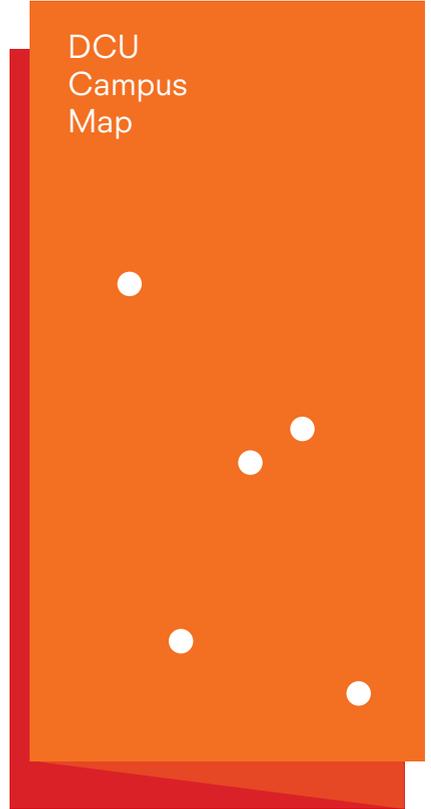


U&Beginning



DCU
SS&D



A Step by Step Guide to
Settling into your New
Learning Environment

Steps

Step One
Understanding Learning at University

Step Two
Your First Week in DCU

Step Three
Settling into Your Programme

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Introduction



This Booklet has been created specifically to help First Year students settle into third level education and come to terms with this new learning environment.

The transition to university is well known to be challenging on many levels – academically, personally and financially – but many of these challenges can be overcome if you keep the head and ask for help when you need it.

Take some time to read through these pages during your first week at university and then keep it on your study desk so that you have a quick reference close to hand.

Along with this booklet, the following resources will provide you with the necessary tools to negotiate your way through your First Year at DCU:

First Year Student Diary and Planner

The A-Z Guide to Life at DCU and

The Week-by-Week (online) Orientation

www.dcu.ie/students/index.shtml

Once you have completed a full year in university, you'll understand the system, feel much more at ease with your surroundings and begin to reap the benefits of a university degree.

To Do List

Note down anything you hear about in the first few weeks which you want to learn more about when things settle down.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____

Step One

Understanding Learning at University



You will have heard many times that university is a 'totally' different experience and you may be wondering what makes it so different. Over the years, we have asked First Year students exactly this question and have based the following information on this.



The Challenges

1. Fewer Contact Hours

In university, you may have far fewer class contact hours than in school but you will be expected to put in at least 2 hours work out of class for every hour you spend in class. This means researching further, reading recommended texts, writing up your notes etc. On top of this you will have projects and assignments to complete. You will be constantly busy during the academic year – and much of the work is outside of the classroom.

2. Nobody is checking that you are attending class

Although there are some compulsory classes, on the whole, nobody is keeping your attendance or checking to see if you have read over your notes or done further work. This is great in one way but it means that you have to make sure you manage your time carefully and keep on top of your coursework and readings. Moodle (the DCU Virtual Learning Environment, which is used to complement the work you do in class) provides notes for some classes but is not a substitute for going to class and taking your own notes / taking part in discussions.

3. Cramming won't work

Unlike school learning, where generally you can scrape by if you cram at the last minute, your programme moves on very quickly and you will find that it is impossible to cram everything in at the last minute. You need to be organised from Day 1, file your notes and shout for help if you are feeling any way lost by Week 4. Learn as you go! It's easy to let work build up and put it off for 'another day' but that's a recipe for disaster. Take the decision now to stay on top of your work and you'll enjoy your year and reap the benefits of a free summer!

4. There is never 'one book'

When writing your assignments or doing projects, you will be expected to consult different sources, gather opinions or facts and present them in a coherent style, which is correctly referenced. Don't rely on 'finding that book' – 'that book' doesn't exist!

5. Getting to know people

In school, you had a core class group, which stayed together for many of the subjects. In university, you may be sharing modules with much larger groups and rarely get to sit alone with a small group of students from your own programme. This can be daunting initially – as that friend you made in the last class may not be sitting with you in the next class and you have to start all over again. Your social skills will certainly be challenged!

The Opportunities

1. You can control your own learning

Rather than getting narrow guidelines within which learning should occur (e.g. one book), you get to explore a whole new world of books, journals, articles and possibly, labs. Over time you will understand how to decipher what is important for your subject area and what can be glossed over. Gone are the days of learning off by heart and spilling it out on a page on the day of the exam.

2. The opportunities are endless

Within the classroom and labs, you will gain the knowledge of the subject area and develop skills such as debating, analysing, critically evaluating and reflecting. Outside of the classroom, you can attend employer events, social events, developmental workshops, sports initiatives and much, much more. If you are lucky, you'll get to experience the workplace further on in your studies or get to spend some time studying or working abroad through a structured programme organised by the University.

3. Clubs and Societies

The University has over 100 clubs and societies to choose from – all of them equipped with funding structures and committees and the necessary equipment and expertise to run at an extremely high level. You'll never again have the opportunity to discover a new sport or activity – at little or no cost.

4. Four months holidays

At no other time in your life will you have 4 months to discover the world, take part in volunteering, enter the workplace and simply take time out to do something to develop your personal, social and professional skills. Many of you will have other commitments, of course, but having these summer months to concentrate on them – after a year of juggling everything – is close enough to a break!

5. Experts at your Fingertips

In a university environment, you will find academic experts, careers professionals, health professionals, access to professional bodies, events' organisers – a whole range of expertise on one campus. This concentration of people with different skills and knowledge who simply 'know what they are talking about', is unique – and it's all there for you to take advantage of.

Experts at your Fingertips

In a university environment, you will find academic experts, careers professionals, health professionals, access to professional bodies, events' organisers – and it's all there for **you**.

Your First Week at University



During Orientation, you will have received information packs and various pieces of information about your programme, the student support services available, the learning environment and the events at DCU. Most students tell us that, by the end of Orientation Week, they have lots of information but are not sure what to do 'first'. Here is a checklist to make it easy – make sure not to finish your first week without ticking these off:

If you have done all of this by the end of Week One, you are well on track to settling into DCU!



- 1 **Print out your timetable** first thing on Monday morning, as the rooms may have changed since you last looked. Check it every evening this and next week to check the next day's timetable
- 2 **Find your School Office.** The School secretaries will be able to help you with any query you have regarding your timetable or programme to get you started
- 3 **Check your Portal Page** to see that you are correctly registered. All of your modules should be listed here, if they are not, go to the Registry and let staff there know
- 4 **Sign up for a library tour.** If you don't do this in Week 1 or 2, you'll forget to do it and it will make using the library for your first assignment much more difficult. Simply walk down to the library and sign up in person
- 5 **Find the Student Advice Centre** in the Henry Grattan Building – staff there can assist you with anything you need to know about anything during the year. You can ring 7165 from an internal phone if you need quick assistance (from a mobile, dial: 01-700 7165) or mail student.support@dcu.ie
- 6 **Get to know at least one person** in your programme and swap telephone numbers or email addresses if you can. It is much easier to face each day if you have somebody to walk around the campus with
- 7 **Take some time to explore Moodle** – the Virtual Learning Environment at DCU. Once lectures get going, you will need to use it regularly. There is a great online tutorial at www.dcu.ie/iss/video/index.shtml - look at this when you have some free time during the day or in the evening
- 8 **Browse through the DCU webpages** – this will give you a good overview of what is available at DCU. Make sure to use all of the opportunities available to you
- 9 **Take a look at the online orientation** at www.dcu.ie/students/index.shtml. This is a weekly online orientation for First Years – which provides key information to make sure you don't miss anything important happening in the academic year
- 10 **Organise your notes** in folders, so that you have everything in an orderly place from the outset. This makes it much easier to revise, when the time comes – it also makes writing assignments much easier, as you will have everything in one place



Settling into Your Programme



With only 12 weeks in each Semester, the lecturers don't waste time and very quickly you will find yourself deep into the coursework of the programme you have chosen. Semester One is crucial and you need to keep on top of things in order to progress smoothly. If you stick to the following, the year will be a success – whatever 'success' means for you personally:

The first 5 weeks of this year are crucial. You need to take stock of where things are on a regular basis during this period and take appropriate action, if you need to. Look at the Q&A below to see what 'appropriate action' might mean for you.

Go to all of your labs and lectures. In a lot of cases, it's very easy to 'miss' lectures, as there is very little compulsory attendance. Remember that you are fooling nobody but yourself – and the more lectures you miss, the harder it is to 'go back', as you'll feel left behind.

The notes on Moodle (the Virtual Learning Environment at DCU) are a support but not a substitution for the classes. You won't be able to cover the coursework by just working from Moodle.

Organise your handwritten notes (and re-read and re-write, if necessary) three times a week. Make sure that you print relevant moodle notes or print out articles as they come up – and put them in order in your files.

Use your Student Diary and Planner to note down assignment due dates, group meetings etc. This Diary contains key academic cut-off dates and is great to remind you of important events in the academic year.

Get to know some of your classmates and form study groups. This is a great way of getting on top of challenging academic content and, importantly, it will give you a good feeling for how you are getting on in the larger group.

Q&A

Q What if I discover that the programme is not for me?

A You need to make this decision before October 24th and withdraw, defer or seek to transfer. The Booklet 'Thinking of Changing Programme' gives you all of your options before this date. You can download this at: www4.dcu.ie/students/advice/resources/academic.shtml. You can also go to the Student Advice Centre in the Henry Grattan Building (same building as the Registry and bank!), get a hard copy of the Booklet and speak to somebody about your options.

Q Why is October 24th such an important date?

A Many of you will be under the 'free fees' scheme, i.e. you are paying a contribution of approximately €2,700 per year and the government is funding the rest of your studies. If you do not progress into the next year of your studies, however, you will no longer be eligible for 'free fees' and you will have to fund yourself. This will cost anything between €5,000 and €12,000 for one year approximately. If, however, you 'take yourself out of the system' before October 24th, the University will not claim fees for you and you can re-commence in DCU or another institution in September 2015 (or beyond) and hold on to your free fees.

Q I don't know anyone on the programme – is there an easy way of meeting people and making friends?

A This is one of the biggest worries for students in First Year but remember that there are over 2,000 new undergraduate students and many of them are in the same boat! The best way of meeting people is to join a Club or Society early – do this on the 'Clubs and Socs Days' in early October or, if you prefer, mail the Chairperson of the Club or Society and find out when they are meeting next: www.dcsu.ie/.

You can also pop into the Inter Faith Centre for a (free!) coffee anytime – many students use this Centre in between classes and get to meet other students who are just passing time before their next lecture.

Q I'm returning to study after a while out of the academic system and am finding it really challenging. What should I do?

A Go to the next step, Step 4, on 'Coping with the New Study Environment' and work through this.

Coping with the New Learning Environment



Whether you are returning to education after a break for family reasons, coming back to education after being in employment, coming from a different learning environment abroad or entering straight after finishing school, you will find that learning at university is completely different to anything you have experienced before. In order to deal with this new environment, you need to develop the necessary academic skills as well as come to terms with the disciplinary knowledge.

The following resources have been created with a view to helping you along this road in First Year

Week-by-Week Online Orientation

Each week, you will receive an email from Student Support & Development, highlighting important university cut-off dates, academic skills workshops and professional events. These emails will take you a couple of minutes to read and are designed to help you through your first year and make sure you don't miss anything crucial to your studies. You'll find the link to the online orientation at www.dcu.ie/students/index.shtml - feel free to read up in advance!

Study Skills Workshops

A series of workshops on study skills are organised each year which focus on areas which typically cause difficulty in First Year, these include academic writing, note-taking, general study skills, presentation skills, time management etc. Sign up for these workshops early, as places are limited. Further information at www.dcu.ie/students/index.shtml

DCU Library E-Tutorial

Work through this online tutorial at your own pace during the first 3 – 4 weeks. It will help you understand how to use the vast amount of information which is available in the library, which you will need for your assignments. If you do it early, you'll approach your first assignment with plenty of confidence www.library.dcu.ie/lets/index.htm

Maths Learning Centre

If you are taking a maths module as part of your programme, make sure to schedule in a weekly session with the Maths Learning Centre. Basically, it's as near to 'free grinds' as you will get – simply go along with your notes and some work that you would like to do and staff there will work with you on any difficulties you may have. Full details are at www.dcu.ie/math/mlc/index.shtml

Computer Programming Support

Computing students have a programming tutor available to help them with areas of programming, which they may find challenging. Email robert.hanrahan@dcu.ie or call into Room L1.14a in the School of Computing for further details.

Basic Computing Skills

If I.T. is not your favourite word, you'll be glad to hear that we have a self-study resource for students who need to get up to speed on the basics of Word, PowerPoint and Excel. You can take this at your own pace. Full details at www.dcu.ie/iss/software-app-guides/office07.shtml

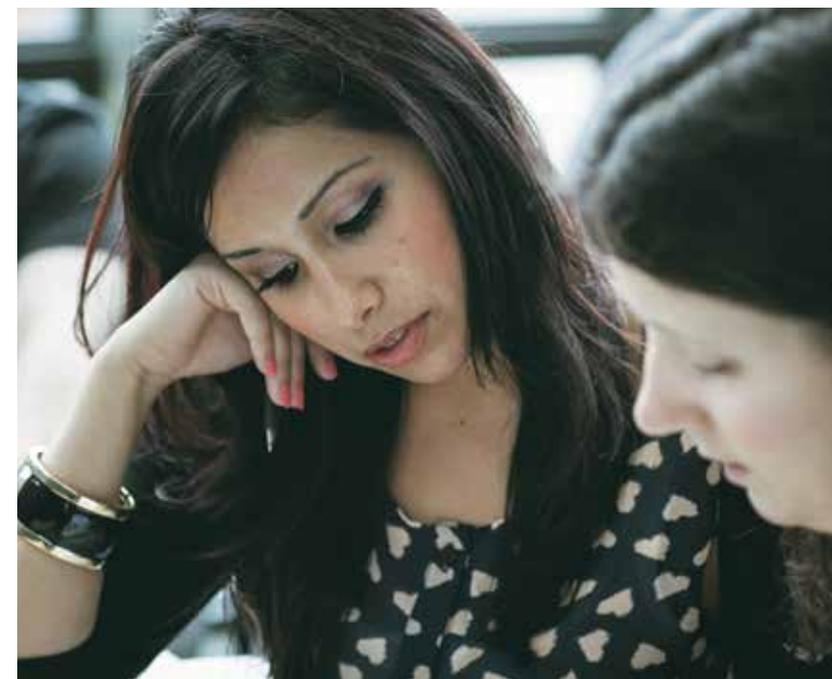
Towards the end of Semester, you will find the following resources helpful

Preparing for Exams

Print out (or pick up a hard copy in the Student Advice Centre) the Step by Step Guide to preparing for Exams at www.dcu.ie/students/advice

Past Examination Papers

Having a look at past examination papers will give you a good idea of what you can expect and the exam format won't come as a shock on the day. Make sure to check with your lecturer that the format has not changed this year. Past examination papers can be found at www.dcu.ie/internal/examinations/papers.php3



Useful Contacts



Final Word – First Year is undoubtedly a challenging year for most students but it's also a fantastic year and marks a whole new beginning. In this booklet, we have summarised many of the challenges that come up and have provided ways of dealing with them. This year will be a success for each of you if you heed the advice given here and make sure to speak to the right person **as soon** as you have any concerns. If you need to speak to somebody, contact us at student.support@dcu.ie, phone 7007165 or call into the Student Advice Centre and we'll help you or put you in touch with the right person.

If you need
to speak to
somebody,
contact us.

The Registry	www.dcu.ie/registry/current.shtml T (01) 700 5338 E registry@dcu.ie
Fees Information	www.dcu.ie/finance/fees/index.shtml T (01) 700 8836 E fees@dcu.ie
Portal Page	www.dcu.ie/iss/portals.shtml T (01) 700 5007 E iss.servicedesk@dcu.ie
Student Support Services	www.dcu.ie/students/index.shtml T (01) 700 7165 E student.support@dcu.ie

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Sports
Disability
Advice
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Log on www.dcu.ie/students

Write student.support@dcu.ie

Call (01) 700 7165

Drop in Student Advice Centre