

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences virtual Freshers' Event. Well, this is the last session for this morning, and I'm going to introduce you to the dean, Ian Fribbance, who is a professor of economics education and is the executive dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. And we've been talking how nice it is to put names to faces. Well, if you're studying DB125 or its predecessor DB123, then Ian has been writing some of the module material in that book.

So Ian, FASS is one of the four faculties in the university. What can you tell us about how unique it is in that setting?

IAN FRIBBANCE: Well, it's the largest, for a start off. So we have about fifty-five thousand individual students every year, which is pretty amazing. That makes it the biggest faculty of its kind, certainly in Britain, and probably right across Europe in terms of a faculty covering arts and social sciences subjects. So that's pretty exciting in and of itself.

It covers fourteen different disciplines, many of which students will recognise from their school days in economics, history, geography, sociology, English, history, many familiar subjects that people will be familiar with. So it's an academic faculty in the sense that it focuses on academic subjects. And what I think really makes it stand out, and exciting, is just the pure breadth. We're covering everything from classical studies, to economics, and everything in between in terms of human endeavour, society, art, culture, really exciting mix of subjects. There's almost nowhere else in the world that you could study, say, music or art history at distance. So for me, it's that breadth, the size, the reach which all add up to a really exciting combination.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, we've heard from colleagues about how the schools are structured so that they can encourage this interdisciplinarity and development of new curriculum. And we've also been talking about some of the new modules that are being presented for the first time now. What plans have the faculty got in terms of curriculum in the coming months and also years?

IAN FRIBBANCE: That's a really, really interesting question. So obviously, we're in a continual process of change and evolution. For example, we're getting many more younger students than we used to have in the past. So we've been in the process of introducing more named degrees, like economics, art history, criminology and so on. And we're certainly looking at doing more of that.

So we'll also be pursuing some more postgraduate development. So students that are starting now might have more postgraduate opportunities when they can complete their degree in a few years' time. We're also looking at more short courses, and exploring new areas of curriculum, particularly around film, media, creative arts and production. That kind of area looks very exciting for potential growth.

So again, as always, in FASS, lots of exciting breadth and lots of exciting new things for us to think about, both in terms of research and curriculum.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. That's wonderful. Sounds super exciting. Now, I've been talking to people a little bit about what they do, and everyone seems very, very busy, Ian. There are lots of people with so many roles, it just sort of makes the mind boggle. So my question to you is, then, is there any such thing as a typical day as an executive dean?

IAN FRIBBANCE: Well, before COVID, there definitely wasn't such a typical day because I could be anywhere doing almost anything. So a very nice thing you got to do, for example, as executive dean is you preside at graduation ceremonies and give students their degrees when they complete. I have a lot of management meetings, as you might imagine, with the Vice Chancellor's Executive, planning the strategy and direction of the university, meetings to help move the faculty forward with all my faculty colleagues.

I have literally been everywhere from a prison, working with some prison students, right through to a Premier League football ground, where we've got a FASS student, for example, who's in the first team of Premier League football club. And almost everything - every setting in between across the four nations of the UK, and sometimes even beyond. So absolutely no such thing as a typical day. Unfortunately, these days, a lot of it is in the front room, or the dining room, but I hope we'll get back to the variety at some point next year.

[CHUCKLES]

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. There's only so much Microsoft Teams one can enjoy.

[CHUCKLING]

The travel and variety certainly sounds great. But you're also doing other things, Ian. I believe you're still actively tutoring on some modules. Does that help with your day job in terms of how you're making decisions that affect students?

IAN FRIBBANCE: Yeah, absolutely. So if there are any students who are out there doing DB125, certainly in London or surrounds, I might get to meet you, or talk to you. Yeah, absolutely, apart from just keeping my feet on the ground, it also means I can really engage with how students see and perceive the university, the latest updates in terms of the virtual learning environment, how we do tuition. Obviously, it keeps my finger on the pulse.

And I hear from students who are sometimes often ahead of where the university is. So for example, in recent years, I've tried experimenting with a WhatsApp group with some of my students. That's gone down really well. And it's really good to hear first-hand from students, because obviously, that can feed into the management and direction of the university. So always good to hear from and engage with students, and really pleased to welcome the new cohort, that are with you this morning.

KAREN FOLEY: No, we've had a wonderful day, Ian. Thank you so much for coming along to meet our new students. This is a very short session, and I'd like to end by going back to Damon and seeing how everyone is at home. If you haven't already filled in our word cloud, I'd like to know if you enjoyed this event, if you'd like to attend another event - we've got lots coming up - and also about how you're feeling about your studies now. So we started today feeling worried, and excited, and anxious, et cetera. And also, I'd like to know what you're going to do because you came along today. So how has this made you feel? Damon, though, before we try and get the results from those widgets, how is everybody at home?

DAMON MILLER: I think everyone is - they've thoroughly enjoyed it, for a start. I'm very appreciative for the different sessions and what people have advised. And I think people have been helping each other out as well, so providing each other with links, and with advice, explaining their own situation, their experience so far. And I think everyone's really

chomping at the bit to get started, looking forward to the beginning. Some have already started. Some are a bit nervous about starting, but I think everyone's ready to go.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Well, that's all we can hope for, Damon. Thank you so much as well for managing the chat, and for all of our colleagues who've been involved in putting this together, and those behind the scenes. Helen and Mark have done a great job in all the preparation that's gone into making this event. But I hope it has been useful for everybody at home. But Damon and Ian, thank you so much.

And thank you, everybody at home, for watching and sharing your advice and tips with each other. This is but one of several events that we've got. We've actually got one on this afternoon for the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies. These events are open for all students, so if you'd like to attend, please do feel free to drop in, particularly if you're a continuing student and you've got advice for new people. You can hopefully see how wonderful it is to meet a friendly face online, and share advice, and inspiration, and enthusiasm, and anxieties, et cetera, with each other.

So that just leaves me to say, bye for now. You can subscribe to our mailing list on the Student Hub Live website if you would like to find out more about events that we've got. I've mentioned earlier that we've got a whole range of events to gear you up for the best module start. We've got workshops on Adobe Connect. We've also got a variety of broadcasts like these, including one on the twenty-eighth of September, which is a generic event for everybody covering all of the basics at The Open University as well, so do make sure that you pop into that if you're a new student. You can drop in and out, and this will be available on Catch Up very soon.

So, bye for now. Thanks for watching. Hope you've enjoyed, and see you at another event very soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]