



“What advice would you give to students starting your course?”

Surviving the first half of a biochemistry degree has included dissecting chicken embryos, encountering eccentric professors, and showering a demonstrator with water from a chemistry experiment! I present here some pearls of wisdom to future bioscience students that I have gathered from my first year at University...

When you arrive at University, you'll immediately have to find out where your department is and find your way around a dauntingly big campus to and from lectures. Easily forgotten to first year scientists however, is one of the most important buildings in the next few years of your life. I urge you to seek out your library! However nerdy it seems, signing up to a library tour in your first few weeks of university is the best way to demystify the process of finding the book you want amongst the thousands of shelves each containing hundreds of books. Discovering how the catalogue works is like realising that the task of finding a needle in the haystack is actually achievable in about five minutes!

The library also contains quiet work areas for those crisis moments when all your deadlines seem to come at once. Trying to work under pressure at home is not always easy when your flatmates are quizzing you about the storyline in Neighbours, so somewhere more work orientated is sometimes a godsend! There are also likely to be several computer clusters in the library for working or perhaps catching up on the latest gossip from facebook.

Remember as well that the library will have several copies of all the core textbooks for your degree. Resist the temptation of immediately writing cheques for hundreds of pounds when your department, in conjunction with Waterstones, sends you an essential reading list during the summer holidays. It is highly likely that you will never open some of those 'essential' textbooks, and will have wasted a lot of money when you thought you were getting a good 'student deal'. I suggest waiting until you start your lectures before considering which books to buy; you can always use the copies in the library for the first few weeks. Your department notice board will have lots of flyers advertising second-hand textbooks for a fraction of the price in the shops, from second and third years.

Be thankful that textbooks are there to supplement your lectures, and you do not have to spend hours and hours in the library doing reading off your own back. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the amount of contact hours you have timetabled, when your fellow housemate has a single hour of philosophy a week. However regard it as a blessing, as most lecturers will distribute comprehensive handouts that are clear and of course entirely relevant to the module. Bioscience students need so much less motivation to do hours of reading or essay writing because of just a few extra lecture hours. So remember that you are getting the most value for your money in terms of tuition fees, with regular access to some of the country's top academics with their wealth of knowledge, and do not be tempted to skive your lectures. You will only make more work for yourself in the long-term and deeply regret it when it comes to exam time!

The other key part of a bioscience degree of course, is practical work. I remember the trepidation with which I entered my first lab; I have always been the most clumsy and unobservant person, so I thought I would fall flat on my face at degree level practicals. But I soon found out that nearly everyone was in the same boat. In fact after the initial apprehension I began to look forward to labs, as they are a chance to get to know other people on your course. The tribulations of pipetting do get easier, and you will not have been the first to add five millilitres instead of five microlitres, producing some rather unusual results! Exploit the knowledge of your demonstrators

– they will all have been in your position at some point, and enjoy the opportunity to giggle through some cool experiments with some new people.

Make sure you get on the right side of your tutor from day one. This is the person that is going to be able to explain the concepts from the nine o'clock lecture that you fell asleep in. This is the person that you are going to be able to negotiate your essay titles with to a subject that you find more interesting. This is the person that can fight in your corner if you have some personal or family crisis. Regard them as your ally not your foe!

It is important to appreciate that a degree on its own no longer sets you apart from the crowd. Ensure that you have something extra on your CV, whilst simultaneously doing something that you enjoy and provides the opportunity to meet new people. There are so many different societies and clubs at Uni, that there is bound to be something to take your fancy. You can try the jive with the dance society, protest with the fair trade society, or even play hide and seek with the games society! So get involved and learn some new skills at the same time, like project management or how to organise fundraising events.

All things considered, remember that these are going to be your glory days. Work hard, but play harder! Yes you are doing a tough degree, but the other side of university is to meet new people, join new things and enjoy being independent for the first time in your life.