

KAREN FOLEY: Good morning everybody, and welcome to Student Hub Live Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Freshers' Event. Well, isn't it lovely? We're all sitting here with our virtual cuppa, loads of you online all across the world. I hear it's a lovely springtime in New Zealand, which was where I used to live. And we've got a wonderful international audience and lots of people from all over the UK.

Now, my name is Karen Foley, and I'm a lecturer at The Open University, and I present Student Hub Live, which, for those of you who don't know, is The Open University's online platform. It's live and interactive. And what we're trying to do is facilitate some sense of academic community here.

And we have heaps of events throughout the year. Hopefully, this is one of the first of many that you will attend, but we run a lot of these broadcast events where we'll often showcase new module material. We run study skills workshops that focus on things like essay writing and critical thinking. And these are all extracurricular events available to you as an OU student. And you can check out what we've got lined up to get you off to the best start possible on our Student Hub Live website.

So, this is an online interactive event, and this is one format that we use. Today, what you can see is we've got a lovely chat box with loads of you saying where you are, what you're studying, and what you're doing and how you're feeling. It's great to see that some of you are a bit anxious, and nervous, and excited, and wonderful to see some of our continuing students reassuring all the newbies that it's all going to be OK.

We've also got lots of widgets or polling tools that we'd like you to fill in as well. When you fill those in, you can also see what other people at home think as well. So we've asked you things like where you are, whether you're new to the OU, what level you're studying, and what sort of thing you're studying, et cetera.

So to vote on those, you can just click on the one you'd like to interact with, and then choose one of the options. But we also have word clouds. Now these have three boxes, and you need to fill in all three boxes, otherwise, your results won't submit. The computer will say no.

So, what you need to do is if you can only think of one or two, that's cool. Just add a full stop or a cross at the end, and then your results will populate. And you can also see what other people think as well.

Now, you can ask questions to the great panel I've got lined up for you today. And Damon is on our hot desk, and he'll also answer a lot of your questions. Welcome, Damon. How are you, and how is everybody at home?

DAMON MILLER: I'm good, actually. Yeah, and everyone is really excited. You can see the chat box is absolutely full. As you say we've got people from New Zealand, Jersey, Ayr There's someone on a - Barbara's on a train on the way to Cologne, I think it is. So yeah, everyone's really ready to go. I've got my biscuit, all set.

KAREN FOLEY: A singular biscuit, Damon?

DAMON MILLER: And a banana just in case I run out of energy.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm very disappointed.

[LAUGHTER]

DAMON MILLER: I've got to watch calories during lockdown.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, this is it, isn't it? It's very good that you've got a balanced diet there to keep you going, throughout the day.

DAMON MILLER: [LAUGHS] I try. I try.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, Damon, tell us a little bit about yourself because you work in the faculty as well, and you also teach. So what are you bringing to the party today?

DAMON MILLER: Well, I'm going to sit and interact on the chat box. And if anyone's got any questions, then obviously ask, and I'll do my best to address them. And if people have got questions for the people in the sessions, then I can pass those over for them.

I'm an associate lecturer. I teach Level 2 International Studies, or International Development. And I used to teach the Level 1 social sciences course. So yeah, a wide spread of things. I worked centrally at Milton Keynes in the deanery in the communications team there. That's my main job.

But yeah, I love the teaching, and I love the students. And it's always great. So looking forward to starting again. Starting to get the lists of students allocated to tutor groups so they're starting to come through. And we'll be all ready to start in October.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Yes, so it's very exciting. The start of the new academic year for most students, but not all, because sometimes we'll have a February intake of students, and some other modules start at different times of the year. But this is, I guess, our biggest time where we all start together. So it's all exciting, both for students and also for the tutors and everybody else behind the scenes as well.

So, as Damon said, you can chat, and you can do anything you like in that chat box, and make the most of the opportunity while we've got so many students here all at the same time, to ask advice and opinions - how do you fit study around your kids, various things that are going on. What we often find is that students really, who've done it before, offer the best advice possible. So, please do make the most of that.

But if the chat is very overwhelming because there's lots of stuff going on, you can just turn that off. There are different ways of using the interface. And you can just watch the video. The video is also available on catch up afterwards as well. So you can also just chat, and sort of take in what you want to, and then go back to it in a little while after the show.

So, choose what you'd like to do, and make sure it's best. If you would like to pin the chat, there's a little pin browser at the top if it's scrolling too quickly. So you can go up and down and see maybe something that people have said.

And we've also got Twitter. Our hashtag is #SHL20 And our handle is @studenthublive. You can also email us any questions as well, studenthub@open.ac.uk.

So we've got a big programme lined up. And today, what we're going to start with is Level 1 - your starter for ten. And I'm joined by Lee Curley and also Neil Younger for the session. And we're going to talk a little bit about some of the Level 1 modules.

Now, Lee is a cognitive psychologist interested in how people make decisions in applied environments. And since joining the OU, he's chaired the B presentation, which is the February presentation of DE100, which is our Level 1 psychology module.

And he's been actively involved in research, and also was an academic conduct officer, which, hopefully, none of you will ever meet because they pick up plagiarism, where people have copied things off sources that they shouldn't have. And Neil is a lecturer in history.

And he's the module team chair of our new Level 1 arts and humanities module, A113, which we did a profile of earlier this year, actually. So, if you're interested in finding more about that, you can do that in addition to what Neil will tell you right now. But first, let's just take a look at how you're feeling right now. Because we've been asking you your thoughts, and those have been all very populated. So let's just sense the mood and see what everyone at home has to say.

So, we've got "excited" coming up as the main word that many, many people have said - "Ready," "tired," "nervous," "awake," "a little tired, but nervous," "busy," "scared," "curious," "planned," "stressed," "looking forward to it," "not awake yet." So there's lots of things - oh, "full of cold." That's not good, is it? "Anxious," "optimistic," "coffee needed," "motivated," "new day is ahead," "enthusiastic," "hungry."

So, lots and lots of very different emotions, all to be expected at nine o'clock on a Tuesday morning, I would say. We do have coffee breaks throughout the show. So you can make sure that you do keep yourself topped up. But I'm hoping that we can alleviate some of those fears and worries that are so very, very common. But, I think as you'll find out more, and meet other students, and meet members of staff, hopefully, some of those will subside a little bit.

Now, let's start then with Neil. So most of the Level 1 modules, Neil, include different disciplines. So it's very rare that students will just study one specific thing. And some students don't really understand why that is, why they have so many different things thrown in at Level 1 when many students think, I want to go and be a criminologist or a historian. So why do we structure our learning like that? And why is it so valuable to students?

NEIL YOUNGER: Yeah well, all of our - in arts and humanities anyway, all of our Level 1 modules are interdisciplinary. So, we have A111, which covers all eight of our arts and humanities disciplines. And then students split off into either A112 or A113, and they're both new modules this year.

I'll just show you there's the book for A113, which I just got a couple of weeks ago, which I've been working on for the past two years or so. So it's really exciting. And this does a lot for students, I think.

So one thing that it does is that it introduces students to disciplines which they may not really have encountered a great deal before. So if we think about history, for example - mine own field - we all study that at school. But there are disciplines which typically we don't study at school a great deal, like philosophy, like classical studies, like maybe art history.

And so students sort of come into these Level 1 modules not really knowing a great deal about these disciplines. Often they find that they plan to study one thing, but they become sort of captivated by something else, and they sort of are carried off with enthusiasm for that. So it gives students a really good overview of what we do in the OU.

But also, I think what we find is that the disciplines really speak to one another, and they help illuminate each other. So, if we give you A113 as an example, the way that we do this, we cover the disciplines of history, music, philosophy, and religious studies. And we look at four revolutionary periods across the past five hundred years. And we get each of those disciplines to speak to those revolutionary periods.

And that really sort of illuminates how these disciplines speak to one another and sort of help us to understand each of them more deeply. So, one of the blocks that we have in 113 is on the nineteen-sixties and all of the social changes that were happening there. And we really find that the disciplines reflect each other.

So, the philosophical ideas of people like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir are really tremendously influential on the history of the period, on the student riots, on the rise of individualism. And we see that - we have a unit on female American popular musicians. We look at those thinking about their music itself but also the conditions that they lived in, the fact they're living through a sexual revolution, and so on.

And so all of these really sort of help us to understand each other. And they remind us that what we're looking at here is all different aspects of humans, and what they do, and what they make, and what they think, and so on.

KAREN FOLEY: And there's some element as well, I think, that when you combine all of these different disciplines - so many of them are asking different questions using different methods. And there's something wonderful, I think, about being able to use those different disciplines to interrogate, often the same phenomenon, because they are using different approaches often. And it can really draw out some of the strengths of the disciplines you are interested in, even if it means that you're studying, I guess, disciplines that are perhaps less interesting to students.

NEIL YOUNGER: Yeah. Well, I think there are a lot of sort of similarities in the skills that we use across these disciplines as well. For example, interrogating primary sources is something which is really important in a lot of these different disciplines. And it shows us how disciplines ask different questions about human events, human creations. But they use many similar methods, and they think about things in many similar ways.

And this interdisciplinary study helps us to understand the differences between disciplines, but it also helps us to understand the overlaps and the similarities. And both of those are really important, I think, in understanding what we're doing when we study the past or the present.

KAREN FOLEY: That's absolutely wonderful. Thank you so much. And we've got lots of DD102 students and A111 students all meeting each other in the chatroom, which is wonderful. I used to teach on DD102, which is our Level 1 introductory social sciences module. And in that, you'll meet the street.

And just using one example and various different lenses, you start to look and explore a very common world that we all experience but from very different angles. And it's so exciting to start to use some of those discipline lenses to research things that one would think are sort of fairly, I guess, simple on the offset, but actually, end up being far more complicated.

Lee, psychology, for example, one would think, well, that's quite a nice, clear-cut discipline. But in actual fact, psychology lends on so many disciplines in itself, doesn't it?

LEE CURLEY: Yeah, so psychology really is the study of human behaviour and the mind. And because of that, it really creates a nice interdisciplinary, kind of, area research. For instance, looking at the way the mind interacts with the brain shows a nice connection between biology, psychology, neuroscience. Looking at how people perceive themselves within society and how they interact with society causes a nice blend between psychology, social psychology, and then sociology.

My study, I look at your decision-making or forensic bias. And, a lot of my research is interconnected with legal scholars and criminologists. And psychology is tied with so many different areas. Originally, it has its origins in philosophy. It's connected quite well with economics and politics, also linked with psychiatry and other allied health professions. So, I think as you start your psychological adventure, you really start to see how interdisciplinary psychology truly is.

KAREN FOLEY: And not only are you looking at the content, but what's so exciting about psychology is you're using different methods, different ways of exploring the world as well. Can you tell us a little bit about that, in particular, things like the different research methods that you're going to introduce the students to?

LEE CURLEY: Yeah, of course. So in psychology, especially in first year, you're going to get some teaser sessions towards quantitative analysis, which is measurements, statistics, and how you can see differences between groups. And a lot of those research designs and analysis we use on that data shares with the life sciences, such as biology, physics, chemistry.

And then on the other end of the spectrum, you're going to be looking at qualitative data. You're going to be interviewing people. And you're going to be analysing the data in a qualitative manner. And that links in well with social sciences and psychiatry, stuff like that. So psychology really is this blend, this midpoint between the more physical sciences, like biology, and the more social sciences, like sociology. And it really is right in between there.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now let's see what people at home said. We've asked everyone what they're most excited about, and what they're most worried about. So let's take a look and see.

So firstly, let's focus on the positives. What are you most excited about? Well, "learning" and "getting started" is coming up very commonly here. "Finishing my degree" - so some continuing students here. Welcome to the session, and thank you so much for joining us. "Starting the course," "new opportunities," "knowledge," "future me," "more than halfway through," "modules/subjects I love," "module content," "like-minded people," "new challenges," "moving forwards," "improving my skills" - so many wonderful things.

Yeah, "meeting my tutor," "experiments," "furthering my career," "opening my mind" - so there's wonderful things in store for people here as well. Let's take a look at some of what you said you were worried about as well.

So the worried wordle that we asked you really features "time" here, which I think is one of the most common things. "Essay writing," "TMAs," "referencing," "failing," "falling behind," "getting behind," "not understanding," "missing something," "terminology," "keeping track," "juggling work," "understanding topics," "getting overwhelmed" - so there are lots and lots of things here.

I would just reflect that so many of these are very, very common - so much so that we run dedicated Student Hub Live sessions to them. We have workshops on time management, on essay writing, on critical thinking, understanding the questions. For those of you who are new, on module start day, we're going to be showing you all around the virtual learning environments, et cetera in some Adobe Connect workshops. So please be mindful that these are really, really common things, and there is support and help out there for you in so many different ways, not just from Student Hub Live, but that is just one option.

Lee, I'd like to talk about Level 1 in context because I think very often, as we can see here with students, when they're starting, they are worried about falling behind. These are very rational fears. But many students forget, I think, where Level 1 sits. Although, we do have students at the whole range of the spectrum. And I wonder if we can just sort of talk about Level 1 in terms of future studies and, I guess, where it sits and really what students should be focusing on right now, and what they not should be worrying about, but I guess where those worries are best placed.

LEE CURLEY: Yeah, of course. So Level 1 at The Open University, I just want to say firstly, it prepares you better than any university I've been associated with. It really steps you through from - maybe you've never done higher education at all. It'll step you through the skills of how we collect data, how we analyse data.

And first year is all about giving you a bedrock to advance on for later study. You're also going to learn about psychological theories, which might be a bit basic, but they're also going to be the ones that are historically important. And they're going to allow you advance and see how psychology has progressed over the years.

You're also going to learn a lot more skills also in relation to how to be an OU student, how you learn online, how you work online with other individuals, and also important skills that will help you for future employment or maybe future study post-grad, for instance, such as time management skills, communication skills and key skills, such as critical thinking skills.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. And very often, these are skills that you will meet again, and again, and again in more and more complex ways as you progress in your degree qualification. And something like psychology, in particular, as you say, Lee, will introduce you to some of those key principles that will be revisited.

And it's really important, I guess, to spend some time thinking about those. Very often, we focus on the contents and trying to remember the content. But it's important to remember that these are actually enabling you to develop your skills, your ways of approaching, your ways of looking at data and looking at different methods and seeing how that can help make sense

of the world. Neil, what about arts and the humanities? How are some of those key skills developed at Level 1?

NEIL YOUNGER: Well, I think there's a few things to say there, one is that, as people have been saying, develop really gradually and slowly. And it's about - in arts and humanities, it's often really hard to sort of pin down those skills.

Because it's not like learning an equation or something, as you might do in mathematics, or memorising a new verb, like you might do if you're learning a language. The skills that we have in arts and humanities around writing, around interrogating sources, maybe around more discipline-specific things like listening to music or analysing a philosophical argument, they're not things that you can master overnight. They're something that you start gradually, and you build up unit after unit and module after module.

And it's a process of continual incremental improvement. It doesn't stop when you finish your degree even. We're all improving our own skills. So I think it's something where one shouldn't feel that one has to master it instantly. You're going to be led through these things really gradually. And we accept that it'll take a while to get good at it, and that's absolutely fine.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely.

NEIL YOUNGER: But there's lots of -

KAREN FOLEY: And that's why - sorry, I was going to say that's why it's very important to pass Level 1 because, that way, you can get to Level 2. And if you do fail, there are opportunities to resit. And that can and does happen, especially if you don't answer the question. That's almost a guaranteed way, I think, of not passing.

But as long as you seek help, read the questions, and really make the most of the opportunities, it's very likely that students will pass this module. But at Level 1, you need to get through it. Where it really counts in terms of your degree classification, like whether you get a first or a 2:1 or whatever.

That's really at Level 3. And Level 1 is that opportunity to go and make those mistakes. And as you say, Neil, it's about learning.

We're nearly out of time, and I just wanted to end with one quick question. Neil, you had mentioned that you have got this book in your hands that's taken you two years to write. But I wanted to ask you, Lee, about how topical some of this stuff is, how some of these issues and methods really relate to the real world. Can you just give me one example about something in psychology that students are going to need that could really help them understand the world today?

LEE CURLEY: Yeah, of course. So in D100, for instance, you're going to be learning about authoritarianism, which is a personality trait that predisposes individuals towards fascism and kind of extreme ideologies. So you're going to be learning about that. And that really does relate to the rise of the far right or the alt-right currently.

You're also going to be learning about - you're going to be developing these critical thinking skills and learning about statistics. It'll be able to help you in this modern fake news era to critically think about stuff and see stuff from different viewpoints. So psychology is very relevant, I think, even more historical theories really right back to today.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Well, we could talk a lot about that, Lee, and about how people collude with certain ideas and conform with others, et cetera. So it's all very, very relevant today. But thank you so much, Lee and Neil. It's been an absolutely wonderful introduction. And I hope that you at home are feeling a little bit more confident, in particular, all our wonderful Level 1 students there. So these are some of the lovely people.

But next, we're going to be meeting a student, Billy Docherty. But first, we're going to have a quick video break, which is about Billy, who is our next speaker. So if you haven't topped your coffee up, now might be the time to do so. We'll be back in five minutes, where we will meet the man himself. See you then.

[MUSIC PLAYING]