GETTING STARTED AT UNIVERSITY

VALUEMaP Programme
Student Learning Advisory Service
Objectives for this workshop

• To reflect on the experience of starting university
• To draw out your strengths as students
• To consider how this experience can be combined with successful study
• To outline ways of managing your learning and study effectively
• To outline some specific topics, tools and techniques in study skills
Learning from Experience

In small groups of 3-4:

• Discuss your course briefly (5 minutes)
  • Hopes and fears for the course
    • What do you hope - or fear - will be true?
  • What existing skills do you bring to your course?

Be ready to report back in the plenary
Returning to Study

Key issues often reported by mature students include:

- Concern over personal ability: can I do it?
  - Build on existing strengths: step-by-step
- Greater level of autonomy
  - Less ‘spoon-feeding’
- Greater emphasis on personal initiative
  - Taking responsibility
- Concern over expectations
  - ‘The way we do things round here...’
- Local culture – e.g. use of academic titles
- Academic regulations
Learning from Experience

In small groups of 3-4:
• Discuss briefly previous learning experiences
  • How did you feel about being at school/college?
  • How much of that past experience do you think may colour your expectations of university?
  • Any particular ‘return to study’ concerns?
• What did you learn from your previous approach to study? What worked for you – or didn’t?
Developing Existing Skills

- Be aware of what you bring to university—e.g.
  - Interest in learning
  - Determination
  - Patience
  - Pleasure in reading and exploring different topics
  - Enjoyment in working with other people
  - Previous work experience (paid or unpaid) that contributes to your understanding
  - Career or personal goals, and understanding of how your chosen studies might help
# Graduate Skills

Research suggests employers want *transferable skills*

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<th>Analysing &amp; solving problems</th>
<th>Team &amp; Interpersonal skills</th>
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Effective adult learning tends to be driven by:

1. **Motivation**: professional or personal development; social contacts; new learning
2. (Perceived) **Relevance**: why do I need this?
3. **Timing**: the ‘right’ moment in terms of self-development, timing of class, pace, etc.
4. **Practice**: hands on experience – assignments!
5. ‘**Arousal**’**: engagement & interest in class
Independent Study

• You are ‘on your own’ much more!
• There may be many more demands on your time:
  • Study
  • Family commitments
  • Part-time work
  • Travel time
• **Prioritise** and **organise**: plan
  • How important is *this* particular event/meeting/task?
  • Discuss with ‘significant others’ (evolving) study needs
  • ALWAYS consider ‘do-ability’ of tasks/commitments
• Remember: in HE ultimately *you* decide
  • Meeting deadlines, revising for exams, lectures, etc.
Academic Support

• Understand the personal tutor system that applies to your department

• Don’t be afraid to ask questions

• Develop personal support network

• **Deal** with any difficulties via formal university/department procedures
Resources: the Library

- Libraries remain key resource for study
- Make sure you are familiar with the DHL
- Browse through your subject collection
  - Familiarise yourself with library layout
- Start to play with the online resources
  - Online Library catalogue
  - eBooks and online journals
  - Reference books, etc.
- Remember the Templeman Library
Managing Work/Life Balance

- Short breaks + holidays
- Leisure activities
- Time off – chill-out time
- Keep control over any paid employment
- Eat healthily
- Get regular exercise
Getting Started

When starting a new course, what usually happens?

PANIC!

Then......

Planning – bit-by-bit

Preparation

Reading  Note-taking  Organising
The ‘Learning Stream’

- Getting started – energetic rush
- Feedback and marks
- First Assignment
- Making steady progress
- Feels like going in circles
- Done it!
Learning Styles

• Understanding your own preferred **Learning Style** can lead to more effective study

• Learning Styles affect the way you:
  a) perceive information
  b) process information
  c) organise and present information

• There are several competing theories

• One very influential theory is by *Kolb* (1984)
The Learning Cycle

Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation

Reflective Observation

Abstract Conceptualisation
Learning Styles

Giving four potential ‘learning styles’
Learning Styles

According to Kolb…

• **Accommodators** *tend to prefer* Doing & Feeling
  – ‘hands on’ activity

• **Convergers** *tend to prefer* Doing and Thinking
  – solving problems, finding practical solutions

• **Divergers** *tend to prefer* Watching & Feeling
  – imaginative ‘butterflies’ – exploring new material

• **Assimilators** *tend to prefer* Watching & Thinking
  – ideas, theories, concepts
Learning Styles

Honey and Mumford develop this:

- **Pragmatists** *tend to prefer* problem solving, doing
- **Reflectors** *tend to prefer* stepping back to ponder
- **Activists** *tend to prefer* immediate experience
- **Theorists** *tend to prefer* logical explanations

Each has a different *learning preference*
Learning Styles

An alternative scheme suggests that different people tend to learn best through different ‘inputs’:

- **Visual** input (‘show me’)
- **Auditory** input (‘tell me’)
- **Kinaesthetic** input (‘help me to do it’)

Which do you prefer?
Organising Yourself

• Organising your study space
  • Somewhere comfortable
  • Avoid obvious distractions
  • Make sure you have resources you need
  • Good filing system for notes, etc.

• Organising your time
  • Be aware of concentration spans
  • Plan around assignments *now*

• Common problems – distractions…..
Too Much Information.....

- Information overload
- Be selective – prioritise information
- Make sure you note any questions
- Become aware of backup resources:
  - Faculty/Departmental/Module Handbooks
  - Departmental website: www.kent.ac.uk/xxxxx
  - Student Portal
  - Moodle and SDS
  - Course Handouts
- Ask! Tutors, Reception, Student Services, SLAS..
Keep in Touch with Things

- **Keep** all course literature and guidelines
  - File this material effectively
- Check your KENT email regularly
  - Respond quickly to staff emails

- Make sure you know and understand course procedures & requirements
  - Forms to be completed and returned, etc.

- ‘Buddy groups’: informal student groups
Communication

- Talk to other students!
- Talk to staff!
- Ask questions
- Understand the personal tutor/senior tutor system that applies to your department
- Make sure that you deal with any difficulties via formal university/department procedures
- Use SLAS and Student Services
  - Be aware of Workshop programme
  - Book sessions online