Welcome... to your OU Students Association magazine, a place to share your stories, connect with others and find out more about your Association.

This summer edition has something for everyone including stories and advice from students, two articles from the new demographic of the OU – younger students, overcoming a fear of statistics with the OU Psychology Society, a range of useful apps, slippers and much more.

Many students say they would like to volunteer to do something for their Students Association, but have very little time or are unable to travel any distance. One answer is to take part in the online Students Consultative Forums where the OU ask students their opinion on various topics. The more voices heard, the more the University is likely to take into account what we say. You can read more on page 4, where you can listen to the Association’s new podcast.

The Communications Team decided to let students know a bit more about OU Students Association officers and staff, so as we were the ones to come up with the idea, we thought we better be the first to introduce ourselves, you can find us on page 7.

As well as providing an insight into the Central Executive Committee (CEC) weekend (page 5), I attended the Students Consultative meeting in Birmingham with Sue Goodyear recently and you can read about a day in her life as Vice President Representation on page 6.

Finally, good luck to everyone doing exams or EMAs at the moment.

Lorraine Adams
Vice President Communications

COMING UP...

3 June
Bye-Election Results Published
Find out who has been elected to represent you in your Region or Nation in the recent Assembly and Assembly Executive Bye-Elections.

27 June
East Midlands Assembly Big Weekend!
Taking place at the OU regional centre in Nottingham, your Assembly invites you to a day of activities and a social event in the evening. Email: ousa@open.ac.uk

2 July
OUstudents Radio!
On Thursday 2nd July from 7-9pm you’ll be able to listen live to our very own OUstudents Radio. More details to follow.
CONTENTS
WHAT’S IN THIS ISSUE SUMMER 2015

TOP STORY
4 Consulting with OU students
A year on, find out how the new consultative process is gathering student opinion.

4 OUstudents Podcast
Listen to the newly launched OUstudents Association Podcast.

6 A day in the life...
Of your elected Vice President Representation, Sue Goodyear.

7 Who’s who?
Your guide to who’s who in the OU Students Association.

9 Ask a student
Share your questions with your fellow OU students for great advice and support.

10 Why @YoungOUStudents?
Find out why Jack has set-up a new group to bring younger OU students together.

12 Being a parent and an OU student
Amelia shares her top tips for being a parent and an OU student at the same time!

14 FREE study apps
Social Enterprise, DnA share their top Apps to support your OU study.
Consulting with students...

Early in 2014 the Students Association and the University introduced a new system for consulting students. Looking back over the first year, has the new system made a difference?

The new flexibility which enables forums to take place virtually as and when necessary, rather than be restricted to fixed dates, has meant that a lot more OU students have been able to get involved in consultations. There’s also been increased student attendance at the new face-to-face consultative meetings in the English regions.

The new structure has also resulted in consultation on more issues than ever before. Over the past year the University’s Students Consultative Forum alone discussed fourteen different issues of direct relevance to the student experience – having a real impact on vital topics like Group Tuition, the Learning and Teaching Vision and Plan, and Curriculum Fit for the Future.

Coming up soon is the annual week-long Online International Students Consultative Forum, which will consider the views of students resident outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland on a range of topics affecting their studies. It will run from 15 – 21 June and if you are an international student why not register for a place now by completing this online form: http://www3.open.ac.uk/forms/internationalstudentconsultation/

You can drop into the forum at any time during the week and spend as much or as little time on it as you like.

Finally, the Student Consultation Office will soon be recruiting for more volunteers for a range of online forums. Do keep an eye out for the request for volunteers on social media and on the Student Consultation website: http://www.open.ac.uk/students/consultation/volunteer

Students become storytellers

We want the podcast to be a way that you, OU students, can get your voices heard – literally!

On Charter Day (23 April) we released the first episode of our podcast. At the time we called it ‘Your Voice’ but have since changed the name to ‘The OUstudents Association Podcast’ to better integrate the podcast into the other works that the Association produces. We want the podcast to be a way that you, OU students, can get your voices heard – literally!

The first episode follows Mark Cameron, Student Association Representative (SAR) for Scotland, as he recounts how the OU changed his life. In his uplifting story, he describes how he gained confidence and grew as a person by becoming a more active member of the OU study community.

The second episode will focus on the isolation that many OU students feel at times, and what some students do to connect with others. Episode two features the Student Life Podcast team, and discussions with talented OU bloggers about the methods that they take to stay connected to other students.

With brand new student stories every episode, advice (and laughs!) from Tutors and OU staff, ‘Your Voice’ aims to live up to its name by giving students another platform on which to share their experiences and opinions.

You can find the first episode here: http://bit.ly/all-episodes

The OUstudents Association podcast is also available in the iTunes podcast catalogue.
Who and what is the CEC?

Acronyms! We’re all guilty of using them without explaining what they mean. Vice President Communications, Lorraine, sheds some light on what CEC actually means.

Well, CEC stands for Central Executive Committee and is made up of the elected Student Team, including myself. We meet 4 times a year to discuss the Students Association’s work, and to make important decisions regarding policy.

The meetings usually last for a whole weekend, starting on Friday evenings with non-official business (as not all members can arrive until Saturday) followed by a meeting on Saturday and on Sunday morning.

At the last CEC meeting in March, the Communications team had 2 papers to present: Social Media Guidelines and the Draft Communications Strategy. We were pleased that both papers were approved.

There are usually several presentations by OU staff to let us know the latest developments and to gather our opinions. This time it was the Analytics Ethics Policy (i.e. what the OU can and can’t do with data gathered from students and what they intend to do in the future); the new OU committee structure for Academic Governance; and a review of last year’s student consultative process in light of the upcoming regional consultative meetings.

With so many changes happening at the OU over the last few years, I find these presentations to be an eye-opener. As much as I am interested in the business side of the CEC meetings, the highlight of the weekend in March was the dinner given on Saturday evening for the Students Association staff and the quiz that followed. The staff do a great job in supporting us and it was lovely to talk to them in a social setting. The quiz tested our general knowledge amid much laughter and I even knew a few of the answers! All in all, an interesting weekend. If you’re interested in observing a CEC meeting email: ousa@open.ac.uk

Lorraine Adams
Vice President Communications

Securing Greater Accessibility for OU students

With around 600 modules on offer, how does the OU make its learning materials accessible to disabled students?

The OU is known for its commitment to inclusive teaching and learning. It is not surprising, then, that the OU has more disabled students than any other university in Europe, with over 18,000 (around 14%) of undergraduate students now declaring a disability.

The OU’s Securing Greater Accessibility (SeGA) initiative was established in 2011. Based in the Institute of Educational Technology (IET), SeGA’s aim is to ensure that the curriculum is accessible to disabled students. Staff from all OU faculties, and various support units including Library Services, contribute to SeGA’s work so that the responsibility for providing accessible modules and qualifications is shared across the university.

SeGA provides information and guidance to OU staff who design the curriculum, so that they understand how to create learning materials and activities which meet accessibility requirements. SeGA has also established a network of contacts for accessibility so that OU staff know who to contact with queries, such as requests for reasonable adjustments.

In addition to SeGA, IET conducts accessibility testing to ascertain how easily disabled students can use online materials in accordance with the methods which they normally use. For example, the OU’s virtual learning environment has been regularly tested for its usability with assistive technologies such as screenreaders.

As well as testing by educational technology experts, OU students are often invited to IET’s labs to give their feedback on websites and online tools, and this feeds back into the development of these tools. Although these activities are conducted with disabled students in mind, all learners can benefit from accessible materials. So by supporting staff through SeGA and conducting accessibility testing, IET aim to make the OU’s curriculum even better for its students.

For more information email: IET-SeGA@open.ac.uk

Deadline

by Eileen Beasley

Starting with a flourish
words waltz across the page.
Forming lines, like debutantes
to catch the viewer’s gaze.
Chop!
The guillotine
of writers’ block
beheads creative flow.
Words recoil in anguish,
isolation takes a rest.
Impotent pen keeps tapping
tap, tap, tapping on the desk.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘We’re a breed unto ourselves; a patchwork of different shapes, styles & vintages...’
A day in the life...

Join Sue Goodyear, Vice President Representation to find out what life is really like being a member of the elected OU Students Association team...

Firstly, hello! I’m Sue and my remit as Vice President Representation (VP Rep) covers such things as Residential Schools, OU Student Consultation and Assemblies. I also attend quite a few Degree Ceremonies and am frequently on campus in Milton Keynes attending different meetings. This means that my days are usually a varied concoction of loveliness. So, come along with me for the day...

The first thing I always do is log into my VP Rep mailbox. Sometimes the hardest bit about my role is remembering my password – I’m supposed to change it every few months for security purposes, which makes logging in a bit of a daily challenge for someone who forgets passwords easily! Today I have 15 messages waiting.

It’s interesting to see the times that emails have been sent – sometimes it seems like the people who send them never sleep! Of course, international messages aren’t sent out at a ‘normal’ time on my time zone. It’s this that is the first indication that the OU and the Students Association function very differently from brick universities.

I usually have messages from Assembly members with general queries – I act as a pointy finger, directing them to the appropriate department to get their answers. Students that are new to the OU also contact me. It’s great that they reach out to the Students Association this way! I direct them to the forums and to the Students Association website.

The messages today are predominantly focused on Residential Schools (Resi Schools), involving queries from the OU Resi School team, the lovely Kate Snapes from the Students Association office, and Resi School Coordinators. The Students Association is responsible for meeting and greeting the students when they arrive to Resi Schools; we always need volunteers for this, so on to the online forums I go!

I’m a moderator on the forums, so I make sure to check the forums frequently. I also check the Regional and National forums. It’s interesting to see the similarities of the issues students post about, but also the differences that arise, such as internet access and download speeds. We’re all individuals after all!

Answering questions or just saying hello to students on the forums (https://msds.open.ac.uk/signon/SAMSDefault/SAMS001_Default.aspx?URL=http://learn1.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?name=OUSA-STUDENTS) is something that I really enjoy. I wish that more students would post in there, to join in with the great chats that usually happen online. Although the Association’s Facebook and Twitter pages are very active, there are students who prefer to stay away from social media. I think the forums are a perfect place for those students!

After I check the forums, I pack my bags and to attend an OU Student Consultation Meeting. I’m looking forward to hearing what the OU has to say this year! When I return I will then be repacking to attend a Student Engagement Project team meeting, and an Equality and Diversity Objectives Steering Group meeting, both on campus in Milton Keynes.

I attend meetings with the OU ensuring the OU students’ voice is heard on all levels. At first, these meetings were quite daunting to attend, but I’m feeling more confident now.

So that’s my brief but busy ‘Day in the Life’. I hope I’ve given you an insight into what I get up to as VP Rep. This role is always varied, always interesting and always enjoyable! Is it a good time to place an advert now?

WANTED for 2016 someone to take on the role of VP Rep. You will have 2 years on a jolly rollercoaster of loveliness; meeting students, travelling, meetings, feeling supported and being part of an amazing team.

Is there time for a joke too as I sign off...

I decided to make my password “incorrect” because if I type it in wrong, my computer will remind me, “Your password is incorrect.” hehe!

Sue Goodyear
Vice President Representation

---

Bye-Election results published

Find out who’s been elected in your Region or Nation!

The main student body in each OU Students Association Region or Nation is its Assembly and Assemblies are led by Assembly Executives.

We’ve recently held a bye-election for Assemblies and Assembly Executives with OU students voting for the candidates they want elected in their area. The successful candidates will take up their positions immediately.

To find out who’s been elected in your Region or Nation visit our website:


---

Sign-up to our Engaged Students mailing list

To receive information about the Students Association, be the first to hear about up and coming events and to get your opinions heard, just click here:

Who’s who?

A brief hello and guide to who’s who in your OU Students Association...

We don’t have a shiny OU Students Association building where you can pop in and have a drink, meet your friends for coffee or dance the night away, but what we do have is so much better!

We have an amazing community of OU students getting together online, meeting up locally and supporting each other all over the world and it’s not just a coincidence that all this takes place.

A lot of hard work goes on behind the scenes by our fantastic team at the OU Students Association. So, we thought it might be a great idea to introduce ourselves (afterall it would be rude not to). Welcome to the first edition of ‘Who’s Who’.

Meet the Communications Team...

Lorraine Adams
Vice President Communications, Student Volunteer

David McCann
Head of Communications and Technology, Staff

Anna Vickerson
Communications Officer, Staff

Heather Bloomer
Communications Intern, Staff

Where are you based?

David, Anna and Heather are all based at the OU Students Association office on the OU Campus in Milton Keynes.

The office is based in the Wilson Building (named after Harold Wilson) which is just a short walk away from Walton Hall (where our lovely pic was taken).

Lorraine is based in Greece (yes we’re very jealous too) and flies over regularly for meetings.

What do you do?

As a team we’re responsible for overseeing the OU Students Association’s Communications.

We produce this lovely magazine, manage the Students Association website, update you via email and support the wider Students Association team with their communications.

We also work closely with the Engagement Team (next edition) to update our Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts.

What should we know about the Comms Team?

Well, you should know that Lorraine loves swimming in the sea every day, David is learning how to play the guitar, Anna is planning her wedding and Heather is a genius on the Ukulele!!!

You might also like to know that we love to hear from you and we always welcome feedback.

If you have an idea for an article, a story you’d like to see featured in the magazine or you want to tell us about something you’ve read, please get in touch: ousa-comms@open.ac.uk

Join the community

Say hello on:

- www.open.ac.uk/ousa/community
- @OUstudents
- fb.com/OUstudents
- instagram.com/oustudentslive

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Should be doing my TMA. What am I doing? Painting my nails. Oops!’
Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Everyone needs a tutor like mine.’

OUstudents Hall of Fame!

As OU students we are, quite frankly, amazing! So, we decided to celebrate all things OU student with a new ‘Hall of Fame’ feature.

If you have something you want to shout about, anything that you’re proud and want to share, let us know. It doesn’t need to be OU study related you just need to be an OU student!

Email the Association’s Communications Team: ousa-comms@open.ac.uk

I became a published author!

Inspired by the OU’s Creative Writing programme Ewan set about writing his first novel.

I completed two of the OU’s creative writing courses A213 and A363 as part of an open degree. Since completing my studies with the OU I have had poetry and short stories published in various anthologies and won several prizes.

I was inspired by the OU’s creative writing programme to attempt a novel. Gibbous House began in serialised form on a creative writing site called ABC Tales. A gothic romp of a Victorian novel, with a serial killer for a protagonist, this version of Gibbous House was enjoyed by a large following on the site.

In 2014 ABC Tales and Unbound Books (unbound.co.uk) approached me with a view to crowd-funding my novel. Preliminary sketches have been made for the cover and the novel is due to be launched soon.

I would never have considered writing anything at all had it not been for the skills attained and encouragement offered on the OU’s Creative Writing courses.

Ewan Laurie
OU graduate

Travelling across Europe in a caravan...

Thrown a curve ball, Leigh purchased a caravan and took-off on a ‘European Adventure’ with her husband and two terriers.

After a career in training ‘Sales People’ I was made redundant. In the previous year I had enrolled with the OU for a BA Honours degree in English Language/Literature. I had also started writing again. I had written short stories as a younger, but after joining the navy, having a family, and allowing ‘life’ to take over, writing had been elusive.

My response to having this curve-ball thrown at me was to purchase a caravan, rent out my home, and take off on a ‘European Adventure’ with my husband and two terriers.

Studying in the confines of a caravan has its pro’s - you are often without internet or phone (the sheer bliss of zero interruptions is much appreciated), and con’s - one is missing tutorials (critical for people like me who need to ‘talk stuff through’ to understand it).

Over the last two and a bit years I have experienced life in twenty two countries, which have been relevant to the courses I’ve undertaken too.

Whilst travelling I blog daily from the point of view of my dog, Martha. It’s a tad quirky but has attracted a following so I’m going to indie-publish it in paperback (Travels with Martha) in July.

Studying, travelling, and writing are not easy - sitting up at 4am writing assignments because the previous day has been spent wandering around tiny villages with the most amazing architecture is tough (especially when your partner is trying to sleep six feet away) - but at least with the flexibility of the OU it CAN be done!

Leigh Walton
Travelling OU student

Hi, I’m a new OU student studying for a BA (Hons) English Lit and Creative Writing.

I run my own creative writing business called For The Love of Books (www.loveofbooks.co.uk) and volunteer twice a week as a radio presenter and broadcaster with Saint FM.

You can catch me on Saint FM 94.7 every Tuesday and Wednesday night from 7-8pm for ‘Writer’s Block’ and ‘The Pleasure of Classical Music’ respectively or online at: www.saintfm.co.uk

Sarah Banham
OU student
Ask a student

Need advice? Who better to ask than your fellow OU students!

Sara’s problem: Technical trauma!
“...My laptop broke last weekend, losing my entire report worth 25% of my exam! I have an EMA to write and an exam to revise for. I’ve sent the form off for financial aid with the evidence required, but I’m worried they won’t help because of the time of year.”

- Contact your Tutor immediately. They are the best person to advise, and can give you an extension while you get things sorted out. Also contact the OU. Good luck! - Sarah

- Can’t help with advice, but I’m sending you my sympathy for the stress that you’re going through. - Judith

- You can only wait and see what the finance people say but I support the suggestion by someone else to put all your documents in GoogleDrive (or equivalent). That way you keep them on your computer but they are also backed up in the cloud, so you can access them securely from any computer with an internet connection. Hope it works out well! - Amy

Hannah’s problem: Juggling study
“I’d be interested to hear from anyone who’s attempted to juggle an OU module with a new baby. I don’t want to fork out for the module and then find I can’t manage it, but at the same time I want to crack on with the degree and don’t really want to take a year off!”

- I gave birth to twins during my level 2’s. I was lucky that I had them between modules but started up when they were 2 months old. For me, uni was a god send. It helped keep me focused and forced me to look after myself. – Abbi

- I’m due to have a baby next week, with a TMA and EMA due shortly after. I’ll keep you posted! – Kelly

- I did my first OU degree in maths while my youngest was a baby and worked full-time. You have to be very organised but it can be done. – Shirley

Tracy’s problem: Double trouble
“Am I able to study two modules at a time which would total 120 points?”

- You definitely can, but I think only you can answer whether you should. Things worth considering:
  1. 120 points is equivalent to full time study (32-40 a week). Can you commit to that amount of time?
  2. Do you generally need more time for a module than the recommended hours per week? If so, it’s a good idea to take that into account when deciding how much time you’d need to get the work done.
  3. Do you have experience studying at this level already? Personally I found a definite step up in difficulty between levels 1, 2 and 3.
  4. Working two sets of deadlines is more difficult than working to a single set of deadlines. For example, I had a TMA deadline for one course last year that was 4 days before the final exam for a different course.

- It is do-able but it is a true commitment, particularly when running a household and working full time. My family did take the strain, but I found the effort worth it, ultimately finishing in less time overall. Good luck! - Rhonda

- Try and get ahead, even if it means buying the course books beforehand and working through them in the summer... - Louise
Why @YoungOUStudents?

OU student Jack found a gap in the OU market for younger OU students, find out what he’s got planned to change this...

When I started studying with the OU, way back in 2013, finding students the same age was quite difficult. Over the years, I’ve met some good friends through Twitter and Facebook but one thing struck me. How little platform and voice had been given for younger students.

There’s plenty of encouragement to connect and chat via the Students Association forums but for many there is nowhere specific enough for the younger student community.

I agree it is good to share experiences with people of all ages, however, for many young students it can be uneasy.

From my experience, there was a clear gap in the market for platforms specific to younger students; environments where we can meet, chat, share study tips and so on. Afterall, 30% of all new OU undergraduates are aged under 25 (according to figures from the OU office) which is a staggering amount. In fact, over the last five years, the numbers of younger students choosing the OU has steadily increased. Why? Well there are many reasons and everyone has their own. Lower tuition fees, combining work and study, personal reasons, wanting something different out of higher education. What’s clear is that there is a strong community of younger students.

If I mention meeting and sharing experiences any more, I’m in danger of sounding like a broken record. When I first put forward the idea of having a younger students group, plenty of ideas were swilling around. Unfortunately the scale of ideas I have can’t be implemented, but there are some in the early stages of planning:

• Meet-ups could take place at OU Regional Centres allowing you to meet with other students of the same age face to face. Plans are afoot for this kind of event and I think it would be a real icebreaker for meeting students and forging new friendships.

• The Students Association is going to support the group by providing a platform on the forums which will allow for official information, as well as the more informal stuff to be discussed.

It’d be great if, like regional OU communities, we could also have our say on the matters that impact us. Get involved! If you think there would be scope for something like an online newsletter or blog which anybody could contribute to then get in touch. In fact, any ideas you have will be listened to. Follow the accounts, get involved, meet fellow students and suggest some ideas you’d like to see. The more we build the community, the greater the benefits.

I’ve met people along the route, mainly by trawling Twitter and Facebook. Now there is a real opportunity for younger students to meet and build a real community.

The many platforms of the group are only just beginning but with a bit of luck younger OU students of the future will benefit from finding fellow students and meeting new people.

www.twitter.com/YoungOUStudents

Jack Jevons
OU student

---

We ❤️ Instagram!

Here’s just a few of our favourite images taken from our OUSTudentslive Instagram account. Remember to share your pics with us by using #OUSTudents in the caption and take a look at all our images so far (they’re fab).
Keeping up with the Joneses

We both overcame big hurdles and were so proud to be able to celebrate our graduations together at Usher Hall.

My mother, Ann, began her Psychology degree with the OU back in 1973, continuing to 1981 to achieve honours. She recalls having to get up at the crack of dawn to watch special OU television programmes which related to her course, and then having to get her two teenage sons ready for school (one of which was me), and her husband off to work.

When her results came through, unfortunately with a busy life, she just couldn’t find the time to go to a degree ceremony, therefore the celebrations were put on hold.

In the meantime, after a number of years in New Zealand, I came back home to run my own busy newsagents business in Edinburgh whilst studying at the OU, following in my mother’s footsteps.

Fast forward to 2015, and I have just completed my studies in Psychology and Counselling with the OU.

Unfortunately I had to stop short of continuing for my honours degree for a while, because I had a heart attack one month into my final module in 2014.

I have two young children, aged 10 and 6 who kept me active while I was recovering, so even though there were times I felt like giving up, I didn’t want to let anyone down.

The OU support staff, tutors, and both my parents, Ann and John, and my wife Heather, encouraged me to complete the 6 TMA’s and reach the final exam and I am so thankful that I got over the finishing line.

What next? I’m now re-directing my energies into training to work in psychology/counseling, where my main interests lie in child development, however I’m aiming to take further courses in the near future with the OU.

Sometimes life throws things at you making everything seem difficult; however my mother managed to juggle her time over the years and achieved her degree. I had an unexpected trauma which affected my plans and many people have similar experiences.

We both overcame these hurdles and were so proud to be able to celebrate our graduations together at the Usher Hall, with our family watching.

Perhaps there are ex-students reading this who never had the time many years ago to finally graduate and they too will step forward and get the recognition they deserve, after all you have to ‘Keep up with the Joneses’!

Steve Jones
OU Graduate

Study style the OU student way...

We asked OU students on Facebook and Twitter ‘What sort of slippers does an OU student wear?’ and... here are all your lovely slippers in all their loveliness! A massive thank you to everyone who posted a pic. We can’t decide which ones are our favourite. They all look so comfy, we all want a slipper party now!
I became an OU student when my daughter was about a year old. We’d somehow navigated the zombie-like phase of sleep deprivation and near constant anxiety that I think all new parents experience. I decided I wanted to use the time that I was staying at home wisely. Plus I was getting a little bored of every conversation being related to nappies, weaning and Mr Tumble.

So I began my first OU module. I may have been a little naive in thinking that I could simply study while my daughter slept, either during daytime naps or at night-time. Four years later, I think I’ve gained a little more wisdom on how to handle being a stay at home parent and an OU student so I thought I’d share a few tips with you.

Firstly, plan well but do not make a strict schedule. Look at your study guide to see exactly what you need to do week by week. I say don’t make a strict schedule because you cannot really schedule children. They get sick, decide to randomly change their sleep patterns, go through teething and a whole range of other things that you can’t really predict.

Secondly, use any support you have. If you’ve got an essay due, don’t try to cram it into that space of time between your child’s bedtime and your own, when you’ll probably be pretty worn out already. Politely ask your partner or another trusted family member or friend to take the little one off your hands for a while so that you can study in peace and with less of a rush.

Thirdly and probably most challenging of all, try not to spend all of your free time studying. I know that’s hard, I really do, but if you spend every second of spare time you have on your course, you’ll start to resent it. It’ll stop being enjoyable and become a horrid pressured obligation. You need other things to do, like hobbies and seeing friends and family. I try to have at least one day per week where I don’t study. Sometimes that just isn’t possible, of course, but at least attempt it.

Lastly, do not panic. If you’re getting behind or a deadline is looming and your child is poorly or their sleeping patterns have suddenly changed, then speak to your tutor. They are human beings and will almost certainly have sympathy for you. They can give you advice and even the odd extension on assignment deadlines.

Also, there are plenty of other OU students who are also parents that you can talk to (or have a rant at!) if you need to. You’ll find them in your tutor group, in forums, Facebook groups and many other places online. You are not alone with this, trust me. Being a parent is a stressful, tiring, but wonderful experience and so is studying. It’s a privilege to be able to do both.

Amelia Smyth
OU student
I'm 23 (and a bit) years old. I'm a normal young adult with a normal young adult life except, this life is made far more interesting by a companion of mine, depression...

But in 2013, I heard about the OU. Curious, I looked into the courses. The BA History path turned out to be ideal; I could transfer the credits from my first year of study at a brick university over to my OU degree. October rolled around, and my first Level 2 course began.

Fastforward to 2015 and I'm still going strong, thanks to the support of the OU (with most of my marbles still intact).

I know I'm not the only student studying with mental health issues, so I thought I would share some tips that have helped me along the way...

1. Keep your tutor informed. My tutors have proven very supportive, issuing extensions when required if I was struggling.
2. Apply for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). This has provided me with funding for mental health mentoring and equipment.
3. Contact your Student Support team. They can help you with additional exam arrangements and any other problems you may be having.
4. Sign up to the Student Association’s Peer Support service. Having another student to offload to can be extremely helpful.
5. Get involved with your Students Association. It’s easy to become withdrawn as an OU student. The OU Students Association is a great way to get in touch with other students, join societies, volunteer, and engage with the more social side of uni life.
6. If energy levels allow, attend your tutorials and day schools. One thing I enjoyed in a brick uni was the face-to-face interaction and passion Lecturers had for their subjects. OU Tutorials allow this face-to-face contract to happen.
7. Break study down into small manageable chunks. Sometimes covering a few pages of material can be enough to make you feel like you’ve achieved something positive.
8. Look into audio forms of your study materials. For times when sitting down to study feels like climbing Mount Everest, listening to the material can be a good way to keep up to date with your studies.
9. Join the Disabled Students Group. It’s a great way to feel less alone when you’re struggling.

I don't know if you can tell, but I love the OU. My tutor is really supportive, and I’m getting marks higher than I could have dreamed of at a brick uni. What’s more, I can work full-time to earn a living and develop useful skills to go alongside my degree.

The OU also gives me a feeling of accomplishment, which is important to help me feel positive about life. What's not to love?

Jessica Johnston
OU student

---

**When the going gets tough...**

OU student life is tough and if it all gets a bit too much, don’t forget Nightline is there for all OU students wherever they are.

Student volunteers are on the hotlines from 6pm each evening waiting to take calls. No topic is off bounds and they’ll listen as long as you need.

It could really help to talk your problems through, whatever they’re about and however difficult they feel right now.

Hundreds of OU students have already made that call so you’ll be in good company.

Hotlines are open 6pm - 8am through the night every night until late June

Call: 020 7631 0101

Instant message (Skype): chat.nightline

Skype Phone: londonnightline

Text: 07717 989 900

You can email the team at any time on: listening@nightline.org.uk

Why not put these details on your phone; you never know when they might be useful?

---

**Study getting you down?**

Please contact Peer Support. Manned by OU students and former students who understand the difficulties of studying alone, we know how lonely and overwhelming it can be, trying to balance studying with a busy life and/or coping with other problems such as disability.

Anything you discuss with us is confidential. We can answer a simple question, or be there as one to one support for you. We can’t help with academic issues, these should always be taken up with your Tutors/Student Support Team, but anything that makes study difficult for you is within our scope.

FREE apps to help with studying

We met a fantastic Social Enterprise, DnA, at the OU’s Disability Awareness Conference and we asked them to share some of their techy wisdom with us.

Hi there,

We’re DnA, a Social Enterprise formed and run by ‘disabled’ students (not that we like the word disabled... Neurodiverse?).

We provide support (assistive technology training, study skill strategy tuition and mentoring!) to students accessing the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), and as end users ourselves have developed an extensive pool of knowledge when it comes to tips and tricks that can make university life a whole lot easier for everyone!

When you’re studying remotely we know how tricky it can be to stay on top of everything - meeting those umpteen deadlines, juggling work and study, child care, that last minute reading when your eyes are bleary and you’ve got the coffee shakes... so we’d like to let you into some of our productivity secrets, share our most prized strategies and tools in our magic box! We hope you find them as helpful as we do! Below are our top 3 apps to start you off (ps. they’re free! Kerching!)

There are hundreds of great apps out there to boost productivity and minimise stress - there’s something out there to suit every need and fulfil every purpose.

We created an ‘App Guide’ (https://www.dnamatters.co.uk/static/resources/dna_apps.pdf) to help you find the right one, so take a peek at our resources page on our website (www.dnamatters.co.uk/resources/), where you can find lots of other useful strategies and software reviews! You can also sign up to our newsletter (https://www.dnamatters.co.uk/signup/) or follow us on facebook for regular updates on cool apps and useful strategies.

Final thing, DnA’s CEO has been nominated in the National Diversity Awards for our work supporting diverse learners - if you want to show your support and further our social impact and community led projects, do share the love! You can nominate us here: https://nominate.nationaldiversityawards.co.uk/Nominate/Endorse/21179?name=atif

Thanks!

Timmie, Raphaele & the DnA Team
www.dnamatters.co.uk

---

Google have seriously raised the bar for cloud based working and learning!

Their document, presentation and spreadsheet apps have opened the doors for anyone to access them on any device, wherever they are.

What’s more, they can be shared with anyone, so they are perfect for collaborative assignments.

Then there’s the calendar app, which can send reminder texts of upcoming deadlines, or you can use the advanced email app which allows you to ‘snooze’ emails until you’re less busy or schedule emails to send at a later date.

The options are endless - have a play!

---

Evernote
The Elephant that Never Forgets!

Think of Evernote as your portable bag of notebooks and personal library, that you can access anytime, any where and on any device.

It allows you to work remotely and banish worries of forgetting where you left that really important document...

You can store text notes, to-do lists, photographs, drawings, audio recordings and even full articles from the web! It’s even got awesome text editing, image annotation and due-date reminder functions.

Everything is searchable through categorising and tagging systems so you can always find what you’re looking for by using keywords.

Simple and very effective!

---

Zotero
The Master of Referencing and Bibliographies

Zotero is a TOTAL game changer when it comes to assembling your bibliography and citing references. It cuts out that rising panic when you realise you’ve got a horrible slog ahead of you trying to collate your bibliography from references you found months ago, and forgot to note who said what and where on earth it came from.

Zotero is the only research tool that automatically senses content in your web browser, allowing you to add cited material to your personal library with a single click. From there you’ve got all the referencing details required to make a correct citation and then collate your entire bibliography at the click of a button (with over 7000 styles to choose from, including the OU’s own Harvard style!).

Sounds like magic, it is!

---

Google Apps
Stay organised, work collaboratively!
Making study fun!

What are the chances of OU Psychology Society members feeling enthusiastic about statistics?!

A lively group of students at the OU Psychological Society (OUPS) Research Methods and Statistics Workshop, in Warwick, back in March, rated themselves between zero (fear, terror and panic) and ten (enthusiasm and delight) on an enthusiasm for statistics scale. A scale which had been ‘developed’ by the tutors, Jim Handley and Neil Frude. They named it the Warwick Enthusiasm for Statistics Test (WEST).

Neil and Jim wanted to measure the effectiveness of their workshop, particularly in terms of students’ emotional response, a major barrier to understanding and using statistics. The Friday evening responses ranged from zero to nine and the majority (60%) clearly rated themselves towards the ‘panic’ end of the scale.

However, no strangers to such challenges, the tutors pressed on undaunted. There followed eight, good humoured sessions, with workshops, lectures, discussions of the need for research methods, principles of experimental design, the probabilistic nature of the world, small group activities and plenty of ‘hands-on’ experience.

In the great tradition of OUPS events, groups were mixed and remixed so that everyone had the opportunity to work with everyone else and there was plenty of time for questions and discussion.

The tutors noted that the range of tests covered in this single weekend would typically be taught over two years of a psychology degree at a conventional university (around 180 hours teaching).

So, what state were the students in by Sunday afternoon? There was only one way to find out the WEST scores were taken again. They had narrowed and shifted, now ranging from four to ten, with only 3% of the group rating themselves below five (compared to 60% at the start). That certainly seems a very impressive result, but ‘seeming impressive’ is not enough.

What really counts, as the students had repeatedly heard, is whether this change was ‘statistically significant’. A t-test confirmed that indeed it was. There had been a highly significant increase in enthusiasm for statistics: (t(64) = -6.68, p < .001).

Students’ commented:

‘Couldn’t have been better. I had been very anxious and they immediately made me feel at ease.’

“I had not realised statistics could be so much fun – thank you so much!”

Jim and Neil are running another workshop at Warwick later in the year on July 3rd-5th. The March weekend focused on quantitative methods and analysis, the July one will cover both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

For more information and to sign up for the next workshop, see:

http://oups.org.uk/events/statistics-and-research-methods-workshop

Join a society!

Joining or starting a society is a great way to meet other OU students, have fun and enrich your OU study. We have so many diverse societies that you’ll want to join a few...

www.open.ac.uk/ousa/get-involved/societies

Free OUPS membership offer:

The Open University Psychological Society (OUPS) is the student society set up to support those studying psychology with the OU. The society provides opportunities to join other students at both course based events and events of general psychological interest.

It is a registered charity and is affiliated to the OU Students Association.

Membership of the society with all the associated benefits normally costs £15 a year but as an introductory offer all DE100 students have been given free membership of OUPS for their first year, which includes electronic versions of the quarterly newsletter as well as discounted fees for OUPS National and Regional events.

More details on how to take up the benefits of this offer can be found at: www.oups.org.uk.
**Visiting campus**

There are so many ways you can get involved with your OU Students Association! Heidi shares her experience of visiting the OU campus in Milton Keynes.

I grew up on a council estate where everyone knew everyone, it was a great place to grow up. I had a love for words (mainly silly ones) and even though I excelled in English at school (O Levels at 13) I was not considered ‘university material,’ and to be honest my parents wouldn’t have been able to afford to send me to Uni, so I guess it was for the best.

A few years ago I heard the university fees debate on the radio, and what I gleaned was that the government would loan a student the fees to study for a degree and they didn’t expect payment back until the student was earning £21,000 a year… it got me thinking, was I too old (I was 45 then), do I need entry qualifications, and more importantly, could I do it?

The Open University was my saviour, 2012 saw me taking the plunge and going for a degree in Psychology, after all in psychology you can never be wrong, which appealed to me, because I never am!

So imagine my joy at being selected as one of 10 students invited to attend a lunch with the OU Council at their campus in Milton Keynes. I was so excited, when I told my children they looked at me blankly “eh?”, to put it into language they understood I said “Imagine if you were invited to Google!” – they got my point.

If anybody thinks that the OU is just an online entity, think again, the campus is enormous and extremely beautiful.

Chaperoned by the OU Students Association we were given a tour of the Science Faculty, where the laboratory looks like a scene from Dr Who, we saw chambers recreating space, the development of cameras for space craft Gaia, a life-sized model of a purely British developed space aircraft, viewed the sun through a telescope and wandered the beautiful gardens full of sculptures, art and carvings.

Lunch saw us each hosting a table with OU academics and dignitaries, where we were able to tell our stories of why we became OU students, and give our views and ideas on the OU. It’s exciting to know that some of our ideas may be used in the future to influence OU projects.

So, from humble café owner to education shaper – little ‘ol me, who’d a thunk it?!

Heidi Milner
OU student

---

**Hello and welcome to the latest issue of your OUsstudents magazine. Hopefully you’ve enjoyed reading through all the articles and features!**

I submitted a TMA last week for the first time in over six months and for the first time ever I wrote it in a few hours, gave it to ‘Him Indoors’ to proof read, corrected it and submitted it.

I know everybody has their own way of studying and writing but I usually like to take a fortnight to do a TMA with lots of preparation, a first draft that undergoes many revisions and then maybe I’ll be satisfied enough to submit it!

I know that right now there are a lot of EMAs being submitted and exams being sat and you have my every sympathy as you wait for that all important email to arrive to tell you your result is available.

If, like me, your emails come through to your mobile phone it means your heart stops every time it pings. When you get the link to collect, that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach… holding your breath, opening your eyes and there it is in big letters ‘PASS’ and you think ‘phew’.

However, sometimes it isn’t the result you want and your heart sinks as you read that you will have to resit or resubmit. I’ve had it happen to me three times in eleven years of OU study and it’s horrible.

All your fellow students are happily celebrating and you’re just sat staring at that horrible word ‘FAIL’. However I can confirm that although it feels like the end of the world, it isn’t. Once you get over the upset and disappointment you can resit your exam or resubmit your EMA successfully. Despite three fails at post grad level I battled on with the help of some fab, fellow OU friends and passed all the necessary courses for the Masters.

So however you feel right now, enjoy the next few months off and remember it’s hard work being an OU student but there is so much support out there from your fellow OU students, the University and your OU Students Association.

---

Ruth Tudor
President of the OU Students Association