



TopUniversities.com



*The TU Guide to*  
**STARTING UNIVERSITY**





# Contents

The TU Guide to Starting University  
[www.TopUniversities.com](http://www.TopUniversities.com)

- 03** Introduction
- 04** How to Prepare Academically for the Start of University
- 07** What to Pack for University
- 11** How to Make Friends and Escape Your Comfort Zone at University
- 14** Why You Should Join a University Sports Team
- 16** Remembering My First Week at University





# Introduction

Starting university this year? From preparing for your first lecture to meeting new people, the **TU Guide to Starting University** has you covered.

Beginning university is an equally daunting and thrilling experience. Whether you're studying close to home or moving to another part of the world, attending a university with close friends or going it alone, there's nothing that can quite prepare you for those first days in student accommodation and in university lectures. It can take some people several weeks to adjust fully to the student lifestyle, with its late nights, raucous antics and feeling of independence, but it's important not to feel overwhelmed. Fortunately for you, we're here to help.

Our team of current students and recent graduates are here to share their invaluable tips for making the most out of your first semester at university, guiding you through those tricky early lectures (you'll be amazed how different they'll feel to studying at school) and awkward social encounters. Hopefully, by drawing on our own experiences and talking about what did and didn't work for us, you'll be able to settle into university life, find a group of similarly-minded friends and maybe even discover a new favorite hobby!

If the information in this guide proves helpful in any way, or you'd like to write about your own experiences of starting university for us, don't hesitate to get in touch. Find us on Facebook or Twitter and share your stories. We look forward to hearing from you, and hope you have a fantastic first year at university.





# How to Prepare Academically for the Start of University

Studying at undergraduate level can be a big step up from school, so it's important to hit the ground running. **Charlotte Stevenson** shares her tips for preparing for the first lecture of the year.

After receiving your exam results and confirming your place at university, you might be wondering what to do next. While it's possible to start chatting to other first years online and make plans for nights out in your first week, the academic side of university is often harder to prepare for.

What will your lectures, seminars and tutorials at university actually be like? What do you need to know before you arrive? Use these last weeks of the summer to find out the answers to these questions and ground yourself in the foundational knowledge you're going to need if you don't want to become too overwhelmed in the first few weeks.

Here are some ways to get in the right frame of mind.

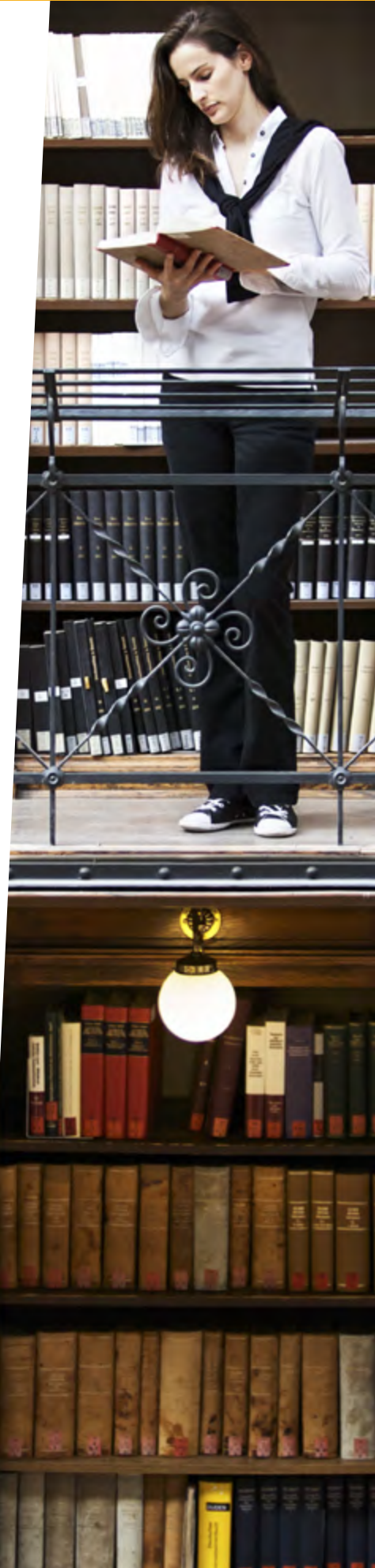
## FIND PEOPLE WHO CAN ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE

If there are any open days being organized by your university before classes start, these will be an opportunity to ask questions about your degree and the teaching in person. If this isn't something you're able to do, you can always email the university instead, asking for information on what topics you'll be studying and how they would like you to prepare.

It's also a good idea to find the university's page on The Student Room or other online forums, as older students should be able to answer your questions and inform you about their own experiences.

## SEE IF YOU CAN GET HOLD OF THE READING LISTS ALREADY

Last year, I emailed my lecturers before the year started and was able to get one of them to send me a copy of the reading lists for the upcoming classes. If your university doesn't provide these in advance already, I'd highly recommend doing this. It meant I could get a lot of the books I needed second-hand before other students bought them all, which





saved me money. It also helps you get an idea of what the workload will be like for the year.

When it comes to reading through your new books, start with the longer or more complex books. They might look scary, but getting them started while you have time to work gradually will make them much easier to complete in the long run.

#### **STOCK UP ON SUPPLIES**

There is nothing worse than being interrupted by something completely avoidable such as a pen running out of ink or your computer memory being full. For this reason, it is important to make sure you have extra supplies and working equipment right from the beginning.

You don't have to have a top brand computer or the finest fountain pen, but you do need to make sure that you have enough to last you for at least the first few months at university. Researching in advance can be useful.

**Doing well at university is largely down to how responsibly you can manage your time in order to use it most efficiently. The secret to this is successful scheduling**

#### **PRACTICE YOUR TIME MANAGEMENT**

Doing well at university is largely down to how responsibly you can manage your time in order to use it most efficiently. The secret to this is successful scheduling.

A useful way to practice this over the summer is by prioritizing your weekly activities and then putting them into a daily context so you can see when you need to be doing what. By practicing this, you'll soon see how you can structure days into discrete blocks of time, which will be useful when you need to find time for revision ahead of exams.



### START THINKING ABOUT QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS

One of the most important things you can do before university starts is get in the university mindset and start thinking outside of the box. This will help you develop your own voice so you can better enunciate your thoughts articulately when you're sat in lectures and tutorials.

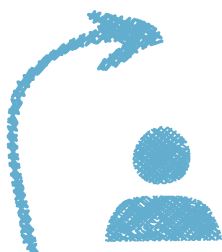
While working your way through the reading list, keep a daily record of the questions and ideas you come up with. These will prove useful once classes begin as you'll have a head-start on what you want to discuss and maybe even focus on for your assignments.

**While working your way through the reading list, keep a daily record of the questions and ideas you come up with. These will prove useful once classes begin as you'll have a head-start on what you want to discuss and maybe even focus on for your assignments**

### CONTINUE TO ENJOY YOUR SUBJECT

It is easy to forget why you are passionate about a subject once there are assignments and textbooks to deal with. The most important thing you can achieve is maintaining that love of your field so that what you contribute to the global conversation really is your best work.

Whether it be creating yourself an extra fun reading list that focuses on your favorite areas of interest or attending extra lectures in your nearby area, make sure you're finding ways to keep yourself motivated and engaged with what you are heading to university to study.



# What to Pack for University

Can't fit all your worldly possessions into your suitcase? **Katie Roach** is here to tell you what's essential and what you can leave at home.

Results day has been and gone, so the next challenge before your time at university starts is to pack. I know from experience how tricky it is to know what you're going to need at university, especially if it's unclear what will be provided by your halls or accommodation. If you need a hand figuring out what belongs in your suitcase and what doesn't, here's a rundown of some of the things I found to be essential when starting university.

## FIRSTLY, SAVE SPACE BY ONLY PACKING YOUR 'WINTER' WARDROBE

I thought I would need to bring everything I owned to university, but you really only need to bring clothes for autumn/winter if you'll be spending Christmas at home. Then, after Christmas, you can bring the spring/summer clothes. Bringing it all at once just means you'll have no wardrobe space and your room will become extremely cluttered really easily.

Make sure to bring coat hangers with you. This is key as most halls don't provide many, if any at all.

## DON'T FORGET YOUR ID AND UNIVERSITY DOCUMENTS

When you enroll, the university may ask for things like your passport, other forms of ID, your acceptance letter, and other uni documentation. I suggest you file them away in one folder that you can easily get to when you move in. You can add any new documentation you receive when you arrive (such as login details and passwords for the university system or the new Netflix account you proudly buy with your student loan!).





### WHAT TO TAKE FOR THE KITCHEN

If you're in catered halls, then this list of kitchen essentials may not be necessary, but from my experience of self-catered halls, here's a list of the things I found to be super useful:

**Distinctive plates and cutlery:** By this, I mean buy ones that can easily be identified as yours. Mine were all red and the cutlery had red handles so I knew exactly which was mine. You want to avoid all having the same cheap white Sainsbury's plate and arguing over who didn't wash up!

**Basic cooking accessories:** If you're anything like me, I didn't know what a capable cook would need before starting university. While you could try and survive for a year off oven chips and fish fingers, taking basic items like a baking tray, tongs, a fish slice, a wooden spoon, a pot with a lid, a frying pan, some kitchen knives, a pair of kitchen scissors, a measuring jug, and, MOST importantly, a colander enables you to cook a wider range of dishes.

I'm not underplaying the importance of the colander by the way. It's not a false stereotype that pasta makes up a substantial proportion of a student's diet. You will need a colander, end of.

**Bottle and can openers:** It's handy to have these just to avoid attempting to open a can of beans with a knife, like I did once, and slicing your hand open. The bottle opener will come in handy when drinking with your new flat mates too.

**Other essentials:** Tea towels, bag clips for open bags of crisps or cereal, your own washing up sponge and liquid, and oven gloves are also a must. I actually had oven gloves that looked like proper winter gloves so I could grip my tray of chips better, and they were probably the most useful thing I packed for university.

### TOILETRIES AND MEDICATION

If you're lucky your parent/guardian may have this covered, as it seems to be a trend that families make care packages for their children to take to university. These often include things like paracetamol, plasters, antiseptic cream, and probably most importantly, cold and flu remedy. Freshers' flu is a very real thing so being stocked up with that is a must. You'll also need everything you use at home such as a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo etc. but you shouldn't need us to tell you that.

I had an en-suite bathroom at university, so I was lucky in that I could keep my toiletries in there all the time. However, if you're sharing showers, you may want to buy a portable shower bag that hangs up in the shower to make sharing as convenient as possible. If you're sharing, you'll also probably need some slippers to avoid walking on the gross halls' floor







**Decorating your room and filling it with your trinkets and knick-knacks is really important to make uni feel homelier... Look out for uni events such as plant and poster sales as they are a great opportunity to buy everything you'll need to spruce up your room**

barefoot when you go to and from the bathroom.

If you have your own bathroom there are a few other things you'll need. I had a bath mat, and another mat to go around the base of the loo. Also, a loo brush and lots of cleaning products are essential.

#### **BUY THE RIGHT STATIONERY FOR YOUR COURSE**

While you can buy this once you're at uni, it's still useful to consider what you'll actually need. Depending on your course you'll need different equipment so buy accordingly. You may need to buy course books, but I would recommend being careful and selecting only the ones you really will need. Try to talk to some current students to gauge which are actually useful. I bought so many that I didn't need so do yourself a favor and double check!

#### **DON'T FORGET TO FIND ROOM FOR SOME HOME COMFORTS**

These are the items which won't come to mind immediately but will help you to settle into your uni room very quickly and help if you ever feel a bit homesick. It could be that you pack your favorite mug, a photo album, or maybe some posters you had up in your old room.

Decorating your room and filling it with your trinkets and knick-knacks is really important to make uni feel homelier. Halls' rooms vary but quite a lot are a tad disgusting and plain, so bringing bunting or some succulents can really help to brighten up the place. Look out for uni events such as plant and poster sales as they are a great opportunity to buy everything you'll need to spruce up your room.



### THINGS YOU DON'T REALLY NEED BUT WILL MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER/MORE FUN

**A speaker:** You'll be everyone's favorite flat mate if you have a decent speaker for pre-drinks.

**A printer:** This is more for convenience than anything but it's a lot easier to print that last minute essay if you can do it from the comfort of your room instead of attempting to find a working printer at uni.

**A lamp:** Your halls will more than likely provide one but they are not always that useful. My halls gave us a small color changing circular lamp which, while being super cool, was the most impractical thing.

**An extension lead:** There were definitely not enough plug sockets for me to charge everything I owned so having an extension lead was extremely useful.

### WHAT TO LEAVE AT HOME

To be honest, you should leave as much at home as you can. The aim is to travel light. This will make moving out of halls and into your second-year house a lot easier. I know from experience that taking pretty much everything from home makes moving out after first year extremely stressful.

Unfortunately, and I know this is difficult to accept, you will have to leave your pet at home (if you have one!). This can be really tough, but remember you'll see them every time you're home over the holidays. It seems people miss their pets more than their family!

Finally, this is a little cheesy but also try to leave your worries at home. Uni is an opportunity to try new things, step out of your comfort zone, and meet lots of new people, so leaving your fears and trepidations at home will make your introduction to university that bit smoother.





# How to Make Friends and Escape Your Comfort Zone at University

Going to university means opening yourself up to lots of new people and experiences. This can be a nerve-wracking experience, but **Charlotte Stevenson** has some tips which will help.

Arriving at university can be simultaneously the most nerve-wracking and exciting experience, a moment where you leave your comfort zone and begin to try new things and meet lots of new people. The first week of classes is a perfect opportunity to make friendships that will last a lifetime and test your boundaries, but knowing where to start can be tricky.

If you're struggling to adapt to university life, escape your comfort zone and meet new people, here are some ways you can start.

## ATTEND PLENTY OF FRESHERS/FRESHMEN EVENTS

While not all the events put on in these first weeks may be for you, it's important to use these opportunities to socialize and engage with some friendly faces. Even if something sounds boring or not your thing, going along means you'll have a chance to know your class-mates and the people you'll be living with.

If you're not a party person, don't worry. Not all student events are based around drinking lots of alcohol and going out until late. Keep an eye out for other activities which have been organized at your university. In my first year, I ended up going on a selfie hunt across campus with my housemates, which was a hilarious experience and a great opportunity to build friendships.

## FIND CLUBS AND SOCIETIES THAT FIT YOUR INTERESTS

Whatever your interests and hobbies, I guarantee there will be at least one club or society connected to it at your university.

In addition to societies connected to things you already enjoy doing, a



good way to push the limits of your comfort zone is to try something new. This could be something you've always wanted to try but have never done before, such as rock climbing or sign language. The vast range of university societies means it's a fantastic opportunity to try these things and all groups will be used to catering for novices. Rise to the challenge and say yes to something different. You'll be surprised by the result.

### HEAD OUT AND EXPLORE YOUR AREA

No matter how well you know the area your university is in, there is still nothing better than heading out with your friends, a map and the aim to have an adventure. It's a real exercise of trust to let yourself get lost and know you're in charge of working out your way back, and will help you discover parts of your new home apart from the ones you walk past on the way to lectures each day. Often, you'll find the places you discover by accident are the ones which remain the most memorable.

**Depending on what you're studying, you might have the opportunity to study abroad for a semester or even a year. Normally, this happens in your second year at university, so it's a good idea to find out at the start of first year and start planning**

### FIND OUT IF YOU CAN STUDY ABROAD FOR A YEAR

Depending on what you're studying, you might have the opportunity to study abroad for a semester or even a year. Normally, this happens in your second year at university, so it's a good idea to find out at the start of first year and start planning. While this is a big leap to make on your own, your university will provide lots of support and the experience will be unforgettable. There'll be lots of other students also going abroad from your university, so you'll be able to share plans and tips with each other in the







build-up. If you can't study your course abroad at any point, it's still worth researching the modules and other course options that will be open to you further down the line, so you can plan ahead and push yourself academically.

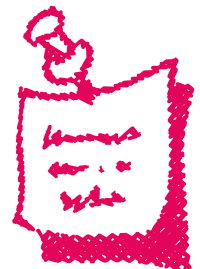
#### **ASK EVERY QUESTION YOU WANT TO**

It can be easy to stay quiet upon arriving at university and let the new people and information you encounter wash over you, but doing so will only make escaping your comfort zone harder in the long run. The beginning of university is the best time to ask the questions that pop into your head, whether it's asking someone in halls where they're from or checking with your tutor what a particular word means. Asking these questions will encourage you to be more communicative and create the opportunities for conversation with people. No question is ever too foolish, so try not to feel nervous.

#### **DON'T TRY AND REINVENT YOURSELF**

Adjusting to university life shouldn't mean you need to change who you are to fit in. Don't completely erase who you are as a person, but instead allow yourself to develop a little further into the person you want to be.

Being yourself is the best way to head into a new situation because it means you'll feel much more comfortable and this will help put other people at ease. Remember, you're all in the same boat by being in this new place full of strangers.



# Why You Should Join a University Sports Team

Even if you've never played sport before, university is a fantastic chance to try something new and join a team. With a range of ability levels and sports available to you, **Sabrina Collier** points out why you'd be silly to miss out.

If you're not into sport, you're probably planning to avoid university sports teams like the plague, determined to avoid reliving the horrible memories of sports classes in school etched in your memory.

Don't rule out playing sport at university at some level though. Not only are there a vast array of possible sports to play at university, but there are also a wide range of ability levels, catering for everyone from the very sporty to the complete novice. If you do find a sports club that suits you, here are some of the ways it will improve your university experience (and not just by helping you work off last night's pizza):

## YOU'LL MAKE FRIENDS YOU MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE HAVE MET

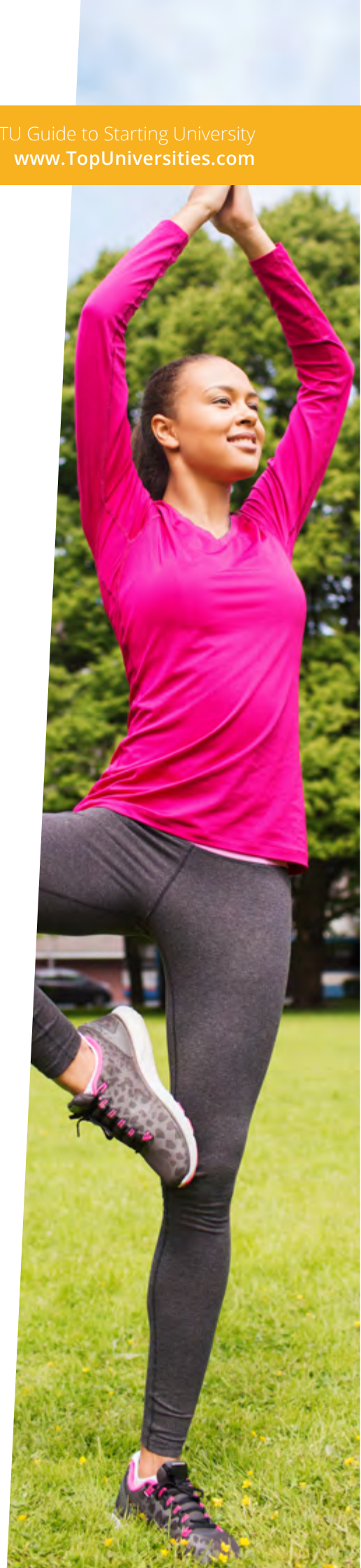
Playing sport means you'll meet loads of new people and form relationships with them, either by playing with them or even by playing against them. Some of these people you might not have met if you'd never played sport and they'll become your firmest friends. University sports clubs often have socials, meaning you'll have plenty of opportunities to build close friendships with other members over a drink.

## IT WILL HELP WITH STRESS AND BOOST YOUR HEALTH

Exercise is a powerful source of stress relief anyway, but it's especially beneficial when you're at university. Whenever you have any looming assignment deadlines or exams that are troubling you, you can use training sessions to exercise and take your mind off things, releasing endorphins which make you happy, as well as giving you a whole host of other health benefits. Reap the full benefits of exercise by making sure to eat healthily.

## YOU'LL GAIN SKILLS WHICH IMPROVE YOUR EMPLOYABILITY

A place in a sports team might not seem like the kind of thing that will





catch an employer's eye, but you'll pick up plenty of soft skills, such as time management by being involved in a sports team. Showing you were able to take an active role in university life without it affecting your studies, or that you could take a role of responsibility (e.g. captain) within a sports team, will impress employers and give your future graduate scheme application a helping hand.

**Showing you were able to take an active role in university life without it affecting your studies, or that you could take a role of responsibility (e.g. captain) within a sports team, will impress employers and give your future graduate scheme application a helping hand**

#### **IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRY SOMETHING NEW**

As previously mentioned, most universities offer a vast range of different sports, giving you the opportunity to try something new and push yourself outside your comfort zone. If you've always wondered what lacrosse, ultimate frisbee or quidditch must be like to play, now's your chance. Don't look back on your university experience in a few years' time, regretting that you didn't try something.

#### **YOU'LL HAVE FUN!**

If you're not into sport, you might be a bit skeptical of this one – but trust me, once you've found the sport for you, it could become a passion for years to come. University can be stressful, with the pressure of doing your work and meeting deadlines bound to have an impact on your mood. University sports teams allow you to let out this tension with your friends, in a supportive environment. Once you've found the right balance between your social life and your academic life, you'll be able to look back on a memorable and enjoyable university experience.



# Remembering My First Week at University

We asked our writers to share their memories from starting university, and their advice for this year's students.

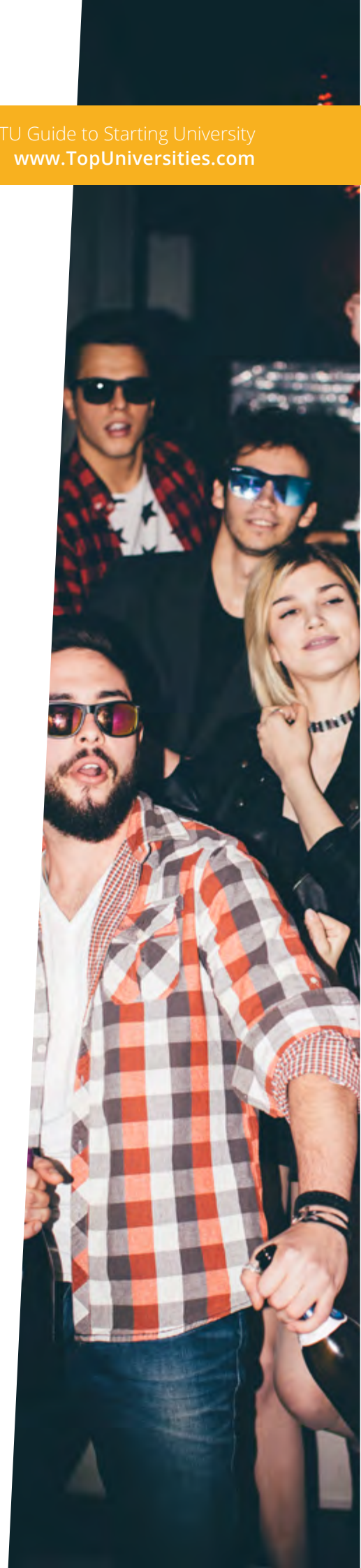
## SABRINA COLLIER

Starting university was a nerve-racking time for me, which is completely understandable as I'd never lived away from home and was moving into a flat of strangers in the remote town of Aberystwyth in Wales. Luckily, I already knew Aberystwyth well from family holidays there, and it's a small town, so I knew I'd be fine on that front. However, this didn't stop me from having a brief cry on my very first night in my new room, right after I'd hugged and said goodbye to my family. I was feeling completely overwhelmed.

To make things more difficult, I was not only sharing a flat (and tiny kitchen) with about 20 other students, but also sharing a room with a complete stranger. This sort of arrangement isn't normal at UK universities but that year Aberystwyth had accepted more students than they could accommodate, meaning some of us were put in single rooms with bunk beds. I eventually got my own room in November.

Going back to my first night, before my roommate had arrived, I remember feeling very intimidated by the sheer number of people in my flat and how loud and excited they were. It's embarrassing, but I remember hiding in my room while they were laughing and drinking together in the hallway. I remember thinking I should go out and introduce myself, but I couldn't bring myself to. Eventually I came out to the kitchen to make tea after they'd gone. Another girl also appeared, a really friendly Swiss girl (with her own room...jealous) who said she felt the same way, so we bonded over our mutual shyness. She was really into horse-riding, so a while later I went to the first Riding Club social with her...despite not being a horse rider.


I eventually went out on the Friday of freshers' week, to the Students' Union. It's embarrassing to admit, but it was the first time I'd ever been to a club, so it was a new experience for me. I remember asking my flat mates: "Is the music meant to be so loud you can't hear yourself think?!" Of course, not having been out as a sixth former made me a socially awkward drunk who thought it was cool to write drunk Facebook





statuses, and generally say a lot of stupid things - \*cringe\*.

If you don't want to go out and you're not into drinking, you shouldn't feel pressurized to do so, but, despite this, I definitely feel as though my shyness and nervousness made me miss out on the typical freshers' experience. So, if you're not into nights out and boozing, don't worry: it's natural to feel anxious, but don't let that feeling stop you from getting to know your flat mates and meeting new people (there are plenty of ways to do so that don't involve drinking).

A group of five diverse young adults (three men and two women) are smiling and giving thumbs up. They are arranged in a circle, looking towards the camera. The background is a plain, light color.

**Don't let fear or anxiety stop you from doing anything you want to do, whether it's studying abroad in a faraway country with a culture completely different to your own, or simply trying a sport you've never tried before at uni**

Don't let fear or anxiety stop you from doing anything you want to do, whether it's studying abroad in a faraway country with a culture completely different to your own, or simply trying a sport you've never tried before at uni. Go for it. The more you get out of your comfort zone, the more memories you'll have to look back on from your time at university.

#### **MATHILDE FROT**

I often look back to the uncertain, beer-soaked days of my first year at Queen Mary University in Mile End with rose-tinted glasses. Last night, after spending the entire day doing grownup things like laundry and killing spiders with squares of toilet roll, I found myself praising my university's abominable student bar, the infamous Drapers Bar & Kitchen.

Drapers was heaven on earth - the lights were depressing, the floors were sticky with beer and vomit and people would literally grope you on the dancefloor, but you could get unashamedly sloshed, before speaking to (and kissing) strangers in the smoking area who found your stated ambition in life to hitchhike to Berlin enthralling.

I sometimes miss those contrived yet enthusiastic conversations, because I know that if I were to strike up a similar conversation at work instead of the inane and awkward “what are your plans for the weekend?” I’d probably be referred to HR. Yet, the truth is, I don’t actually want to hitchhike to Berlin because it sounds dangerous - and I need to stay at home to water my potted plants.

Despite the hype, most people find their first weeks at university to be a bit like their first sexual experience - mildly disappointing, if not tarnished by paralyzing loneliness or some horrifically embarrassing and amateurish mistake (setting off your halls’ fire alarm after thinking a sock over the smoke detector would allow you to smoke indoors, for example).

I was always a bit of a yutz - to give you an idea, I wore a Tony the Tiger t-shirt to my high school graduation while all of my classmates were in suits, heels and bandage dresses. Suffice it to say, braving the intimidating crowds of freshers’ week and ordering my first drink at the bar as a late bloomer proved somewhat unnerving.

By second year, however, I was asking friends to meet me at Draper’s as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Which is why I take comfort in knowing that another cohort of heavily perfumed wide-eyed freshers will brave the elements at Draper’s Bar and Kitchen very soon. If you’re going to be one of them, don’t worry if it all seems overwhelming. You’ve got at least three years to make this place feel like home. Plus, when it’s only £3 for a shot and mixer on Monday and Wednesday nights, why wouldn’t you?


**I sometimes miss those contrived yet enthusiastic conversations, because I know that if I were to strike up a similar conversation at work instead of the inane and awkward “what are your plans for the weekend?” I’d probably be referred to HR**

#### **CRAIG O’CALLAGHAN**

My first week of university passed in what now feels like a blur, a succession of late nights and lazy mornings spent making friends in the way most students do (especially in the UK), by drinking lots of alcohol in cheap nightclubs. I think I was fortunate in that I quickly made lots of friends with people in the same block of flats as me and the atmosphere was very social. People were always visiting each other’s flats and planning nights out together which helped break down the awkwardness that always happens when meeting new people for the first time.







Perhaps the only downside to how well I got on with people in my halls of residence was how little effort I made to get to know people on my course. With only six hours of teaching a week, it took me a while to get to know anybody else in my tutorials and even by the time I graduated there was nobody on my course I would have considered to be a very close friend. Of course, it's impossible to see and do everything and meet everybody, particularly in those hectic first few weeks, but I could have gone to more course socials.

I also largely ignored the vast number of societies and sports teams at university, preferring instead to stay in with friends or go to the pub. Having been quite interested in playing football or another sport at university (albeit not at a very competitive level), I only ended up playing once in my first semester. By doing so, I made a couple of really good friends but I was never that interested in playing again. The same thing happened with societies. There's practically a society for everything at most universities now, from Pokémon to fine wine, but I never became a member of any of them. While I don't think I massively missed out, I realized in my final year how few things I had to put on my CV.

**There's practically a society for everything at most universities now, from Pokémon to fine wine, but I never became a member of any of them. While I don't think I massively missed out, I realized in my final year how few things I had to put on my CV**

Despite not taking advantage of every opportunity available to me, I thoroughly enjoyed my first weeks at university. It probably helped that I could already cook (a few meals at least), made friends quickly and was used to being away from home. Although I suddenly had a much greater level of independence, it didn't feel unusual in any way. Unlike some of the friends I made, I didn't spend my student loan too quickly or neglect my studies, two mistakes which can instantly make university life more stressful than it needs to be.