Aneeqa Meedin
Department of Biomedical Science
The University of Sheffield

"What advice would you give to students starting your course?"

Biomedical Scientists at the University of Sheffield are a conspicuously varied crowd. I took an opportunity presented by a broken projector in a recent lecture to surreptitiously scrutinise the occupants of the hall, thus confirming what I already knew about my classmates – many of us have nothing in common except that we happen to find ourselves in the same room day after day.

I am compelled to argue, however, that our lecturers are somewhat conspicuously alike. They are perhaps sociologically diverse, but without exception all of them successfully conceal this during laboratory hours. I gratefully acknowledge their almost religious devotion to their work for inspiring the atypical way in which I am going to address the question at hand – by transcribing the much-evoked and revered Ten Commandments, the original guide to life, into advice for new and bewildered Biomedical Scientists.

I am the Lord Your God
Placed in the context of Biomedical Science, we have to assume that knowledge is our deity – and as believers would testify, it is to be found everywhere. I spent hours tottering through dusty library basements before it was pointed out that the University held subscriptions to several publications online. The quest for knowledge is not dependent on library opening times or journeying out in the cold. Therefore course work can be completed almost anywhere, sadly leaving one without an excuse for avoiding it.

You shall have no other Gods before me
It is imperative that you are prepared to stand up for your beliefs and are aware of the responsibilities involved in being at cutting edge of science. Ethical and moral issues abound in Biomedical Science and it is beneficial to know where you stand. Discoveries currently being made in our laboratories may one day affect individuals worldwide. In a stem cell lecture last week, we were asked to consider the implications of potentially being able to cure devastating conditions such as paralysis, for example, who is deserving of the limited resources needed to carry out the treatment?

You shall not make yourselves ~~an idol~~ idle
High entry grades may be indicative of the work required, along with advice from the department suggesting two hours of additional reading or note-taking per lecture. Unlike school teachers, university lecturers neither threaten nor encourage but just expect the work to be done. Long deadlines often lull students into a false sense of security, when they merely point to how much effort is required. It is helpful if one develops time management skills sooner rather than later – personally, investing in a well-consulted diary has helped me juggle assignments and revision more effectively.

Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy
Even lecturers leave the confines of the department occasionally to socialise and pursue other interests, and I would suggest that their disciples seek to do the same. My justification for large amounts of leisure time is based on the course itself - namely, the proven need of the brain to rest and enjoy variant activity in order to perform. As well as the physiological need for physical activity, I claim that a happy and healthy Biomedical Scientist can only subscribe to what they have learned in class and take advantage of all the recreational opportunities available at university.

Honour your parents
With tuition costs soaring, you owe it to yourself and anyone supporting you just to try and make the most of this experience.

You shall not murder…or if you do deal with the dead, show some respect
The University is one of the few universities in the country that deal with complete cadaver dissection in order to support our anatomy modules. It may be the first time that one faces a dead body and is definitely by no means pleasant but there is so much to be gained from seeing structures in situ as opposed to just in a textbook. Nausea and emotions run high at first, but the thought that each person consented to give up their body to allow us to learn is often enough to evoke appreciation and perseverance in overcoming them.

You shall not commit adultery…or if you do, tell all to your tutor
On second thoughts, one should probably not. The point is that several of us will have unforeseen setbacks in our university years - and luckily the department allocates everyone a pastoral tutor who is the first port of call for anything of that nature. It is important to make the faculty aware of any difficulties you might be facing at crucial times and get the support you deserve.

You shall not steal
Inexplicably, kleptomania is rife amidst the student population. As a community we are notorious for theft of illegally downloaded media and pilfering of road signs but in most instances this goes unpunished. Plagiarism however rarely goes unnoticed. The inherent problem with producing assignments is that one often has to rely on others' work and sometimes it can be difficult to walk the fine line between paraphrasing and plagiarism. My advice is to ensure all sources are fully acknowledged and to consult a lecturer if in any doubt.

You shall not bear false witness…especially to yourself
The problem with the multiple choice examinations of the first two years is that they are revered as fun guessing games. In reality, they require as much preparation as essay-based tests except perhaps and an even more thorough understanding – guessing corrections remove marks for wrong answers and minus scores are not unheard of.

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife…or notes…
Our lectures are given in PowerPoint and the slides placed online afterwards for ease of reference. However, there is nothing worse than trying to revise from mystifying slide diagrams or incomprehensible doodles belonging to a friend. On-line slides unfortunately do not replace notes taken from the occasional titbits of wisdom spouted by the lecturers. Being present in a lecture may not always feel as rewarding as remaining in bed for another hour, but it ensures you don't miss a thing.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house…or grades…
Finally, it does not matter how anyone else does – nobody can fault you if you just do your best.

If I am to assume that the fresher students of next year are of equally varied tastes and personalities as ours, I have only general advice to offer them. Nonetheless, all of it is based on personal experience and most of it was learned the hard way! The only other thing left to say is that they should just enjoy it – my time here has gone far too fast.