

(re)Freshers - 1st February, 2023

- Student Spaces

ROB MOORE: And welcome back. Hopefully, you enjoyed those videos. So some have you been asking us about tutorials and some interesting points there on the videos about tutorials.

So remember to keep asking your questions in the chat box. And just a quick reminder, just make sure you only share things you're happy to share. Don't put any personal information in there.

So for this session, we've got Carol coming back to us again from the library. And we've got Sarah who has joined us. Now, Sarah used to be the president of the OU Students Association. So we're going to pick her brains about what it's like being a student and helping students.

OK, so let's get cracking. We'll start with you, Sarah. So what is your role as the President of the Students Association? How did that come about? And how did you get involved with the OU in the first place?

SARAH JONES: OK. So I guess if I go back to the beginning of how I got involved. So when I was growing up, my dad had done a degree with the Open University, so back right at the beginning of the OU. So when I was doing my GCSEs, instead of just studying GCSE coursework stuff, my dad gave me his maths books to study for his degree.

So I learned a lot about the OU growing up. And I had-- I started when I was about 14 and didn't go to traditional university. But I knew that I always wanted to do a degree at some point. And after I had my kids, I'd had severe postnatal depression. I was in a really bad place.

And I just got to the point where I was like, right, my kids are at school now. I need to do something for myself. And I want to do a degree. And my only option was the Open University.

And my determination was I'd just sit behind my computer screen. I wouldn't get involved in anything. It was a great place for me to just be my normal introvert-self-- well, at that point-- my normal introvert-self and learn, which is what I wanted to do. And then I got noseey.

And I got-- I had had a look at the Students Association website, realised there was a community of students out there who were all feeling pretty much the same as me and were there to help each other.

And so I got involved with the Students Association. So I started my degree in 2017, 2018 I got elected as the faculty rep for Well-being Education and Language Studies. And I spent two years doing that. And then I decided to stand as president. And I spent two years doing that. So yeah, very much involved.

ROB MOORE: It's amazing that you choose the OU because you can keep it a distance and not get involved. And then you end up probably in the most involved role that there is, you can have as a student. So-- but again, you weren't forced to do it. It's an opportunity. And that's what I love about the study that we do.

You can take these opportunities. And you can do as much or as little as you want to do. And how did you find the tutorials? We've had lots of questions about tutorials. So when are the tutorials? When can you attend them? So how did you manage the tutorials?

SARAH JONES: So I suppose I found the tutorials-- you could do everything without going to a tutorial. But the tutorials help you to understand what you've just been learning and actually have that opportunity

to ask questions in real time with somebody who is an expert in their field, and that was the biggest part, and also joining with other students who are all studying the same topic, all asking the same questions. And sometimes you didn't feel you could ask a question because you thought it was a silly question and somebody else would come along and ask it. So it was a great opportunity for that community of learning to take place. And some of the tutorials were on Saturday mornings.

Some of the tutorials were on evenings. Some of them were other times during the day. So there was various times that you could go to them.

And when I first started, obviously, there was a lot more face to face because it was pre-pandemic. And so there was one sort of face to face. But there was also those that were online.

And for me, if there was an in-person tutorial, it was a great opportunity to go and meet other students and actually learn in the same space as other students. And for some of my degree, it was vitally important that I did that. But they're all over the place. Sometimes it isn't your tutor doing the tutorial. So you can pick-- sometimes you can pick a tutorial that isn't your tutor. But it's the same information being given. And it's somebody who's an expert in that field still. So don't be worried about going to a tutorial that isn't necessarily your tutor. And just as long as you keep accessing those tutorials, it's really important because it helps to solidify the education that you're getting.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And we like to make access to the tutorials as easy as possible. So we heard Robert in the previous session talk about the student home page and the module home page. And there is a link at the top of that, which is just called tutorials. You click on there and there are all the opportunities, all the information you need about where the tutorials are and how to book them.

And we try and make them as accessible as possible. We pick a variety of days, variety of times.

Sometimes we have a whole day that covers a lot of information. Or, we might break that down into two separate online sessions. But yeah-- so we're glad you find them really useful.

You've also got the widget on the screen at the moment, which is talking about the OUSO website. So the OU Student Association website. So let us know if you've been to it yet. Oh, actually we've got the results. So yes, 67% of you have already been there. And the remaining 33%-- it's on your to-do list. So some of the things that you can find out from there.

And we've-- not least of all, how to get your TOTUM card but also past papers. That's where you go if you want any previous exam papers. And they can be downloaded from the website.

So what other things can we get from the Students Association, Sarah? What help do you provide or advice do you provide? Because we've talked to the student support team representative earlier. But these are students. Why is it different?

SARAH JONES: Yeah, I mean, there's lots of student community. I've talked a little bit about student community. And that is what the association is. It's the student community. So there's lots of groups. So there's OU Pride. There's the LGBTQ, which is the LGBTQI+ group. There's the Black Minority Ethnic Group. There's the Disabled Student's Group.

And then you've got societies. So there's a Space Society. There's various different societies that you can go and join.

There's also clubs. So on Facebook, there's a massive club called OU Fit. So if you want to get-- if you want to keep track of what you're doing, there's a whole community, massive community of students that track their fitness on there. So there's lots of different things to access.

There's also-- at the minute, they've also got their own freshers events that are int-- get my teeth in-- that are introducing students to the different things that they do. So if you have a look on their website at the moment, there's also lots of volunteer roles that are available. So you could go and volunteer at graduation. You could volunteer as a meet-up host.

You have lots of different opportunities on there. There's also a list of where you can get help for different things, including there's a link to OUSET. So I'm currently the chair of OUSET, which is the Open University Student Educational Trust. And we help students in financial hardship.

So there's a link to that. So you can go and look at that. If you're struggling with things monetary wise come have a look. See if you're eligible.

And also on the OUSET, link, there's a link to where else you can get grants or other hardship funds. So there's all kinds of really useful student information on there. And the last thing that I just want to mention that's on there is there is a Student Leadership Team that is elected every two years. And they work with the university to make sure that your student journey can be the best that it can be.

And they have their reports on there. You can find out what they do. If you've got a specific issue, there's links to how you can talk to the person that you need to talk to. And you can contact them.

So go on the website. Go and have a good look around. There's also-- one of the best things that I did as president was I helped to celebrate 50 years of the Students Association. So there's lots of stuff to do, the 50th on there as well and all the different ways that students have been helped by the Students Association over the last 50 years.

ROB MOORE: And as we can see with you here today, once you begin your journey with the OU, it can take you in all sorts of unexpected, different places, which is fantastic. Before we move on, I'm going to move on to Carol in a second. Before we move on, I want to give a prologue for tomorrow night.

So we've got our freshers social tomorrow night. And the social is basically me and Jacob. And we're going to be hosting the OU-themed quiz. And you're all invited.

You can go to the Student Hub live web page. And you can sign up. And it's just going to be a fun time to have some chats, talk about student experiences, talk about you and what you're up to.

So it won't be themed on anything particular in terms of a study focus. But it's just a social time to get together. So that's 7:00 tomorrow night.

We would love to see you all there. And there are plenty of things to get involved with tomorrow. We've got Carol back now. So Carol, so we spoke earlier about access to the OU library. And of course, not everybody can get to Milton Keynes.

CAROL WRIGHT: Yeah, that's right.

ROB MOORE: And we've had a few questions about accessing local libraries. So could you tell us how students can do that?

CAROL WRIGHT: Yeah. So there's a great scheme called the SCONUL Access scheme, which enables OU students to use and borrow books from other participating university libraries. So there's a link on the homepage of our website, which you can go to check if the institution that you want to use actually participates in the scheme. And then you just fill a form out.

It does take a few weeks. So if you want to join, make sure you do it quite early. And not every university library takes part in the scheme. But the majority of them do.

And it just means that you can have that university experience of going into a library, using resources in print if that's what you want to do. Some of the institutions will provide you with IT access. Some provide you with access to their e-resources. But again, each individual institution has their own access rules for SCONUL students.

So if you want to double check what kind of access you can get through a particular university, it's best to contact them first. But it is a really great scheme because it means that you can go and access a university library for your studies. You do have to be on a 30 credit module or more to be able to register. And I've got to stress that you've got to follow the regulations of the particular university library that you use. So if you borrow books, then you've got to make sure that you return them in time according to their rules and things like that. But yeah, you should really take advantage of that if that's something that you'd want to do.

ROB MOORE: And obviously, you can use the library as a study space, a quiet place to go and do the work.

CAROL WRIGHT: Absolutely. So if you're struggling for space at home, it's ideal because you can get out of the house. And a lot of the libraries are open 24-hours a day. So you can go and access some of the study space whenever you want. So it's a good way of getting that university feel around your course as well if you can't access the library in Milton Keynes.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. We're going to go over to Heidi in a second. So get ready, Heidi, to fill in some of the comments. Maybe there's some questions coming in that we can get the team to answer. But good to see that Robin's looking forward to the social tomorrow. Swasey booked her ticket and so as Melissa. So excellent. We're looking forward to that. So have we got any questions, Heidi? Is there anything that we haven't covered yet that we can cover in the last few minutes?

HEIDI: Do you know what, Rob? I think we have done really well. We have covered answer so many of the questions that there's honestly no more remaining on there. So if anybody does have any other questions, do please feel free to pop them in the chat.

But no. We seem to have covered all of the questions. It's just been so fantastic to see the level of engagement.

Robin has just talked about some of the groups that they have joined up to, just following on what Sarah was saying that about the different clubs and groups that are available. And that's something that I would really recommend. So yeah, do go and have a look. And then if there's anything that takes your fancy, do of course sign up. But no, not in terms of questions, we don't have anything else in at the moment.

ROB MOORE: OK. So no, that's fantastic. I'm going to come back to Sarah then. So Sarah, with earlier on, we were talking about tips for students. So this is going to put you on the spot now. Top three tips for a brand new student. What tips do you wish you had been told when you started?

SARAH JONES: Don't worry.

ROB MOORE: Don't worry.

SARAH JONES: As a brand new student, everybody-- you're all in the same space. Don't worry. And on that, this is your student journey. It's not anybody else's.

It's yours and yours alone. Don't measure yourself against anybody else. Don't-- if they're going too fast or going too slow or getting so much on their assignments and you're only getting this much, don't worry.

This is your student journey.

This is your space to learn. And I guess build that relationship with your tutor. It's so important to have a good relationship with your tutor.

When you don't communicate with your tutor, you're not going to get anywhere. And I heard in the last session that one of the tutors said, we're not mind readers. And your tutor is not a mind reader.

If you're struggling, and you don't tell them, they are not going to know. If you have a life event that happens that affects your studies, tell them they'll be able to either just offer you a little bit of encouragement, point you in the direction of somebody who can help you. They're amazing. So really, it's-- don't worry about where you are. This is your student journey and get to know your tutor.

ROB MOORE: Oh, absolutely. I've just seen a note coming through from David as well, which fits in really well with what you've just said. He says David has a notice in front of him that says have fun. Do not stress.

This is supposed to be an enjoyable time. It's not meant to be a chore that you struggle your way through. I refer to it as eating glass, basically jumping through until we get to the end. You're supposed to enjoy it, and that's what we really want.

All of the messages today are coming out with very similar points, which is talk. If you've got a problem, talk to somebody. That's what we're there for.

There's lots and lots of support. And don't worry that you're not quite sure who to talk to because we're very good at linking you up to the best people to talk to. So if you're not sure is this a question for my tutor, or is this a question for the student support team, don't worry. Ask one of them.

And if there's somebody better to talk to you, we're very happy to say ah, well, this is what you should be doing. But actually, this person will give you exactly what you need. And I keep coming back to this. The only thing we can't help you with is the thing that you don't tell us about.

The more you tell us, the more we can help. Life happens. And it's going to happen to you during your studies.

And we will deal with it. We are good at dealing with it. So talk to us about it. And so—

SARAH JONES: Sorry.

ROB MOORE: I've got a minute. I've got to—

SARAH JONES: That just made me laugh because it's so true.

ROB MOORE: Why did that make you laugh, Sarah?

SARAH JONES: I started my studies in 2017 and finished them in the pandemic. So you know, life just happens around us. But we're all there supporting each other. And your tutors are just the most important person to contact if you're struggling with those things. And it just made me smile when you said that particular thing.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. So Heidi, is there anything that we need to pick up the last visit to the chat pod? Is there anything there that we need to mention?

HEIDI: Yeah, just a quick question from Michelle, asking when should we hear from our tutors?

ROB MOORE: Oh, that's a really good question. And it's not a simple answer. You should hear from your tutors at least the week before your module is due to start. However, because we extend the registration dates, sometimes we are still allocating groups right up to that last week. So sometimes if the tutor is allocated very early, you'll hear early. But don't worry if it's getting to that last week and you haven't heard. It's simply because the allocation can happen very late. So it really depends on when the tutor knows about you. On the odd occasion, it has been five days before the module starts before I've been given the students' names. So yeah, but in other cases, it's been three weeks before.

So it's not very helpful I'm afraid. But what I'm saying is don't panic if it's a couple of weeks ago and you haven't heard. What you can do, though, is you can go to your module forum and start chatting with other students. Most modules have a big forum that you can take part in.

That's one that isn't run by your specific tutor. But you can at least start having some discussions there. And then your tutor, as soon as they know about you, they will be in touch. But it's the nature of the beast that we-- because we don't always find your names out early, it could be quite close.

So there is a-- apparently there is a feedback form. There's a link to the feedback form in the chat box. So we really want to know what you thought of this session. Does it make you feel better? I really hope you feel better, not worse, after spending an hour and a half with me. But hopefully you let us know because that's how we're going to improve. And I'd just like to say, Carol, Sarah, thank you so much for joining us today.

CAROL WRIGHT: Thank you.

ROB MOORE: I'm sure everybody found your insights and your thoughts really helpful. And Heidi, as always, you've been a star. Thank you for looking after the students.

And everybody out there, go and sign up for tomorrow's social, especially with my version of "Where's Wally?" It's actually called "Where's Bobby." But you'll see when you turn up tomorrow.

So you've been fantastic. It's goodbye from the study shack. And I'll see you all tomorrow night.

[MUSIC PLAYING]