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Why You Should Care about Your University Community

An argument that participating in campus life is an important part of the university experience and develops valuable lifelong skills for students



USask residence | Dougall_Photography Getty Images Signature | Canva Pro

Colton Danneberg

USask’s contemporary campus culture remains at a lull since the pandemic. Campus events are usually scarcely populated, many campus groups routinely struggle to fill executive positions — even the USSU can hardly get more than one person to run for their paid positions each year.

Alumni can tell you of how Louis would be packed consistently, that The Sheaf used to be a weekly newspaper, the endless and often out-of-hand prank wars between engineers and agros would be a regular

feature of campus life.

I’m not saying we need to return to this level of campus life, but it is disappointing that we’ve lost so much. Although USask has grown exponentially, the majority of its student population doesn’t participate in anything. It could be apathy, student burnout or maybe we’ve never recovered a level of sociability that was lost in the pandemic. It doesn’t matter what the reason is. The point is, it sucks. Wouldn’t you want to go to university full of people who participate in things and care about things? Isn’t that how you meet new people, make new friends and have

experiences? Wouldn’t it be nice to have a student body that was politically active and fought for things that made students’ lives better?

My argument is simple: if students would like a fuller and more participatory university experience, they must build and maintain a lively campus community. This, in turn, will have long-term positive effects on students’ lives both while in school and long after graduation.

You have likely heard from your parents, fellow students, alumni, professors and maybe even an article in The Sheaf that trying new things and participating in campus groups and societies is an important part of a university experience. This is a great piece of advice, and you should take it. It is not only beneficial for cultivating your own sense of identity and making meaningful connections, but it will also be a much-needed relief from the grind of going to school just to study and work on assignments.

The great thing about participating is that it acts as a snowball. Your participation will have an effect of attracting more participants. Once people hear about this one group that is hosting really engaging and fun events, people will want to be a part of it. It’s also way more intimidating to join a club or union if there’s only a handful of members, because it can feel like a clique.

If you can’t find a group that you feel is worth your time, then make your own. It just entails making a USSU Hub account and getting a few members together who are interested in an idea. If you find there’s a lack in campus groups, fill it. You’ll not only gain practical skills of taking initiative and being a leader, but you will also attract like-minded people to your club.

There are plenty of social benefits to joining a club or society. There are also important political ones too. The things we take for granted on campus — like our USSU healthcare plan, sports and rec programs, even this paper you’re reading — had to be fought for. It had to come from some group of people working together with the goal of improving the lives of students in a meaningful way.

This act of devoting your time and energy

is also important in preparing you to be an active and engaged citizen. Most social movements and political causes expect you to give your time and effort free of charge. By engaging in student-led causes and initiatives, you are able to participate in a relatively low-stakes environment that will help you gain the experience needed to fight for the causes that you care about in the future.

And importantly, if you don’t want the above services anymore, want to add different kinds of services or update them, then you will likewise have to work together with a group of people to change it. The process of stepping outside of being an individual might seem uncomfortable, but it is well worth the autonomy gained by being a part of an active collective.

It’s completely understandable to want to remain self-interested instead of community-minded. The friends made while you were volunteering for some campus group aren’t going to pay your bills in the future. But self-interest in itself does still support the argument of building a strong university community.

The process of networking is engaging with others and building relationships. The sharing of ideas and learning new concepts is based on some basis of a relationship and understanding with you and your professor. The fulfillment of being a part of a community of peers and friends at school is a necessary feature of a rich university experience and your mental health. Even though these things are motivated by self-interest, all of them involve community. Building relationships with others and meeting new people, therefore, should be the goal if you’re convinced that we should all remain completely self-interested.

Many of us are working second jobs, taking full course loads and some have dependents; therefore, many can’t participate fully in campus life. I still argue that everyone should do what they can based on their own circumstances. Going to a meeting once in a while is better than none at all. Attending a Meet the Profs or a games night at school typically will only take a couple of hours of your time, a few days a year. Take advantage of these opportunities when you can. It will likely not only improve your life but also the lives of the students around you.

Interactive Learning at USask: Martin Gaal’s Statecraft

A look into the Political Studies Department’s country simulation and empathy boardgame

Colton Danneberg

Political Studies 261: Global Politics

In POLS 261: Global Politics, students fight it out in a UN model-style online game called the Statecraft Simulation. Students are first asked to fill out a foreign policy aptitude test to group like-minded students, and these groups are assigned to one of 12 countries on a map and made to choose their government and country types from a list of pre-made options.

Students elect a president, a United Nations representative, and other government roles, and choose any country type from a Scientific Pacifist Democracy to a Military Industrial Communist Totalitarian state. The rest of the game involves students taking turns trading, building structures and sometimes going to war against each other.

the amount of goals they win and their country’s quality of life score, are graded. With typically 12 countries participating and around nine to 10 competitive goals, not every country will win a goal. The ‘winner’ of the simulation is the country with the most competitive goals and quality of life score.

Gaal says that the scarcity in the simulation “creates a lot of tension, and it’s the best way I’ve found for students to experience the tension that decision makers have between acting on the interests of their own citizens and acting on their ethical, moral or collective good.”

When asked if Gaal had noticed a shift in simulation strategy over the years, he points to a few factors that may have influenced students’ decision-making. “I do note that the external context of politics

[knowledge].”

To break that cycle, Gaal is looking at running two different simulations to counteract students’ metagaming between successive classes.

Although metagaming may give a country a leg up, perhaps the real mark of a successful simulation is about team makeup. “One of the biggest transferable skills out of the simulation is how you work together as a team. There’s usually a dominant person that takes the lead, [since] you have to elect a president. I tell all the students at the very beginning [that] a good president doesn’t do much. A good president delegates [their] job to keep everybody involved and make sure everybody has something to do ... Nine times out of 10, when you have a dominant person, they take over everything. So this

there are two main types of players in the simulation: those who treat it like a regular class and those who are fully dedicated to winning. “There are people who spend upwards [of] 30 hours a week on the sim, and there’s probably just two to five students each sim who do that max. And that makes it so people who think they’re playing the sim are not really. There [are] different levels [to playing the sim].”

He continues, “The sim starts, and you have all sorts of ideas about how [you’re] gonna win. And then it turns out there [are] people who will literally make it their entire life. They’ll do worse in other classes. For the sake of the sim, they’ll meet daily with all sorts of different countries. They’ll communicate on Discord, on all sorts of social media [and] have each other’s numbers.”



Chess pieces | Umkreisel from Pixabay | Canva Pro

Gaal, who has been teaching the simulation class for the last five years, explains that the idea for an interactive simulation came out of a need to bridge theory and practice.

“Students would [often] ask, ‘Well, we know that war is bad, so why don’t we stop shooting each other?’ Or they would say, ‘We understand that we should stop nuclear proliferation, so why aren’t we?’ People weren’t understanding the dilemmas that decision makers face.”

Gaal explains that the map is a blank slate, meaning that “the world can be the thing they say they want, [like] a Marxist utopia [where] everybody shares and everybody solves problems collectively. There can be no violence. Or they can develop nuclear weapons and kill each other. What tends to happen is that many people start off either center or center left, but they don’t realize the difficulty of achieving the change they want [or] the difficulty decision makers face.”

Both participation and how well a country performs in the simulation, determined by

influences how students play it. As we’ve seen the rise of Trump [and] more authoritarian states [like] Russia or China, I have seen an increase in the number of states choosing militaristic options and negotiating in a more authoritarian way, where at the beginning there was more emphasis on shared decision-making and reaching equitable outcomes. It tends to break down because people compete for those grades, but I have seen a turn towards it being a little harsher, a little more authoritarian, a little more privilege in the military over economic development.”

Gaal also says that students from previous years have been acting as information resources for current players. “There’s this ‘this is what you need to do to win’ kind of thing being passed on from year to year. I don’t know if that’s a good or a bad thing. In some ways, it actually represents liberal theory in global politics, where life is an iterated game, where we’re learning from each round of interaction. But it’s also leaving some at a disadvantage because some don’t come in with that

is [also] something for them to learn [because] it doesn’t end well. You can impeach your leader, and it’s happened, and when it happens, people are disgruntled. The question I [always] ask is ‘Well, if they impeached you, it meant you weren’t working with them because you either weren’t listening or you ignored them or you cut them out somehow, so this is something you have to learn from.’”

No matter what happens in the simulation, Gaal says, “I’m not so concerned with what they do in the sim, [but] what they learned from it. Why did that happen? How could it be avoided? In whose interest was it? In whose interest was it against? ... We try to combine learning from the game and the lectures through our weekly memos, [where] each country has to answer questions that relate to what happened in the sim [by] using the material we learned in the lecture.”

A previous year’s winner, Federico Szechtman Pintos, is now a graduate student in political studies at USask. Szechtman Pintos explains that in his view,

During his simulation, he says, “I had [a group member] following this team in the library because I knew they were meeting at a particular time. She started taking pictures [of their screens] because they were logged on to the big TVs in the [study] rooms.”

When asked what his thoughts on metagaming in the simulation were, Szechtman Pintos replied that “I think that it’s a part of the game because it [simulates] real-world corruption ... Even in the real world, it’s just a point system. You either get the highest [or you lose].”

Although some students would disagree, Szechtman Pintos said he would be interested in taking the simulation again. “I want to see what it’s like when every single member of the sim is also equally invested, so some sort of super sim where universities can compete against universities, and it’s only the winning team of that particular year or all presidents of former sims, because those [people] tend to put the most time in. And then [seeing] how they’re able to work together, because

Simulation and Empathy Boardgame Classes

classes, and how students learn from blending theory and practice

that might break down.”

Political Studies 201: Global Citizenship
The other interactive learning class that Gaal teaches is POLS 201: Global Citizenship. In this class, students are tasked with creating empathy board games that typically focus on the experience of a marginalized group in society.

Gaal explains that “POLS 261 is doing, because they’re having to do global politics. And POLS 201 is teaching. Global Citizenship is about questions of to what degree do we owe others outside of our in-group, whether that be a church, province, country, ethnicity. [Essentially,] what rights and responsibilities do we have to others?”

Gaal says that “The board games the students make identify a marginalized group or an issue that we need to build empathy towards, and then they have to find a mechanism to do it. Some mechanisms are super simple — there [was] a great one last year, which was a Snakes and Ladders type game for irregular migrants trying to get into the United States. At the bottom, it had the Rio

Grande, [where] you had to roll doubles to get across, and then you get a bit further, and there’s a border wall where ICE and other patriot groups are trying to get you... Then you also have cards that determine who your character is. If you’re a character that is in a more marginalized position, say a single mother with three kids trying to make it, your dice only has numbers one to three, but if you are, say, a young 19 year old fit male trying to make it for a job they already have set up for [you] in Chicago, then you have one to six.”

“All the games should be to some degree frustrating,” Gaal continues. “They’re intended for you to learn the experience of these people that you think are important to learn [about].”

Gaal finds that a diverse range of student perspectives adds nuance and depth to the board games. “We get a significant number of international students in 201, so what I found really fascinating is many of them have brought their story into [the] game. We had a student from Sudan who was talking about the plight of workers who were trying to get away from militant groups and [had] to survive. We had a

student from Nigeria, we’ve had a student from Ukraine, we’ve had students from different places, and they help bring the context in. That’s been really interesting [because] it wasn’t just teaching, but it was kind of [a] personal reflection that’s come into the games as well.”

“The one thing we always have to be careful with the empathy gaming,” Gaal adds, “is that we don’t stereotype marginalized [peoples] ... There’s always going to be an element of that, because a game has to be a simplification of the world, but we ask them to come up with as much detail and context [as they can].”

Interactive Learning
Gaal’s favourite parts of running active learning classes are twofold: “I love watching the learning process through the sim. [It’s] where do people start? How do they change, and why do they do that? ... And then I like the output of learning. I like having conversations with students after the class. They understand the world better, and they’re able to act on it better. My default position for everything I do is that I want students to have agency in their own lives and in our collective reality for

change, because there [are] a lot of changes that need to happen.”

“This probably won’t sound good, [but] I love to see students struggle, because learning is struggling,” Gaal adds. “Whether it be my POLS 112 class, where I tell my class every week you should be frustrated because justice isn’t simple, [POLS] 261 when they’re worried about positionality or equity or power differentials ... [or POLS] 201, there’s a lot of things in the world we need to fix and we need to be involved with, and the first step of that is understanding it and having empathy for those that are facing these problems. [It’s about asking] what are we going to do about it, individually and collectively? That’s what I love about it — it’s not just [a] one-way regurgitation of information. It’s about learning, doing, reflecting and hopefully growing.”

Students interested in running the gauntlet of Gaal’s statecraft or board game classes can check the course catalogue for when POLS 261 and POLS 201 become available. Typically each class runs once a year or once every two years.



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There Isn’t One Right Way to Study

A Practical Guide on Study Habits for Students

Emily Mainprize

Studying is often imagined as a single skill that people either have or do not have, but in reality it is a collection of habits and strategies that can be adjusted for different needs, environments and learning styles.

Modern research in learning science suggests that effective studying depends not only on what you study, but also on how you study and whether the strategy fits with your cognitive preferences, lifestyle constraints and goals. Understanding the variety of study habits available allows students to approach learning with more flexibility and reduces the sense of failure that sometimes comes when one method does not work.

For decades, students have been classified into categories such as visual, auditory, reading/writing and kinesthetic learners. While these categories are helpful intuitively, recent research suggests that matching study strategies to content may be more important than matching them to learning styles alone.

For example, people studying anatomy often benefit from visual diagrams, regardless of their preferred style, while students learning languages frequently need auditory exposure, even if they claim not to be auditory learners. Nevertheless, tendencies matter, and many learners report that adopting habits that feel cognitively comfortable helps motivation, reduces anxiety and increases persistence.

Active Recall

One major category of study habits involves active recall, a technique that focuses on retrieving information from memory rather than rereading notes passively. Active recall can take the form of flashcards, quizzes or even asking oneself questions about lecture material.

Cognitive psychologists argue that retrieval practice strengthens memory pathways and makes information more durable, especially over long-term intervals. Students who enjoy self-testing or who prefer structured tasks often find active recall appealing because the progress is trackable and measurable.

Tools like digital flashcards allow students to test themselves quickly and repeatedly, making the method attractive for learners with limited time or with attention challenges who benefit from short, intense bursts of focus.

Spaced Repetition

A similar technique called spaced repetition involves reviewing in intervals that expand over time. Instead of studying a topic once before an exam, a student using spaced repetition may review material on Day 1, Day 3, Day 7, Day 14, and so on. This method works particularly

well for students who struggle with cramming or who find that information “leaks” out of memory if they do not revisit it.

Spaced repetition aligns well with students who like planning, routines and incremental progress. It is also frequently used by students preparing for major licensing or entrance exams, such as medical and law school admissions tests, where large content domains must be mastered gradually.



Closeup shot of a student writing | peopleimages.com | Canva Pro

Interleaving

Other students benefit from interleaving, a strategy where different topics or problem types are studied in a mixed sequence rather than in blocks. For example, a math student may practice algebra, geometry and calculus problems in rotation rather than working only on one type at a time.

Interleaving encourages cognitive flexibility and forces the brain to identify which strategies fit which problems. This method is particularly helpful for analytical thinkers and students who thrive on challenge, but it can feel frustrating or uncomfortable for those who prefer structure or mastery before moving on.

Time Chunking

Another habit with broad benefits involves time chunking, especially using the Pomodoro Technique, in which studying is divided into timed segments (often 25 minutes) followed by short breaks. This method helps students who struggle with procrastination, perfectionism, or task initiation.

Breaking study time into small, manageable blocks reduces intimidation and gives clear stopping points, which are psychologically important for students who feel overwhelmed by large tasks. Some students extend or shorten the time periods

depending on preference, but the core idea of alternating work and rest is consistent.

Schedule Mapping and Backwards Study Planning

For learners who prefer structure and long-term planning, schedule mapping and backwards study planning can be transformative. Backwards planning begins with the deadline for an exam or assignment and works backwards to determine what needs to be completed and by when.

organization.

However, collaboration does not benefit every learner equally. Introverted students or highly self-directed learners may find group work distracting or slow-paced. Still, many students who struggle alone find confidence and motivation in shared effort.

Note-Taking Strategies

Note-taking strategies form another major branch of study habits, ranging from linear bullet notes to concept maps, mind maps and Cornell-style notes. Visual thinkers often prefer diagrams and mind maps because they show relationships between concepts, while verbal learners gravitate toward bullet points.

Recently, digital systems like “linked notes” have gained popularity among analytic learners who enjoy categorizing and cross-referencing information. Paper-based note-takers sometimes report better memory retention, while digital note-takers benefit from searchability and unlimited storage. The effectiveness depends largely on personal preference and the nature of the material.

Well-being-oriented strategies

Finally, no discussion of study habits is complete without acknowledging well-being-oriented strategies. Sleep, nutrition, physical activity and mental health are often overlooked, yet they shape academic performance as much as cognitive strategies do.

Sleep consolidates memory, and chronic exhaustion impairs attention, motivation and emotional regulation. Students with anxiety may need study strategies that integrate grounding techniques, structured routines or mindfulness practices, while students managing depression may benefit from small-goal methods and flexible scheduling that does not punish inconsistency.

It’s just as important to take care of your body and mind as it is to know the material you are studying, so make sure to take breaks, eat balanced meals and get a good sleep every night to take care of yourself.

The diversity of study habits means that students should not assume that a strategy that works for one person will automatically work for another. Experimentation, reflection and adaptation are essential. Matching strategies to one’s personality, constraints and learning needs reduces frustration and increases the probability of long-term success. Whether a student thrives on structure, spontaneity, collaboration or immersion, there exists a study habit that can support their learning journey.

The Importance of Staying Connected

Social support, its effects on mental health and advice for how to stay connected this year.

Emily Mainprize

Transitioning to university can be difficult, especially for those who have to move away from their homes and the people they know to begin their academic journey.

This transition to university represents a critical developmental period marked by academic pressure, social adjustment and increased independence. While this phase can often foster personal growth, it is also associated with heightened vulnerability to mental health challenges. Because of these challenges and the increase in stressors in daily life, maintaining consistent contact with friends and family plays a foundational role in promoting psychological well-being and academic success.

University life introduces a set of demands that differ significantly from those experienced in earlier stages of education. Students are expected to manage their time independently, meet higher academic expectations and navigate complex social environments. For some, this transition involves relocating to a new city or country, thereby reducing immediate access to established support systems.

These changes can produce a sense of instability. Feelings of loneliness and homesickness are particularly common among first-year students. Loneliness, in particular, is not merely a temporary emotional state but a serious psychological concern. Research shows that reduced social support is strongly associated with increased depressive symptoms and poorer overall health among university students. Additionally, broader studies of student mental health indicate that psychological distress is widespread and often linked to social isolation and limited access to support networks.

In such an environment, maintaining relationships with family and friends becomes essential for emotional stability.

Social support refers to the emotional, informational and practical resources provided by others. It is typically divided into four main categories: emotional support (such as empathy, reassurance, and understanding), informational support (including advice and guidance), instrumental support (involving tangible assistance) and esteem support (which includes expressions of confidence or encouragement).

Friends and family are the primary sources of these forms of support. Family members often provide long-term emotional grounding, while friends, especially peers, offer shared experiences and immediate understanding of university life. Together, these relationships create a support system that can significantly influence how students cope with stress.

Importantly, studies emphasize that the perception of support, knowing that someone is available to help, can be just as important as the support itself in promoting mental well-being.

Maintaining contact with friends and family has a measurable impact on mental health outcomes among university students. These benefits are supported by a growing body of research.

A systematic review examining university students with mental health challenges found that higher levels of social support significantly reduced depression, anxiety and psychological distress. Similarly, large-scale studies have shown that students with low-quality social support are far more likely to experience mental health problems, including a substantially increased risk of depressive symptoms.

This support from family and friends can lead to greater emotional stability as students know that they have people that they can rely on when things get hard. Regular communication with trusted individuals allows students to express their thoughts and emotions, which is critical for emotional regulation. This reduces the likelihood of overwhelming stress and helps maintain mental balance.

Students who feel supported are better able to adapt in adversity, which increases their ability to find resilience during stressful periods of time, like exams or midterms. Social connections provide encouragement, perspective and practical help, all of which contribute to resilience during challenging periods of time.

This relationship between social connection and mental health can be explained through two psychological mechanisms known as stress buffering and having a sense of belonging.

Stress buffering is a phenomenon where having social connections can alleviate the negative consequences surrounding stressful events. Social supports reduce the impact of stress by providing reassurance and practical assistance. When students face academic pressure or personal difficulties, having someone to talk to can significantly reduce perceived stress levels.

Humans have an inherent need for a sense of belonging. Maintaining relationships with friends and family reinforces a sense of identity and connection, which is especially important when students are adjusting to new environments.

So how can university students stay in touch with their family and friends instead of getting caught up in all of the work they need to do?

One of the most effective ways to maintain relationships is through regular, structured



Woman on a video call | Ketut Subiyanto from Pexels | Canva Pro

communication and making it part of a routine. Without intentional planning, busy schedules can lead to long periods of disconnection. By planning a section of time to reach out to family and friends, you can make sure to keep in contact with the people you care about and stay up to date on what is happening in their lives.

Setting aside specific times each week for communication, such as a Sunday evening call with family or a midweek check-in with a friend, helps ensure consistency. Routine contact reinforces connection and provides a predictable opportunity for emotional support that is reciprocal and healthy. Even if you’re not in a stressful time of the semester, making these calls to just check in on what your loved ones are doing can help you to relax while simultaneously staying connected with others.

Rather than viewing communication as a separate task, students can also integrate it into their daily routines.

Students can call family members while walking between classes, cooking or commuting, which reduces the time burden associated with staying in touch. It also puts less pressure on finding a designated time for students to call, which allows for more flexibility in everyday life to call and maintain this communication.

Students often prioritize academic tasks over social connections. However, maintaining relationships should be viewed as a necessary component of well-being rather than an optional activity. Allocating time for communication can prevent relationships from deteriorating over time.

Modern communication technologies also provide numerous tools for maintaining long-distance relationships. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on how they are used.

Video calls offer a richer form of

interaction than text messaging, as they allow for face-to-face communication and natural conversation. Platforms such as Zoom, FaceTime and Skype enable real-time, face-to-face communication, which can strengthen emotional bonds.

Apps like WhatsApp and Messenger are useful for maintaining frequent, low-effort contact. While these interactions may be brief, they help sustain a sense of ongoing connection.

While frequent communication is beneficial, the depth of interaction is equally important. Meaningful conversations where students share experiences, challenges and emotions are more impactful than frequent but superficial exchanges.

Sending photos, short updates or voice notes about daily life can help maintain a sense of presence in each other’s lives. This type of communication reinforces connection without requiring lengthy conversations.

Engaging in shared activities can also enhance connection, even when individuals are physically distant.

Students can watch movies simultaneously, play online games or attend virtual events together. These shared experiences create a sense of togetherness, even when they’re not physically present.

Working on shared goals, such as fitness challenges or reading the same book, can provide additional opportunities for interaction and engagement.

It can be hard to stay connected with people during the busy school year, but it’s extremely important. Find some time to reach out to the people you love, even if it’s just for a few minutes. They might just need it just as much as you do.

A Student’s Guide to Spending a Day Downtown Saskatoon

A simple day wandering downtown Saskatoon is a great way for students to take a break from campus pressures.



Saskatoon riverbank from the Meewasin Trail | Dougall_Photography Getty Images | Canva Pro

Hajra Ghuman

There is a particular kind of day every student needs occasionally: a day where you leave campus, stop pretending your whole life exists between deadlines and remember that Saskatoon is a city you can enjoy. Downtown Saskatoon is perfect for that. It has just enough going on to make you feel interesting, productive and slightly put together, without demanding the energy of a full trip or the budget of a person with a real salary.

Downtown Saskatoon anchors a lot of the city’s arts, entertainment and public gathering spaces, especially around River Landing. It is one of the easiest places in the city to spend a full day walking, eating, wandering and feeling like your life has a little texture again.

My first piece of advice is not to treat the day like an assignment.

Students are incredibly skilled at ruining leisure by turning it into a performance of leisure. Suddenly, the goal is not to enjoy downtown, but to optimize it. You need the perfect coffee shop, the perfect outfit, the perfect picture, the perfect little notebook moment where you appear thoughtful and urban and deeply at peace. By noon, you

have transformed a relaxing day into unpaid project management.

A real student day downtown Saskatoon should be simpler than that. It should feel unforced. It should include coffee, a walk, maybe a shop or two, food you did not microwave yourself and at least one moment where you sit somewhere and feel mildly superior to your weekday stress.

Start with coffee because coffee shops give shape to a day. They let you ease into the world rather than being launched into it. Downtown is one of the few places where you can do that properly. The nice thing about starting your day downtown is that you are not immediately trapped in the emotional atmosphere of campus coffee.

A downtown coffee feels different. The point is less the coffee itself and more the shift in mindset. A day downtown should not feel rushed from the beginning.

After that, the obvious next move is the river.

This is one thing Saskatoon genuinely does well. The river makes even your most average day feel a little cinematic. Walking along the downtown riverbank or through River Landing gives the day its structure.

You just need comfortable shoes and enough self-control not to check your email or Canvas every six minutes. River Landing has become one of downtown’s main cultural areas, tied closely to destinations like Rемаi Modern and Persephone Theatre.

Honestly, there is something about walking by the river that makes students feel briefly like they have their lives together. Maybe it is the fact that nobody can assign you anything while you are halfway down the path looking at the water, or maybe it is just that movement helps. Either way, downtown Saskatoon works best when you let yourself walk without needing every second to be “worth it.”

That said, if you do want one anchor activity, make it something cultural.

This is where downtown Saskatoon is much better than people give it credit for. That could be going to Rемаi Modern, which is a major riverside attraction with gallery space for many art pieces, or catching something at Persephone Theatre, which is one of Saskatchewan’s best-known theatre institutions.

I think students sometimes avoid places like galleries or theatres because they assume they must be in the right mood, or know enough or somehow deserve to be there. This is nonsense. You are allowed to go look at art even if you are not an art person. You are allowed to attend theatre even if you do not have elaborate thoughts ready afterward. Half the value is simply doing something that reminds you your brain is for more than absorbing lecture slides and skimming readings.

After lunch, I am firmly in favour of unstructured wandering.

Go into a bookstore, a local shop or somewhere you normally would not bother entering because you assume you should be doing something “more useful.” Students are constantly pressured to justify

their time. Everything must build toward a grade, a job, a networking opportunity or at least a LinkedIn post. Spending a day downtown should reject that logic a little. Developing tastes, preferences and small opinions about your city is useful. It turns you into a person with an inner life rather than a machine for completing tasks.

Downtown Saskatoon is also one of the better places in the city to keep the day flexible. If there is something happening, you can usually lean into it. The city regularly hosts concerts, markets, festivals and other public events, many of which spill into the downtown rhythm depending on the season. That is another reason a downtown day works so well for students, because you can plan loosely and still end up with something to do.

That is the best part of having a day spent in downtown Saskatoon, because it does not need to be impressive to be restorative. It does not have to become content or need to be the most productive use of your time.

Student life can get painfully repetitive. Same classrooms, same stress, same conversation about what is due next week. Downtown offers a different tempo. It reminds you there are people outside your program, conversations unrelated to school and hours in the day that can belong entirely to you.

My guide to spending your day here is simple, really. Get coffee, walk by the river, do one interesting thing, eat something downtown and leave room for wandering. That is it. No intense itinerary. No pressure to maximize every second. Just a day in downtown Saskatoon that lets you feel, for once, like your life is happening in a city and not only in a syllabus.

For a student, that can make a bigger difference than you would think.

The Sheaf is back September 17.

Read us instead of whatever you’re supposed to be reading.

Saskatoon’s Best Mom & Pop Restaurants

New to the city? Here’s a list of local restaurants that never disappoint.

Hannah Ha

There’s a reason Saskatoon was dubbed “Paris of the Prairies”; we have endless options when it comes to grabbing a bite to eat. The endless possibilities can be dizzying to navigate, even as someone who grew up here. Here’s a list of all my favourite locally owned Mom & Pop restaurants in our city, with lively atmospheres and generous portions—with my own go-to orders!

Konga Cafe
204 Avenue H N

Talk about soul-satisfying food. Open only for supper time, the Jamaican restaurant makes the most of its operating hours. The menu leans into hearty, homestyle dishes that are the textbook definition of comfort food. The menu features many protein options under sections labelled Piggy Pen and the Chicken Yard. Surrounded by colourful Caribbean decor, the tender meat and bold flavours will melt in your mouth and blow your mind.

My go-to order: Canajun Pork Chops, with a side of half ‘n half rice & peas and roasted potatoes.

Ngon Ngon Restaurant
803 2nd Ave N

“Ngon” is a Vietnamese word that translates to “yummy” or “delicious”. It’s a bold title, and Ngon Ngon lives up to its name. Though Saskatoon has plenty of Vietnamese restaurant options available, Ngon Ngon is one of the most authentic. There are authentic dishes on the menu that aren’t offered at most Vietnamese restaurants, like their Bun Cha. The food is “ngon”, but the wait times aren’t long. If you go in looking for a quick, comforting meal, Ngon Ngon will deliver.

My go-to order: Bun cha: a vermicelli noodle platter with BBQ pork and meatballs, served with sweet fish sauce and lots of veggies.



The exterior shot of Hometown Diner | Hometown Diner Instagram

Bistro on B
312 Avenue B S

Located on Avenue B, Bistro on B makes sure there is love on every plate. The owner is chatty and welcoming, and most importantly, his love for cooking is evident. The owner describes his cooking as “Tex Mex with a French Bistro feel”, according to a CBC interview. All of Bistro on B’s dishes have generous portion sizes, yet all made with high-quality meat and house-made sauces. Menu items like the 16-hour brisket for \$12.50 are what make this local gem stand out in Riversdale.

My go-to order: 16 hour brisket mac & cheese.

Cafe Japa Bowl
821 Broadway Ave

Cafe Japa Bowl is a no-fuss spot that delivers on fast Japanese comfort. Bowls arrive piled high with perfectly seasoned rice, crisp veggies and your choice of tender proteins glazed in punchy sauces like sweet-soy, spicy mayo or citrusy ponzu. The atmosphere is casual and efficient, and the portions are generous; expect silent slurping after the first bite. It has a selection of ramen and rice dishes and shortribs, making Cafe Japa Bowl the perfect spot for a quick lunch downtown or a late-night pit stop.

My go-to order: Spicy barbecue pork ramen.

Keo’s Kitchen
1808 Broadway Avenue

Thai food is hard to get wrong, but Keo’s gets it so right. Keo’s Kitchen is a warm, neighbourhood Thai and Lao restaurant that feels like comfort food with generous portions, bold sauces and a menu for sharing. Service is friendly, and the dining room has a charming, lived-in feeling with plants and traditional decorations that



The exterior shot of Bistro on B | Bistro on B Instagram

make it great for sit-down meals. Keo’s takeout travels well, too; consider calling them for takeout night. The spice on their dishes goes from level one to level five. Choose wisely, they don’t hold back on the spice!

My go-to order: Pad Thai with tofu, at a level four spice.

D’lish by Tish
702A 14th St E

This cute cafe is no stranger to students at USask. With live music and mismatched plates, this cafe is overflowing with character. It is an art-filled café that has no shortage of soulful soups and a good slice of cake. It has many vegetarian, vegan and halal-friendly options, with standout dishes like Thai coconut curry lentil soup, peanut butter paninis and salted caramel cheesecake. The atmosphere blends cozy with artistic flair, and the cherry on top is the friendly staff. They also often have local artists doing live performances, just make sure to close your laptops when they’re up on stage. The atmosphere at this little cafe is hard to beat!

My go-to order: Mediterranean panini with a chai latte.

Hometown Diner
210 20th St W

This brunch spot needs no mention on this list; it’s already hard enough to get a table on a Saturday morning. Think of Hometown Diner as brunch with a little bit more flair. All its menu items are made from scratch, giving you comfort food bright and early. The restaurant operated on a first-come, first-served basis, with an in-person waitlist, so expect a lineup on busy weekends. Trust, the wait is so worth it every time.

My go-to order: Ukrainian Brekkie: perogies and sausages with heaps of sauerkraut and a sunny side up egg. PS, ask for hot sauce.

Fuh Station
1806 Idylwyld Dr N

Tucked beside an Esso gas station on Idylwyld Drive North, Fuh Station is a true hole-in-the-wall. Despite its unassuming location, its clean, decorative interior will surprise you! The roadside setting only adds to its charm, serving up big flavours and bigger portions. Their noodle bowls are heaping, and their pho broth is rich, with variations like the peanut satay broth, a personal favourite. Their banh mi subs are fresh and reliable, some of the best in the city. Whether you’re stopping in for lunch or ordering for takeout night, Fuh Station won’t let you down.

My go-to order: Special pho with tripe, tendon, meatballs and beef slices.

Pak Donair
1631 29th St W

Tucked away in the back of One Stop convenience, between aisles of chips and energy drinks, Pak Donair will never disappoint you when that donair craving hits. Though it is toeing the line of “Mom and Pop”, it is still Saskatoon locally owned and has so much charm and merit that it couldn’t be excluded. It is one of the few places open in the early hours of the morning, ready for your group of friends after a night out or as study fuel. There are three locations in the city open until 2 a.m., so don’t be shy! They are never shy on the portion or the sauces, offering “regular” and “large” donair sizes. Their rice platters are also heaping, so your dollar goes a long way.

My go-to order: A regular-sized lamb donair with cucumbers, lettuce, tomato, onion and pickles, with white garlic and donair sauce.



Dorm Move-In day: A Cultural Snapshot

Mini Scenes of a day that feels bigger than it is

Katherine Walcer

There are very few days on a university campus that feel as concentrated and as emotionally dense as a dorm move-in day. It's a day that compresses endings and beginnings into the same tight hallways where rolling suitcases bump into each other, and strangers hold the doors open like they've known each other for years. Nothing extraordinary needs to happen for it to feel meaningful because already everything is happening at once.

Move-in day isn't one story. It's a collage of movements. If you stand still long enough by the elevator, near the check-in table or outside the dorm entrances, you begin to see patterns. Not identical stories, but familiar scenes repeated in different forms, a campus-wide ritual every out-of-town student participates in, whether they realize it or not.

There are the cars first. Always the cars.

They line up in slow, patient rows, trunks popped open like mouths mid-sentence. Back seats crammed with storage bins, pillows in plastic wrap, mini fridges still in their boxes. Some cars are packed with precision with labelled bins, neatly folded bedding and a clear system. Others look like they were loaded in a rush with laundry baskets and loose hangers tangled together.

You can tell without asking which families have been planning for months, and which are still figuring it out in real time.

Then there are the first steps on campus.

Students step out of cars with that slightly hesitant energy of half excitement and half disbelief. It's the way they look around, not quite sure where to go, but trying to act like they do. Some move quickly, grabbing things and heading towards the buildings as if momentum will carry them through. Others linger for a moment longer than necessary, adjusting a strap, checking their phone or taking one last look at the car before turning away.

Parents follow closely behind, often carrying more than they should. There is a particular kind of determination in the way they balance boxes, as if helping physically makes the transition easier emotionally.

They ask practical questions to the RAs and other parents, like "Where's the check in?", "Which floor?" "Did you grab your ID?" but beneath it, there is something quieter. There is a sense that this is one of the last times they'll be needed in quite the same way.

Inside the residence halls, everything becomes way more condensed. Elevators fill quickly, sometimes to the point where people pretend not to notice how crowded



Female students in a dorm room | Dejan Dundjerski Getty Images | Canva Pro

it is. There's a shared understanding of everyone being tired, slightly overwhelmed and trying to be polite about it. Someone always cracks a small joke, something about "Guess we're all on the same floor," and for a moment, the tension softens.

Hallways become temporary obstacle courses. Doors are propped open, and inside each room is a different version of the same beginning. Beds are half made, desks are covered in unopened packages and there's always at least one suitcase lying open in the middle of the floor, as if unpacking has already paused before it fully began.

You can see the early stages of identity forming in these rooms, too.

Some are already curated and colour coordinated in bedding, photos pinned up, making a clear aesthetic take shape within minutes. Others remain undecided, items placed without commitment, as if the room itself is still waiting to become something.

There's no right way to do it, but the differences are telling. They reflect how each person approaches change, some by organizing it immediately, or others by sitting with it a little longer.

Then there are the roommates.

The first meetings are often quieter than expected. There's a pause at the doorway, a brief moment of recognition that "This is the person I'll be living with." Introductions follow, usually polite, sometimes slightly rehearsed. Names are repeated once or twice, not because they weren't heard, but because they need to be remembered.

There's a subtle negotiation that begins almost instantly. Which side of the room? Do we move furniture or leave it as is? These decisions seem small, but they carry

weight. They are the first shared choices in what will become a shared space, setting the tone for everything that follows.

Parents often stay for this part, hovering just enough to help but trying not to intrude. Some jump into conversation easily, asking questions and trying to make connections. Others step back and observe quietly, letting their children figure it out themselves. It's a delicate balayage or being present without taking over.

In between all of this, there are the emotional moments.

They don't look dramatic. In fact, most of them are understated. A longer-than-usual hug in the parking lot. A hand placed briefly on a shoulder before letting go. A quick "Text me when you get settled," said in a voice that tries to stay steady.

Some goodbyes are quick, almost efficient. A hug or a wave, and then the car is already pulling away. Others take longer, stretching into multiple reminders of don't forget to eat. Call if you need anything. Lock your door at night. Each sentence feels like an attempt to say something bigger without quite saying it directly.

What's striking is how public these private moments are.

They happen in front of strangers, in open spaces where similar goodbyes are unfolding at the same time. Yet, each one still feels personal. No one watches for long, but everyone understands what's happening. There's a shared awareness, an unspoken respect for the weight of the moment.

After the goodbyes, the atmosphere shifts.

There's a noticeable change in the energy of the building once parents begin to leave. The hallways seem quieter, but also more

open. Conversations between students become a little easier and a little more natural. Doors that were propped open for moving now stay open for a different reason, to invite connection.

This is when the smaller interactions start to matter more.

A knock on a neighbouring door. A quick introduction in the hallway. Someone asking if anyone wants to grab food later. These moments are simple, almost casual, but they are the beginnings of something. Not every interaction will turn into friendship, but each one is a step toward building a sense of belonging.

There's also a kind of shared vulnerability that lingers. As the day moves on, the campus begins to settle.

Cars disappear from the lots around Athabasca, replaced by empty spaces that feel strangely significant. The initial rush fades into something steadier. Rooms become more organized, hallways less crowded and the noise softens into background hum rather than a constant buzz.

But the feeling of the day doesn't disappear completely.

It lingers in the small details like the half unpacked boxes in some rooms, the new names written on white boards and the unfamiliar layout of a room that will soon feel normal. It lingers in the awareness that something has shifted, even if it hasn't fully settled yet.

Moving day isn't about a single moment of change. It's about the accumulation of small actions that create a larger transition. It's the realization that independence doesn't arrive all at once, but in pieces, often disguised as ordinary tasks.

Maybe that's what makes it too significant.

Not the big, obvious milestones, but the quiet, in-between moments that mark the beginning of something new. The one that doesn't feel like defining experiences at the time, but later, when you look back, you realize they were.

Because moving on a day is not just arriving somewhere, it's about becoming a part of something. Slowly, awkwardly and entirely in your own way.



Beyond Your Degree: How to Get Involved With The Arts on Campus

Finding your place in the arts at USask

Laila Haider

Getting involved in the arts at the University of Saskatchewan isn’t just for fine arts majors or people who have been art kids their whole lives. While it’s not exactly the stuff of movies, campus arts culture here at USask is unique and thriving, if you know where to look. People across the student body, from all academic backgrounds, come together to make something beautiful that is built on curiosity, experimentation and the willingness to try something new.

Whether you’ve never touched a paintbrush in your life or you’ve been performing since you knew how to talk, there are more entry points than you might expect — both on campus and across Saskatoon. So if you’ve been looking for a sign to get involved, this is it.

One of the most straightforward ways to engage with the arts at USask is through your classes. The College of Arts and Science offers a wide range of fine arts courses — everything from studio art and art history to drama and music.

But beyond degree programs, there are also flexible non-credit options designed specifically for students who just want to explore. Through community arts programming, you can take classes in drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, textiles and more, regardless of your experience level. These courses are often low-pressure, skill-building environments where the goal is less about perfection and more about the process behind creation.

And that’s really the key to getting started — you don’t need to be good. You just have to want it.

If visual art isn’t your thing — or even if it is — performance-based opportunities are everywhere. Drama classes at USask often double as creative outlets, where students collaborate on productions, experiment with acting techniques or work behind the scenes. Theatre on campus isn’t limited to actors either; there’s always a need for stage managers, set designers, lighting technicians and writers. If you’re even

slightly curious about theatre, taking a drama class can open the door to an entire creative network. If you know you won’t be hitting the silver screen anytime soon, it’s still a blast taking drama classes for electives — you get to stretch muscles you never knew existed.

Music is another major entry point. There is a range of ensembles open to students across disciplines. Some require auditions, but many are designed to be inclusive and accessible. The University Chorus, for example, is a non-auditioned choir that rehearses weekly and performs regularly, often alongside larger groups in the city. Other ensembles — like jazz bands, orchestras and chamber groups — offer more structured musical experiences while still welcoming non-music majors who want to participate. Whether you sang in high school or just like the idea of being part of something collaborative, these groups are one of the easiest ways to meet people while making art.

Outside of formal classes, student clubs are where campus arts culture really comes alive. With over 150 student groups at USask, there’s a strong chance you’ll find something that fits your interests — or at least something close enough to try. Art clubs, creative writing groups, theatre collectives and music-based organizations are often open to participants on a drop-in basis. You don’t need to commit long-term right away; you can attend a meeting, get a feel for the vibe and decide from there.

Improv, in particular, has been gaining traction as a low-stakes, high-reward way to get involved. Workshops and student-led sessions introduce participants to improv through games, short scenes and collaborative exercises, emphasizing confidence, spontaneity and connection. It’s less about being funny and more about learning to think on your feet and engage with others — skills that carry far beyond the stage.

But the arts experience at USask doesn’t stop at campus borders. One of the university’s biggest advantages is its location in Saskatoon, a city with a surprisingly active and accessible arts



Fine art student painting a portrait | Merteren from Getty Images Signature | Canva Pro

scene. From festivals to independent workshops, there are countless ways to get involved off-campus.

Events like the Fringe Festival, Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan and the SaskTel Jazz Festival bring together performers, volunteers and audiences every year, offering opportunities to participate in everything from acting to event production. These spaces are often more informal than academic settings, making them ideal for students who want to explore creativity without the structure of a class.

Workshops are another great entry point. Saskatoon regularly hosts community-based art and music sessions, ranging from beginner-friendly classes to more intensive skill-building experiences. There’s a long-standing culture of artistic collaboration in the region, and that energy carries into the present. Whether it’s a weekend pottery class, a figure drawing session or a local open mic night, there’s always something happening if you know where to look.

If you’re feeling hesitant, that’s normal. A lot of people assume that arts spaces are intimidating or exclusive, but in reality, they’re often the opposite. Most clubs,

ensembles and workshops are actively looking for new members, especially beginners. The hardest part is usually just walking into the room for the first time.

So where do you start?

You don’t need to dive headfirst into the deep end. Start small. Sign up for a one-off workshop. Attend a club meeting with a friend. Sit in on a rehearsal or audition for something low-commitment. Try a non-credit class for a few weeks. You don’t need to overhaul your schedule or declare a new identity as an “art person.” You just need to give yourself permission to explore.

Because getting involved in the arts isn’t really about becoming an artist. It’s about finding new ways to think, connect and express yourself in a university environment that can sometimes feel rigid or overwhelming. It’s about making something — anything — that didn’t exist before you tried.

And in a place like USask, where opportunities range from casual workshops to full-scale performances, there’s no shortage of ways to begin.

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My Love-Hate Relationship With Exams

After years of burnout and perfectionism, I learned that choosing balance over panic makes all the difference.

Hajra Ghuman

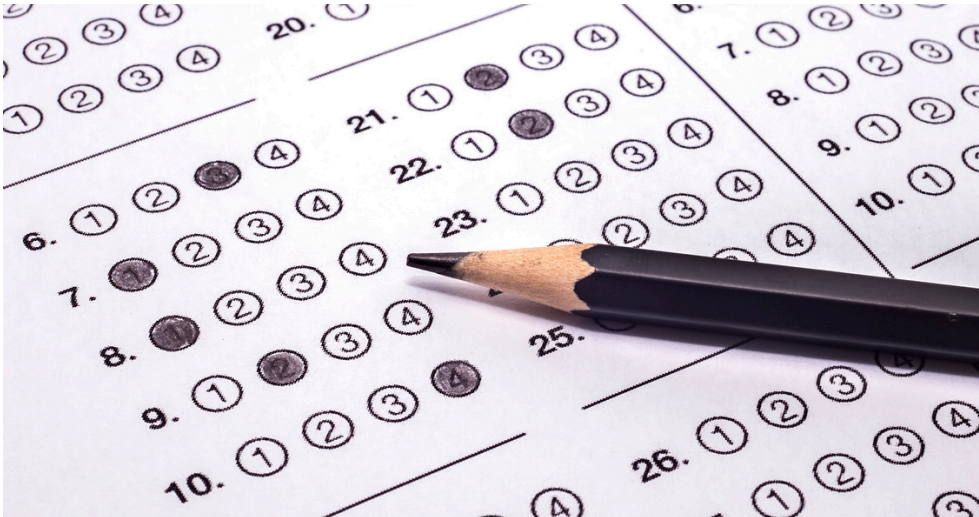
I have had very up and down experiences when it comes to exams. I do not think this is a profound feeling at all, but I may be one of very few who have had a love-hate relationship with them. Sometimes exams have felt like a chance to prove something to myself, almost like a checkpoint that showed I was moving forward. Other times, they have felt like the exact opposite, like a spotlight shining too brightly on me on stage as I failed to remember my opening monologue. Depending on the year and the version of myself I was in at the time, exams could either energize me or drain me completely.

It is strange how the same experience can feel empowering in one stage of your life and suffocating in another, but my relationship with exams is constantly shifting and never predictable.

Back in elementary school, taking an exam felt like a game. It was a way to show off my knowledge in a timed manner, almost like a little competition where the only opponent was myself. I remember progressing through each question as if I were unlocking levels in a video game. The excitement built with each page I turned, and that exhilaration surged again when I got my mark back. My grades were my main source of validation. I fed off the exhilaration each time, convinced that doing well meant this was what I was best at.

In high school, the environment shifted because there were more students, and everyone was suddenly just as smart as I was. However, exams still felt the same to me. I did not get intimidated the way others did and still had that weird spark of enjoyment. I approached exams with the same giddy energy I had as a kid.

The transition from high school to university, especially during the chaos of



Competitive Exams | amnarj2006 Getty Images | Canva Pro

the 2020 pandemic, was nothing like what I expected. Everything from the structure of classes to the rhythm of life felt disrupted. Even though I was naturally a hard worker, my procrastination got worse. I procrastinated everything, not because I did not care, but because everything felt heavier.

I still did well, but I got used to doing just enough to accomplish what I needed without putting my full effort into studying. This change impacted me more than I realized at the time. I stopped chasing that excitement I used to feel and started resorting to basic survival instead.

It was not until law school that my entire approach changed. Suddenly, I was studying, genuinely and consistently, and because I was not used to that level of commitment, I could feel myself burning out. It was not the satisfying disciplined work people romanticize. My old habits no longer worked, but my new ones were not sustainable either. By the time the second year arrived, I decided I needed to approach things differently. I chose to prioritize my well-being, intentionally and without guilt.

I spent time with people, even when my inner voice insisted I did not have the time for it. I let myself enjoy little things

without attaching guilt to them. I began doing this frequently in the first semester, and honestly, even though my exams were brutal, I did not feel as miserable afterward as I had in previous years.

The real surprise was realizing that the world did not collapse when I chose balance. In fact, I was able to enjoy my winter break without constantly worrying about grades, something that never happened in undergrad. When my grades finally came in, I was grateful I had not wasted that time stressing for no reason.

My January to March are much busier now because I do not have exams, so everything is wrapped up by the end of March or early April. The semester feels chaotic, but in a different way. There are more deadlines, more writing and more overlapping commitments. To handle that, I doubled down on being consistent with my well-being by signing up for Pilates during my winter break. At the time I am writing this, it has been a month since I joined, and it has already made a noticeable difference in my mental health, along with the physical benefits. This decision to choose myself every day, to choose movement and routine, has already changed the way I show up for everything else.

I also have been making myself see people

more often, even if it is for a short coffee chat. I have set early deadlines for myself so I could finish things way ahead of time this semester, which made everything feel more doable and less overwhelming. Being more time efficient does not magically remove stress, but it quiets it and makes it easier to manage.

What I have realized this year is that most of us really do have more time than we think we do, if we reduce the time we spend on our phones. Losing hours without realizing it was normal for me at one point, and acknowledging that was uncomfortable and still is. However, putting the phone down more often genuinely works, and I hope the time I spend on it decreases.

Exams themselves were never the real antagonist in my life. It was the lifestyle I built around them. I used to let grades dictate how I lived, how I rested and how I perceived myself.

At the time this is published, I will have just started my final year of law school. I have a strong feeling that the second semester of my second year will go even better than the first. I hope that by then I can carve out even more time for myself by continuing to implement habits that keep me off my phone, keep me grounded and keep me from slipping back into the version of myself who accepted burnout as a normal part of her life.

I have learned that the bad habits we cling to because of school deadlines do not have to define us. We can choose to change them by rebuilding better ones. It is easier said than done, but once you try it out and keep it going, the reward of your discipline truly pays off. The healthier we are mentally, socially and physically, the better we perform. I wish I had understood that sooner, but I am glad I finally did, and I hope these habits of mine get stronger from here on out.

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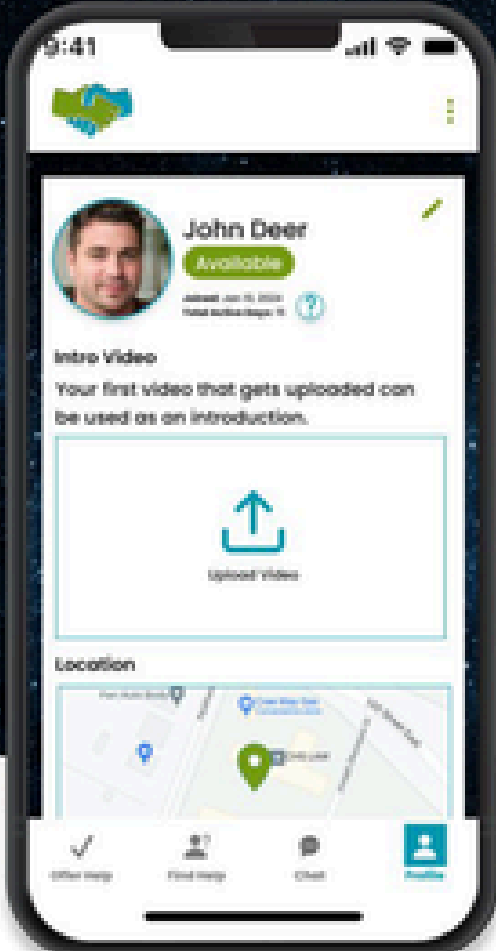
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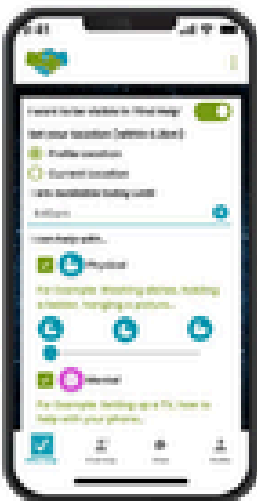
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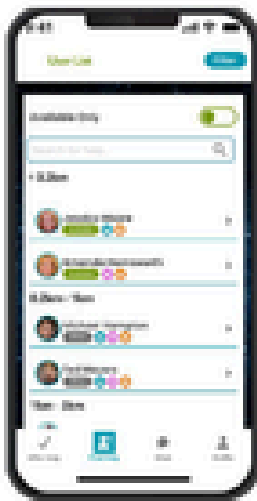
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Take It Easy: A Few Notes For Your First Year

Words of wisdom I wish I’d gotten as an incoming first-year



Group of first year students | Prostock-studio | Canva Pro

Laila Haider

Starting university is an incredibly daunting experience for everyone. It feels like the moment your entire life has been building up to. Countless hours spent writing essays and exams in high school, volunteering, taking part in extracurriculars, sending out applications, not to mention the culture that surrounds it.

All of the movies, books, tv shows, conversations with your parents and extended family about where you’re going and what you’re going to do with your life. It’s momentous. It’s a thrill. You’re starting this new and exciting chapter of your life. You’re becoming a person of your own, with your own goals, career aspirations and responsibilities ahead of you. It’s the most insane rush of dopamine and adrenaline one can hand to a teenager — now an emerging adult.

In this rush, you might find yourself lost and overwhelmed. You might feel like you’re moving ten times slower than the people around you. The classes might seem harder, the grading more unfair. Your friendships may feel like they take longer to stick. The responsibilities you carry might seem to pile up on you.

It’s important that you realize, sooner rather than later, that it isn’t that big of a deal. You are not alone in this rush. You are not the only one navigating through the uncertainties of choosing the right degree. You are not the only one feeling unsure of yourself. You are not alone in feeling out

of place. Almost everyone around you is experiencing some version of the same thing, even if it looks different on the outside.

We build university up to be a behemoth. Something permanent. Something huge. It has a way of making you feel like every choice you make is set in stone. Especially in your first year. Every assignment and exam feels like the most important one you have ever taken. Every bad grade feels like the end of the world. Every weekend spent on your own feels like evidence that you’re doing something wrong, like you’re not doing university “right.”

It’s important that you slow down. You’re allowed quiet nights in. You’re allowed to take it easy. Whether that means taking a lighter course load or a gap semester altogether, it’s fine to take things at your own pace. It doesn’t mean that you don’t care as much about your education as those who don’t. It doesn’t mean that you’re any less capable or ambitious than your peers. It means that you recognize that you are human.

As a student, you’re juggling your academic responsibilities, extracurricular activities, volunteering, work, personal responsibilities, social responsibilities and your own needs. If it feels like a lot, it probably is a lot. Being tired doesn’t mean you’re falling behind.

You don’t need to have everything figured out right now. Despite what everyone tells you, and how you might feel, your first

year is not the final declaration on who you are or what you will become. You might change your major or change colleges or transfer universities entirely. You might discover new interests or that your skills are way better suited for a completely different career. You might realize that the path you thought you were set on isn’t actually the one that you want.

That’s completely fine. You’re growing as a person, as a student and as a professional. University isn’t just meant to teach you how to write essays or conduct lab research; it’s about learning how to navigate through changes and uncertainty. It’s supposed to teach you how to adapt to huge life changes you never saw coming. It’s fine if everything doesn’t go according to the plan that you’ve had since you were 13 years old.

You have to come to terms with the fact that you are now an adult. Things will not always come easily, or when you want them to. University will demand that you think and act differently than you did in high school. It demands more of your time, focus, effort and energy. You’re going to have to work harder now, and since you’re paying for your education now, the least you can do is pay attention to your classes.

Socially, things might take longer than you expect. Especially during your first year, when everyone is getting settled into their new environment. Unlike in elementary school or high school, you’re not going to be able to easily make friends based on proximity alone. You might meet people you like during your first week and then never speak to them again. That’s okay. You’re not failing socially just because you don’t have the same kinds of friendships you had growing up. It just means that real, lasting connections are going to take longer for you to build.

Get involved on campus, join clubs, go to social events, meet new people. Volunteer in your community, even if it’s intimidating or unrelated to your degree. It’s fine if it’s awkward at first, or if you don’t like it as much as you’d hoped.

By testing your boundaries now, you’ll learn how to show up consistently for things that matter to you. You’ll find something in common with people whose lives couldn’t be more different from yours. You’ll experience things you’ve

never been exposed to before. You’ll meet people who will change your life. You’ll find places that feel like home in spaces you’ve never even heard of. It’ll make a large and overwhelming campus feel smaller. More familiar.

Put yourself out there, even if it’s hard. There’s no harm in trying new things. It’s okay if not everything sticks. It’s okay if you make mistakes. It’s okay if your grades aren’t what you want them to be at first. It’s okay if it takes you longer than you wanted it to. There’s no such thing as wasted time. It’s just time spent doing something else. It’s okay if you switch degrees just to switch back again. It’s okay to leave old friends and make new ones. It’s okay if you feel like you have no idea what you’re doing, whatsoever.

Go out and search for what you want — from yourself and from the world. University is a space where you can truly remake yourself, so take full advantage of that opportunity. The only boundaries that exist are the ones that you uphold, so if there’s anything holding you back, it’s yourself.

Take it from someone on the other side of this experience. Things that felt colossal in the first year are things I hardly think about now. What sticks with you are the little things — the small moments in between classes spent people watching, or rushing across campus. The late-night study sessions that turn into philosophy workshops with five other people having the same existential crisis as you. The people you meet because you decided to sign up for a random workshop on a Tuesday evening. The slow-forming feeling that you are capable of more than what you had thought, and the comfort that accompanies that.

It will not always be easy, nor will it always be fun. Some days you will feel completely unsure of every decision you’ve ever made to lead you here, and some days you won’t be able to picture what your life would look like if you weren’t in university. These are just two ends of the vast spectrum that is the university experience.

Take a breath, take your time and please, chill out.

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A Love Letter to The Sign Up Sheets

Sincerely, an upper-year who should’ve written her name down sooner

Hannah Ha

Step 1: Welcome Week Freebies

First semester of every year, students capitalize on free pens and lanyards from all the clubs’ welcome booths. Standing awkwardly until the spiel is over and after maybe scanning a QR code, they ask, “Can I grab a pen/bag/keychain?”

My first year, I walked around The Bowl in my first day of school outfit, ready to take on university. I had every intention of joining any one of these clubs later. Wait, when and where do they meet again? I was busy eyeing the free tote bag. No worries, I scan the QR code and follow the club’s Instagram account. Productive day.

Step 2: Procrastinate

Classes and syllabi rolled around, and I settled into my familiar group of friends. Midterms were upon me by October, and before I knew it, my first semester was over. I spent much of my first year wondering what I’d do for the rest of my degree, feeling “stuck” in the same city I’d lived in most of my life. Again, clubs and tables filled the Arts Tunnel with banners and QR codes. Headphones in, eyes down, I sped past the sign-up sheets and bolted to my next class.

“Next year. I’ll be stuck here for long enough.” Back then, four years felt like so much time. Like a true first year, I procrastinated putting myself out there. Fish out of water, I felt like I didn’t have anything I could give or gain from a campus club, and my worst fear was walking into a room I didn’t belong in.

It also didn’t seem like I had a minute to spare outside of all my classes. By the end of the year, I had declared my major and felt like I found my footing in university, but I was struggling to feel like I really belonged among the peers in my major. I didn’t know the names of most of my

classmates, and I didn’t feel any fraternity walking through the hoi polloi of the Arts building.

I looked back on my first year, feeling like I had fallen behind on networking and let so many opportunities pass me by.

Step 3: Lock In

By now, I was joining whatever club I could get my hands on, taking advantage of every sign-up sheet; I had already felt like I wasted so much time. I wanted to meet peers in my major, and most pressingly, I wanted to stack my resume. Rookie mistake, by the way. I joined six clubs and two rec teams in the first week of my second year. Some I joined with friends, others seemed relevant to my major, one was a shot in the dark. In my paranoia, I dared myself to walk into rooms and talk to people above my year. It felt like I was just throwing spaghetti at the wall.

I put myself through countless Google forms, racking my brain when answering “Why do you want to join our club?”, while knowing full well I was just desperate to be productive. I did a couple of interviews, paid club fees and went to countless club socials. By the first month, I had a stacked schedule of commitments I’d made on top of a full course load and a part-time job. Spoiler alert: whoever you are trying to impress can always tell when you are in the act of resume stacking.

Not only will overhauling yourself not impress anyone, but the commitment to these clubs is impossible to upkeep if you don’t truly want to be there. Join the club that truly interests you, whether it’s an F1 club or a K-pop club; showing a true passion and commitment will always look good on paper.

Step 4: Wait, this is fun

Pretty quickly, the clubs I didn’t care for



Sign up sheet | KLH49 Getty Images Signature | Canva Pro

fell away. I was suddenly dedicating time to a club that I joined on a whim, with no prior experience: debate club.

At first, my attendance was humble. I’d show up every other week as a modest observer of the heated debates, banging on the table like the rest of the long-time members. What kept me coming back consistently ended up being the community I found in a club that was a mix of newbies and seasoned members. Each week, the obligations of the club became something I looked forward to.

The weekly meetings drew me out of my shell and made me realize how many people are in the same boat. Through the clubs — even the ones that didn’t work out — I met students that I can now hit up for notes, advice on which Professors to take or just a casual drink.

I also have made some of my truest friendships in the clubs that did work out. Admittedly, it took trial and error to find the clubs that clicked. Not every club will be right for you! You might love their

cause but not mesh well with the members. You might know nothing about building bridges, but stay for the friendships. USASK has over 150 ratified clubs; think of what’s waiting on the other end; there could even be an executive position that will really impress a med school admissions board.

As dorky as it sounds, university is what you make of it. Joining that club and being involved on campus sounds so bourgeois until you meet lifelong friends, get access to travel and career opportunities and push yourself. If I could go back and do it again, I would not hesitate to take the sign-up sheet by the reins and just go for it.

To the first years who don’t know where to start, or the third years who feel like time is running out: have the audacity to try new things and put yourself out there. The club and the lengthy resume is not the end goal. The value lies in being taught to step outside your comfort zone, pushing yourself to hone new skills and meet new people.

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Friendships fizzle out — why that's okay

University changes us and our friendships more than we expect.

Katherine Walcer

There's a quiet grief that doesn't get talked about much on campus. It's not failing a midterm, or missing home or even realizing your favourite coffee shop raised prices again. It's the slow, awkward realization that a friendship you once relied on just isn't there anymore.

No big fight. No dramatic fallout. Just fewer messages, fewer shared laughs. A growing sense that you're both walking in slightly different directions.

For university students, especially, friendships fizzling out can feel confusing, personal and even shameful. We're often told that “real” friendships last forever, so when one fades, it’s easy to wonder what you did wrong. However the truth is simpler, kinder and far more common than we admit. Friendships naturally change, and sometimes they end. That doesn't mean they failed.

University is one of the most transitional periods of life. Schedules shift every semester. Friend groups change as people move, switch programs or drop classes. Personal priorities evolve quickly, sometimes farther than we expect.

You might start your first year bonding over shared confusion, surviving on instant noodles and complaining about the same midterm. However by second or third year, one person might be deep into co-op placements, another juggling work and school and another rethinking their entire career path.

Friendships formed during intense, shared circumstances don't always survive once those circumstances change. That's not a flaw; it's a reflection of how closely friendships can be tied to context.

Some people can be seasonal friends, there for a chapter of your life, and still play an important role in it. Study friends, lab partners, residence hall companions, even gym buddies. These friendships can be meaningful without being permanent. They can shape who you are, teach you something about yourself or simply make a difficult time more bearable. When they fade, it doesn't erase what they gave you.

Think of it this way: You don't call a

course useless just because it's not required for your major anymore. It still mattered when you took it. It helped you grow into who you are, even in minor increments.

One of the hardest parts about friendships fizzling out is the lack of closure. Romantic breakups often come with conversations, explanations and a clear ending. Friendships? Not so much. Instead, you get messages that might take longer to reply to, plans that never quite materialize, conversations that feel polite but distant.

This ambiguity can mess with your head. You might replay interactions, wondering if you said something wrong or missed a

experiences.

You can be kind, loyal and supportive and still outgrow someone. You can also be the person who is outgrown, and that doesn't make you disposable. Friendships don't end because someone wasn't “enough.” They end because circumstances change.

Watching former friends post photos together, celebrate milestones or move on without you can reopen wounds you didn't know were still there. Social media gives the illusion that everyone else's friendships are stable, thriving and drama-free, while yours may feel like it's quietly unravelling.



Friendship | Martin-dm Getty Images Signature | Canva Pro

It's important to remember social media only shows curated moments, not the emotional distance behind them. It doesn't show unanswered messages, growing discomfort or the quiet decision to stop reaching out. Comparing your real relationships to someone else's highlight reel is a losing game. It often deepens guilt around something that's already normal.

One of the biggest misconceptions about fading friendships is that moving on means you didn't value the friendship enough. In reality, letting go can be an act of respect for both yourself and the person.

Holding onto a friendship that no longer

fits can feel like forcing conversation and a sense of obligation, causing resentment. Sometimes the healthiest thing you can do is appreciate what was, without demanding it become something it no longer is.

You are allowed to remember friendships fondly without trying to resurrect them.

Not all friendships end completely. Some drift into something softer and less demanding, like an occasional message, a warm interaction when you run into each other on campus, a quiet sense of goodwill. These in-between friendships are often misunderstood. They're not as intense as they once were, but they're not meaningless either. They exist without pressure, and that can be enough. Learning to accept relationships as they are, rather than how they used to be, is an underrated skill.

Even when you understand why a friendship ended, it's okay to miss it. Nostalgia doesn't mean you want things to go back; it just means they mattered. Missing someone doesn't invalidate your growth. It doesn't mean you should reach out. It doesn't mean you're stuck in the past. It means you're human.

As difficult as it is, letting go of friendships that no longer fit creates room for deeper connections, healthier dynamics and people who align with who you are now. University isn't just about collecting friends. It's about learning how to connect authentically, how to recognize when something isn't serving you and how to move forward without bitterness.

The friendships that stay, the ones that grow with you, often do so because you learned to let go of the ones that couldn't. Friendships fizzling out isn't a sign that you're bad at relationships. It’s a sign that you're changing, and that's exactly what university is for.

Not every connection is meant to last forever. Some are meant to walk with you for a while, teach you something important, and then quietly step aside. That's not failure.

That's life, unfolding for you exactly as it should.

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CROSSWORD

Across

- 1. Saskatoon bridge (with 17 across)
- 6. Fancy event
- 10. Tap
- 14. French film award
- 15. Regretted
- 16. Platform for biology nerds (abbreviated)
- 17. Saskatoon bridge (with 1 across)
- 19. Arsonist West in Dexter
- 20. The Cenozoic _____
- 21. French glove
- 22. Structure that protects a fetus
- 24. Cohere
- 25. Health in Bordeaux
- 26. Saskatoon bridge: _____ Drive North
- 29. Saskatoon bridge: aka Traffic Bridge
- 32. Could be high or low (2 words)
- 33. Challenges
- 34. Like Justin to Pierre Elliott
- 35. They may happen in chem.
- 36. Two steps
- 37. _____ Cooper
- 38. Opposite to “non”
- 39. Surfer wannabe
- 40. 2:1
- 41. Saskatoon bridge
- 43. Native of Nairobi
- 44. Striped headcloths worn by pharaohs
- 45. Grassy areas
- 46. Song off of Snack Time by BNL
- 48. What you might click after writing an email
- 49. Service that provides ambulances
- 52. Cake in Rio

- 53. Saskatoon bridge: _____ Buckwold Bridge
- 56. Honk
- 57. Did very well
- 58. Organic food brand based in Canada
- 59. Hiss sound
- 60. Sorrows
- 61. Saskatoon bridge (with 6 down)

Down

- 1. I’d like to get that email too (2 words)
- 2. Successor
- 3. Her name actually begins Jo-
- 4. Munch
- 5. Like some egos
- 6. Saskatoon bridge (with 61 across) next to Gordie Howe Bridge
- 7. Neigh. of Hungary
- 8. Flower garland
- 9. They are often filled with car commercials (2 words)
- 10. Words on an invoice (2 words)
- 11. Saskatoon bridge
- 12. They have a similar flag to Senegal, minus the star
- 13. They often host bake sales
- 18. Opposite of wax
- 23. Talking trees
- 24. Options used by someone starting email drama
- 25. Fathered
- 26. Chocolate substitute
- 27. A way to get debts
- 28. Bases
- 29. Girls trip!

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Crossword | Greta Mader Stevens

- 30. Ancient region of Anatolia
- 31. Atom with a bad attitude?
- 33. Baby slang for fathers
- 36. Tool in electrified carpentry
- 37. The sailor _____ the deck
- 39. Hepatic Drug-Me tabolizing Enzyme
- 40. Take up again
- 42. _____ Fables
- 43. Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No it’s a journalist
- 45. Guides
- 46. Decreases
- 47. Documents needed to apply for EI
- 48. Old term meaning “cut with knife”
- 49. Jacob’s twin
- 50. Neighbour of IA
- 51. Another neighbour of IA
- 54. Prefix originating from oikos, meaning home
- 55. Hit Bollywood from 2022

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