Finding Your Feet
Finding Your Feet at University

Starting your university career can be an exciting time. It is a whole new chapter in your life, time to spread your wings and find your true potential. You may have heard a lot about university life from friends and family or you may be discovering all about it from scratch. For every student university life will be a unique experience and there are bound to be some ups and downs, challenges and triumphs. Within this booklet you will find some tips designed to help you negotiate the adventure that lies ahead.

You have arrived

As with anything in life, it helps to prepare in advance rather than waiting until problems happen. One of the first things you should do when you arrive on campus is to walk around and identify all the buildings and rooms which will be relevant to you such as the library, Student Services, Student Union, your course department and classrooms. This will help you to feel a part of the Goldsmiths’ community. Register for your course as soon as possible; once you have done this you are an official student. Find your course timetable and keep it to hand; structure your life around it. Familiarise yourself with the local area; find out what is on offer socially and practically ie; GP surgery, dentist, hospital, shops etc.

Homesickness

Along with the excitement of leaving home and starting life in a new environment there can also be anxiety, doubts and a sense of loss about what has been left behind. Many students leaving home for the first time feel homesick and even those who didn’t expect to be hit by homesickness can suddenly find themselves missing the familiarity of home and friends and don’t know how to deal with the resulting emotions. This is entirely normal and usually passes in the first few weeks though for some it may persist longer. You are in a new place with new and unfamiliar people so it is understandable that you may feel disorientated
and lonely. If you have come from abroad you may have ‘culture shock’ to deal with as well. It is important to realise that you are not the only one feeling this way and it doesn’t mean there is anything wrong with you. Talking to others about how you are feeling can help you realise you are not alone in this and is a good way of making friends.

If you are homesick notice whether infrequent or limited contact with those at home makes you feel better or worse. Think carefully about spending weekends at home; some students find that it helps to ease the transition, others find that the constant readjustment makes them feel worse.

**Expect it to be nerve-racking occasionally**

All change can be nerve racking and it’s normal to feel some degree of anxiety. Remember, everyone else is finding their feet too and although they may appear confident and composed it is very likely that they also have worries. Don’t be too hard on yourself if you are not always at ease socially or if you struggle to find the right words. Don’t give up; like most things in life the more you do this the more at ease you will feel in these situations. Learn whatever lesson there is for you then move on.

One of the hardest tasks for first years to get to grips with is adapting to the new academic requirements; tutors won’t chase you up about deadlines as they did at school and you will be expected to manage your studies independently. This may feel daunting but it is an important part of becoming a university student and you can be sure your fellow students will be feeling the same. Of course, your personal tutors are there to help you develop this discipline. If it does seem too difficult or stressful it helps if you already know how you can access support.

**Budgeting**

Avoid the trap of blowing your student loan all at once; it has to last the whole term. One of the common ways of getting into a high level of debt is avoidance. This is when you push the problem to the back of your mind maybe because you are having such a good time or you just don’t want to deal with the consequences. This may seem a bit tedious to begin with but listing your expenses including housing, tuition fees, food and course costs such as books and other equipment is a good way of keeping in mind how much you are spending and what you are spending it on.
Look After Yourself

It is important not to underestimate how demanding university life can be so remember to pace yourself and take care of yourself. Within your busy schedule, make time to relax, eat, sleep, exercise, see friends and switch off.

Student life is often associated with heavy drinking and a bad diet; while many students eat healthily and drink in moderation this cliché can hold some truth. Bear in mind that the right foods can help your concentration and help you feel generally well.

It can be fun to socialise with friends over a few drinks but remember that alcohol can worsen depression and in large quantities can cause anxiety and other health problems. Remember to give your body a break and don’t drink every day of the week!

Don’t be pressurised into doing anything you don’t want to whether that is spending more money than you have got, using drugs, having sex or even just going out all the time if you’re exhausted. Also, it’s important to avoid risky situations even if you are having a brilliant time, for example, not walking home alone at 3am (drunk or not) or having unprotected sex.

Don’t underestimate the value of sleep; when you are tired problems can seem overwhelming and it can be difficult to think clearly. Too much or too little sleep can affect your mood so keep an eye on your sleeping pattern. Common habits which prevent healthy sleep include too much time watching movies, surfing the internet, gaming or using the phone just before going to bed. Alcohol, caffeine and other stimulants will also disrupt your sleeping pattern.

An important part of looking after yourself involves paying attention to how you are feeling. If you notice you frequently feel sad, angry, worried or lost, respond to this by seeking help. In the first instance this might be sharing how you are feeling over a cup of tea with a friend or personal tutor. Alternatively you could contact the Wellbeing Service and meet for a confidential chat gold.ac.uk/wellbeing.

Don’t bottle things up

Tackle minor things the minute they come up whether that’s somebody always borrowing your milk or grabbing you for gossip when you need to be somewhere else. Explain what you want clearly and calmly and give people a chance to change before getting annoyed. For personal or academic concerns there is always someone at the university that you can talk to such as a friend, your personal tutor, residents’ assistant, the Chaplain, and Student Support and of course the Student Counselling Service.
Humans are social creatures; there’s no doubt about that. In order to survive we need contact with others. The number of people in our life is not as important as the quality of those relationships. At the heart of healthy relationship is the ability to communicate effectively, but remember communication is not just about talking, it is also about listening.

Are You a Good Listener?

Find out with this quiz.
If you want to find out what prevents you from being a good listener, be honest when answering the following questions. You might also find it useful to ask others to evaluate your listening skills. Indicate how often you do each of the following by marking:

R for rarely
S for sometimes
O for often
F for frequently or always

Does your mind wander when listening?
Do you fake attention to pretend to listen?
Do you find yourself thinking of personal matters during a conversation?
Do you focus only on words and ignore the feelings being expressed?
Do you interrupt others while they are speaking?
Do you complete sentences for others?
Do you focus only on what you want to hear or what interests you and ignore the rest?
Are you easily distracted by noise, the speaker’s mannerisms etc?
Do you plan what you are going to say next when the other person is still speaking?

Scoring:

If you answered rarely or never or sometimes to most questions then your listening skills are probably quite strong.

If you answered often or frequently or always to most questions you should consider working at improving your listening skills.

In either case, working towards making changes in the areas where you indicated often or frequently or always will help you improve your ability to listen effectively.
A Few Strategies for Making New Friends

Be where people are
Join a club, society or group, take up a new hobby. This will mean you meet people with similar interests

Make eye contact
Smile, smile, smile. Don't underestimate the impression a smile makes.

Don’t be afraid to make the first move
Go up to someone and talk to them

Don’t come on too strong
Avoid disclosing too much information about yourself too soon

Don't monopolise a conversation
Don’t talk about yourself too much, ask questions about the other person and listen to their responses

Be yourself

Be positive

Fitting in

When you start university it can seem important to fit in but perhaps it could be useful to ask yourself who or what you are trying to fit in with. Groups exist but remember they are all made up of individuals all with their own differences. You may feel that you are in some way different and may worry that you could be rejected for this difference. This is a common experience when you are in a new situation and sometimes we overlook the fact that others also have differences. Fortunately universities are places which tend to appreciate and encourage diversity and difference but in the first few months be proactive in finding the groups and organisations which exist to support and share your interests.

People can feel they are different because of their race, sexuality, religion, disability or physical appearance. Don’t let the fear of not fitting in get in the way of having a great experience of university life - sometimes we need to give people credit for their ability to take difference in their stride. Look on the university website to see what groups, societies and services are on offer goldsmithssu.org/activities. You may be surprised by the diversity!
At the Student Centre you will find information help and support to assist you during your time as a student at Goldsmiths. Our staff are available to offer assistance with many of the practical elements of student life.

Our principal roles are:

- Student enrolments
- Fee assessment and collection
- Assessments and results
- Student Advice and Wellbeing
- Discretionary funding
- Disability and equal opportunities for students

The department’s activities are underpinned by the College’s Student Experience Strategy and the Student Charter.

**Other Support**

**Samaritans Helpline** 116 123  
New Cross Branch 020 8692 5228

Goldsmiths Students’ Union, are a democratic and charitable organisation that works independently from Goldsmiths, University of London to represent and support you, the students. Goldsmiths Students’ Union provides:

- Academic advice
- Welfare advice
- Employment
- Finance
- Health
- Sexual health
- Housing
- Personal safety
- Campaigns
- Societies
- Sports
- Student media
- Volunteering

Goldsmiths Students’ Union  
Dixon Road New Cross,  
London SE14 6NW  
Telephone: 0208 692 1406  
Email: info@goldsmithssu.org
The Chaplaincy is both ecumenical and multi-faith. We seek to increase understanding and awareness of the diversity of faith traditions, and to ensure that no-one experiences discrimination or prejudice on the grounds of faith.

A listening ear and a warm welcome Chaplains are here for everybody regardless of whatever your beliefs and practices may or may not be. We welcome anyone who wants someone to talk to, or just be with, regardless of how small or big your issue or feelings may seem to you. We are available at any time by prior appointment, just email chaplaincy@gold.ac.uk