined and self-sufficient in terms of handling money wisely and managing your health, energy and personal safety well?
- Do you have sufficient knowledge about universities and how their processes work?
- Are you able to search effectively for information, evaluate it and compare it with other similar information, eg in terms of the requirements for admission to academic programmes offered by several universities?

The article will also refer you to a range of support structures that will empower and enable you to make sensible decisions. Remember that the Recruitment Team at Tuks and the JuniorTukkie Office staff are there to answer any queries (see the article on page 25).

The transition from school to university typically has three stages

1. Separation from your family and home, and also from your high school, your friends and the community (urban/rural) in which you grew up in.

2. Transition is both an internal and an external process. You invariably move to a new physical environment (eg a residence), which poses distinct challenges. At the same time you have to make an internal shift as you try to start blending in, interacting and adapting to the challenges of your programme and living arrangements. Both call for a range of skills that you will need to acquire reasonably fast in order to cope and flourish.

3. Incorporation is the stage during which you have found your feet, know your way around campus, have made friends and are studying with a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

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What is vital at this stage?

Appreciate the fact that you are able to study at a university. It is a huge privilege. You may be the first person in your family to attend a university and it may be difficult at times, but be strong. We will help you flourish.

Studying at a university is expensive, so whether your parents are funding you, you have a partial/full bursary/scholarship, or you have obtained a study loan, you need to plan adequately and consistently work hard to ensure that you will graduate on time.

Learn the ropes. Take responsibility, right from the start, for the greater personal freedom you have at university in terms of your choices, lifestyle and maintaining a high academic standard.

No-one will check whether you attend classes, do the required reading or prepare for classes, or whether you submit assignments and whether they comply with the required standard. This is your own responsibility. Make the mind shift early, because this freedom goes hand in hand with tremendous responsibility and consequences, and therefore calls for self-direction and an inner locus of control. Your future will literally be determined by your own decisions and actions.

The greatest challenges that first year students have to deal with, are:

1 A sense of isolation

For many students, this may be the first time they have not lived at home. Students who come from rural backgrounds may find living in a huge, noisy city or a busy residence rather daunting. If you grew up in a small family and attended a medium-sized high school, you might find it difficult to adapt on a campus that houses 60 000 students. You could also feel isolated because of your culture, gender, sexual orientation, introversion or homesickness, or because you find it hard to make friends and settle down in residence.

SOLUTION:

Join one of the many student organisations on campus; attend the various social events; participate in sports and cultural activities; introduce yourself to someone new every day; join or start a study group. Most churches have weekly singles get-togethers and organise camping trips – join them.

2 A sense of being overwhelmed

Students may experience anxiety because they fear that they may lack the necessary academic skills and are overwhelmed by the workload; realise that they have poor study habits/skills and find it difficult to set up a study timetable and effectively manage their time; battle with preparation for exams; or find that their social lives are too full. Others may not be sleeping or eating regularly. Some students may also be preoccupied and anxious because of financial constraints.

SOLUTION:

These complicating circumstances are real and should not be ignored. Visit the Department of Student Affairs, where you can obtain anything from study advice to counselling (read the article on page 17 in which the services they offer are discussed).

3 Problems experienced with integrating

Give yourself time to adjust. Not everyone finds it easy to make new friends and fit in. Some things that can pose barriers to integration are shyness, language, culture, a sense of alienation, intolerance or difficulties experienced in adapting to sharing your living space in a residence. Quiet introverts struggle to adjust when they find themselves among loud extroverts. Social acclimatisation at university is important as you will find yourself among thousands of students who are completely different from you and come from different countries and different language and religious backgrounds.

SOLUTION:

Learn to set boundaries. Respect your own place and the places of others within the institution. Be tolerant and open-minded. Be patient. Allow yourself to get to know others and allow them to get to know you. Try to live a balanced life that includes the amount of social activity with which you are comfortable. Explore the available student-driven initiatives and choose those that excite you. Do not feel compelled or obligated to participate in everything. Learn to say no. Avoid being suspicious and judgmental. Give yourself time and you may be surprised by the new friends you will make!

Seek all the help you can get from tutors, study groups, the Department of Student Affairs (see page 17) and also the information specialists at the libraries (see the article on page 13), who will show you how to do research and find credible articles to use for your assignments. Learn to think critically. Make as many connections as possible and build your professional network from day one.



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The greatest challenges that first year students have to deal with are:

4 Financial challenges

There are vast differences between the economic statuses of our students, and also between the costs of programmes. Whether you study from home, live in a commune, have private accommodation or stay in a residence, accommodation is also expensive.

Financial challenges are a reality and the costs you have to plan for include (a) payment of an application fee; (b) payment of a study place levy (and accommodation in res if this is relevant); money for food/snacks; the cost of commuting; and sundry items, such as copies at Xerox.

It is vital to budget in advance. I suggest that you visit the websites listed on the right to obtain actionable information that can enable you to make sound decisions.

SOLUTION:

TuksRes

www.up.ac.za/accommodation

(They can also supply you with information on alternative accommodation in the vicinity of our campuses.)

Finances

www.up.ac.za/fees-and-funding

(Also look at the special offer for academic achievers who are first year students). Consider NSFAS (www.nsfas.org.za) and Fundi (Tel 0860 55 55 44, www.fundi.co.za) funding.

Other bursary options include:

- www.up.ac.za/sport (for UP sports bursaries)
- www.gostudy.mobi (a list of bursaries according to field of study)
- <http://bursary.hcifoundation.co.za>
- The Bursary Register: Tel +27 (0)11 672 6559 or email rlevin@mweb.co.za

5 Studying effectively

Many learners come to university and discover that even though they did well in Grade 12, they need additional tips and study advice to cope with the sheer volume of work that they need to do independently.



SOLUTION:

The sooner you can form a realistic picture of what is expected of you and plan accordingly, the better. Visit the Department of Student Affairs to obtain study advice. Know what the demands of each module are and diarise important dates. It is up to you to make an impression. Ask questions if you do not understand something. Make sure that you know what is expected of you when doing assignments. Prioritise your workload. Try not to rush – pace yourself. Accept all the help you can get. You will need to familiarise yourself with assessment methods, hybrid learning, academic writing conventions and the specifications given by lecturers on assignments and how they must be submitted.

To stay abreast, you will need to spend **three hours per module unit per week**. This does **not** include the time spent preparing assignments or learning for tests and examinations.

Far too many students misjudge the time they will need to put in weekly to cope effectively with their academic load and this results in cramming or working through the night to catch up. In most programmes you will need to set aside between 24 and 36 hours every week for your academics, depending on how fast and how effectively you learn and how systematically you work. Taking good class notes is a valuable skill that is acquired with practice.

6 Finding your way around campus

The University of Pretoria has several campuses. The **Hatfield Campus** houses the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, Engineering, Built Environment and IT, Humanities, Law, Natural and Agricultural Sciences and the Faculty of Theology and Religion.

The **Groenkloof Campus** houses the Faculty of Education. The **Onderstepoort Campus** houses the Faculty of Veterinary Science and the **Prinshof Campus** houses the Faculty of Health Sciences. The **Hillcrest Sports Campus** houses TuksSport, hpc and the TuksSport High School.

SOLUTION:

During the orientation period it is important to attend every session. During these sessions vital information is communicated that will enable you to find your way around fast. Join campus and library tours, which are immensely helpful. Attend Open Days and do the UP Virtual Tour of our campuses and faculties.

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CHECKLIST FOR GRADE 9 LEARNERS

- Download the Grade 10 subject choices brochure at www.up.ac.za. Click on 'New Students'. Click on 'Study information'.
- Discuss your dreams and future plans with your parents. Be honest. Listen carefully to what they say. They love you and want the best for you!
- Based on your subject strengths and interests, discuss career options with your Life Orientation teacher.
- Develop strong study habits and be disciplined about doing well academically.
- Consider part-time volunteer work.
- Try to do job shadowing in your fields of interest.
- Remember that you do not have to study at a university or college to prepare yourself for a career – a range of equally worthy careers are available in the fields of sports and technology, for example, through Further Education and Training (FET) colleges.

CHECKLIST FOR GRADE 10 LEARNERS

- Download the Grade 10 subject choices brochure at www.up.ac.za. Click on 'New Students'. Click on 'Study Information'.
- It is crucial to make sure that your subject package is aligned with the fields of study you are interested in. Finding out in Grade 12 that you have taken Mathematical Literacy for programmes in a Faculty where only Mathematics is considered, will be devastating.
- Consult your school psychologist about taking a psychometric test to determine your aptitude.
- Go to www.pacecareers.com and click on 'Services'. Scroll down to 'Get career guidance' and then click on 'Start Questionnaire'. The questionnaire contains 105 statements that all require Yes/No answers. The system will provide you with a profile of your fields of interest and you can then click on the specific fields to obtain more detailed information.
- Start developing your own Individual Education Plan.
- Research careers that interest you. Speak to people working in those fields and find out what their jobs entail.
- Make a list of your personal abilities, strengths, talents, preferences and interests.

- Familiarise yourself with the admission requirements and APS for the different programmes you are considering.
- If you need guidance, contact a Student Advisor on Tel +27 (0)12 420 5144 (see the Recruitment Team on page 26).
- Join the JuniorTukkie Club (www.up.ac.za/juniortukkie) and download the JT APP.

CHECKLIST FOR GRADE 11 LEARNERS

- This is the year that matters most academically, since you will use your Grade 11 results to apply for admission to a university. Make them count!
- Expand your Individual Education Plan as you obtain additional information from university websites and brochures. Compare programmes.
- If you need advice, contact a Student Advisor on Tel +27 (0)12 420 5144 (see the Recruitment Team on page 25).
- Go to www.up.ac.za and do the Virtual Tour of our campuses, the nine faculties and our facilities.
- If you have not yet joined the JT Club, do so now and download the JT APP. Refer to download instructions on page 27.

CHECKLIST FOR GRADE 12 LEARNERS

- Finalise your decision on a preferred academic programme.
- Refer to the UP online application process (page 7) to ensure that you have everything ready to submit your online application.
- Apply early! Applications at UP open on 1 March.
- You will pay an online application fee when you submit your online application.
- Make the necessary arrangements for initial payments, tuition fees and residence/accommodation fees in your first year.
- Apply for financial aid, if necessary.
- Make sure of the closing date for applying for admission to your preferred programme/s. Selection programmes have an earlier closing date.
- The JT Club will assist its members with their applications.
- On the JT APP you will receive regular posts about issues that concern you.
- Make a special effort to maintain or

improve your marks in all your school subjects.

- If you need advice, contact a Student Advisor on Tel +27 (0)12 420 5144 (see the Recruitment Team on page 25).
- Visit the website www.up.ac.za and do the Virtual Tour of our campuses, nine faculties and facilities.

Being a university student is the best time of your life. Have fun; be silly sometimes; lighten up; figure things out – you are smart enough. Build resilience. You are capable of reinventing yourself over and over again!

We look forward to welcome you at Tuks, where your success really matters to us!



Useful links:

JT tel
+27 (0)12 420 6606/5102

JT email
juniortukkie@up.ac.za

JT website
www.up.ac.za/juniortukkie

JT App
www.up.ac.za/juniortukkie > JT APP

Choosing the right programme
www.up.ac.za > 'What to study'

Admission requirements
www.up.ac.za/admissioninfo

Special package offer to academic achievers and information on bursaries and loans
www.up.ac.za/fees-and-funding