



The Somali Student's short
GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY 
ACADEMIC YEAR 2020/2021

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WHO WE ARE

SOMALI ACADEMICS

Somali Academics is a student-led, non-profit organisation that focuses on bridging the access gap between the Somali community and academia. Our mission is to create a platform focused on empowering our youth through organising events, seminars and workshops in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and help fulfil our community's academic and career aspirations.



ANAGA NETWORK

Anaga Network was founded with a vision to connect Somali students and recent graduates in the diaspora with Somali professionals working in diverse fields and from all walks of life. Our objectives:

- **REPRESENTATION**
Provide young Somalis with positive and familiar examples of who and what they can be. There is power in hearing success stories from and of people who inherently reflect you and your experiences.
- **SOCIAL CAPITAL**
In today's global world, "your network is your net worth". Anaga Network hopes to extend this powerful social asset to individuals from a community that has been systematically denied access to it.
- **SUPPORT**
Anaga Network will create a platform for engagement - fostering a space and support system for Somali youth to connect with people from similar backgrounds.

A **N**AGA
NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

University is undoubtedly one of the most stimulating and challenging experiences that most young adults face.

This guide is designed to equip you with tips and insights to tackle the university experience head-on with confidence and get you the most out of your time in higher education.

We've worked alongside postgraduate students, professionals and experts in mental health throughout this guide to compile together the most useful information for Somali students starting university this academic year. But this is a guide that can benefit students at any year in university.

We hope it is of great benefit and enjoyment!
Somali Academics and Anaga Network



FRESHERS AND SOCIETIES

Freshers is typically the first week of University where new friendships are established, societies joined and time mostly spent settling in and seeking alcohol-free events for us Somali students.

However, in this new age of COVID, with many institutions choosing to move their teaching online, the freshers experience will certainly be far from what it has been in previous years. Nevertheless, there is still plenty to get involved in as many events this year will be held virtually, so despite the so called 'Zoom Fatigue' which has befallen us this past 6 months, this is a week you won't want to miss out on.



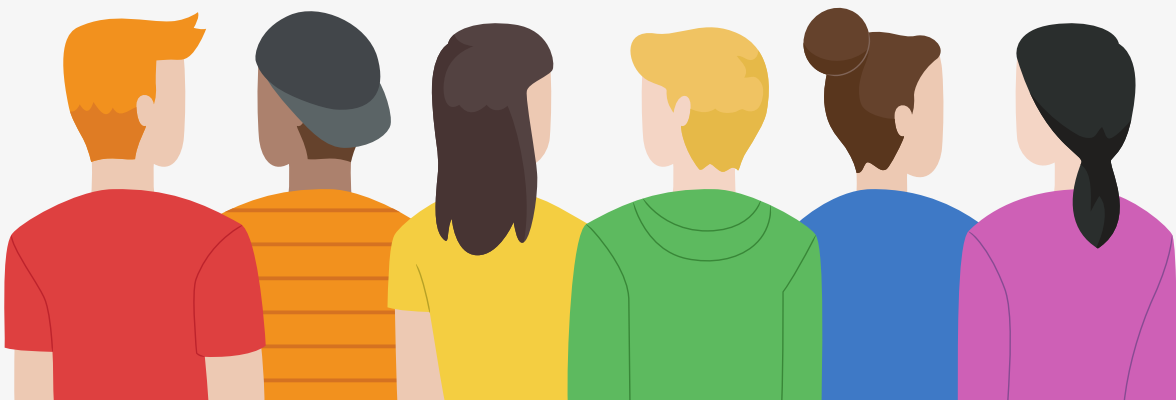
Here are some ways to get the best out of your freshers experience:

Join plenty of societies

Believe it or not, a society exists for almost every interest, with groups varying from those sharing niche hobbies, to sports teams to political groups and everything in-between. Joining one (or several!) is the best way to find people who have the same skills, interests and hobbies as you. It is also a great way to form friendships, acquaintances and networks beyond your course, improving your social life, employability and ensuring a seamless integration into university life.

Create your own

However outlandish or out-of-the-box your society idea, so long as there remain enough members wanting to sign up who are passionate about the idea, you can apply for funding from your student union to get it off the ground. This is an excellent way to utilise free time and gain skills such as project and people management, all whilst doing something you enjoy. Holding a senior position in a society also reflects excellently on your CV, so take advantage of an easy opportunity to develop your social life and career portfolio.



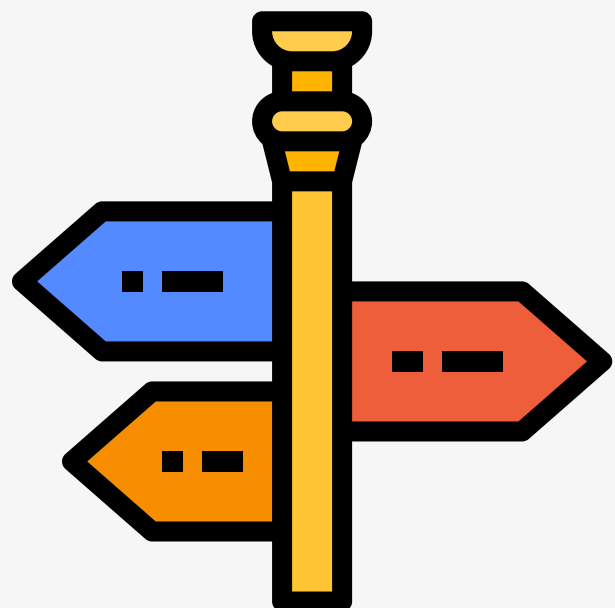
Utilise your Student Union

University student unions are often overlooked, under-appreciated and under-utilised. They are made up of reps elected by students and seek to improve a student's university experience by organising social events for a range of interests, but also directing you to facilities and support services available via your university that you may not be aware of exist.

More often than not, support services are available via the university or student union who are generally happy to set them up for you and others whom it may benefit. Some of these assistances are run by professional advisors who are independent of the University.

These include but are not limited to:

- Counselling and mental health services
- Academic skills guidance (inc. proofreading)
- Careers centre for assistance and work/volunteering opportunities
- Extenuating circumstances support
- Exam support
- Financial advice
- Disability support



Make sure to be well informed about the support services as you may require access to some over the course of your studies. As a University student, you are a consumer of education at your respective institution, so don't be frightened to ask for guidance, safe spaces and services that will aid your education. You won't be facilitated unless you respectfully ask.



Most importantly immerse yourself. Living outside of your comfort bubble is where the largest amount of learning and development of new skills takes place. The first week sets the tone for the rest of the year so look for new partnerships and opportunities at every chance and get stuck in!

NETWORKING

What is it?

The definition of networking is the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically, the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business. Networking not only allows for you to exchange information but it also leads to personal growth whereby you can implement in your day to day life.

Why Network?

A professional network can help support your career development and help you in your current role.



Listed below are reasons why networking is important:

• **Strengthen business connections** •

Networking is about sharing, not taking. It is about forming trust and helping one another toward goals. Regularly engaging with your contacts and finding opportunities to assist them helps to strengthen the relationship.

• **Get fresh ideas** •

Your network can be an excellent source of new perspectives and ideas to help you in your role. Exchanging information on challenges, experiences and goals is a key benefit of networking because it allows you to gain new insights that you may not have otherwise thought of.

• **Advance your career** •

Being visible and getting noticed is a benefit of networking that's essential in advancing your career.

• **Get access to job opportunities** •

Expanding your contacts can open doors to opportunities for business, career advancement, personal growth, or simply new knowledge. Active networking helps to keep you top of mind when opportunities such as job openings arise and increases your likelihood of receiving a referral.



• **Broaden your industry knowledge** •

Networking is a great opportunity to exchange best practice knowledge, learn about the business techniques of your peers and stay abreast of the latest industry developments. A wide network of informed, interconnected contacts means broader access to new and valuable information.

• **Get career advice and support** •

Gaining the advice of experienced peers is an important benefit of networking. Discussing common challenges and opportunities opens the door to valuable suggestions and guidance. Offering genuine assistance to your contacts also sets a strong foundation for receiving support in return when you need it.

• **Build your confidence** •

By continually putting yourself out there and meeting new people, you're effectively stepping outside your comfort zone and building invaluable social skills and self-confidence that you can take with you anywhere. The more you network, the more you'll grow and learn how to make lasting connections.

• **Develop personal relationships** •

Your networking contacts are probably like-minded people with similar goals as your own and some of the strongest and most long-standing friendships are borne from your network.



Find a job you love

Professional networking opens many doors in the form of career advice, lasting relationships and even landing your dream role.

You never know who might be hiring for your ideal job, or know someone who is, and the more people you have in your network, the likelier you are to be the first to know when those big job opportunities pop up.

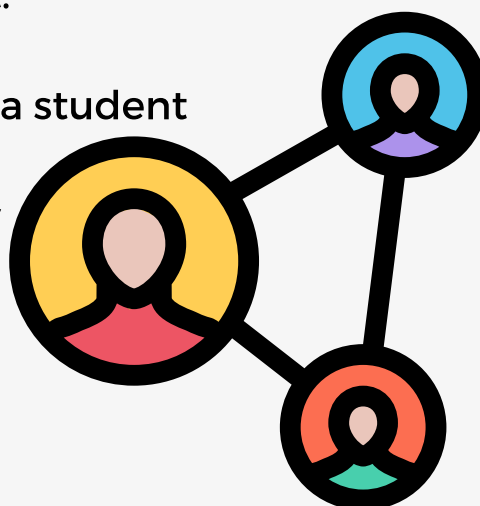
So how do you Network?

The key to networking is understanding how to be strategic and organised, being patient and understanding the options available to you will mean that you are better equipped when it comes to networking.

There is no one way to network - how you do it will depend on the circumstances at the time and on your own personality. Whichever approach you use, the basic principles remain the same - making contact with new people and looking to build and maintain a relationship with them is key.

These 4 areas can be your starting point:

- Online via Social media
- Student networking and network via student societies and career fairs
- Alumni networks via your university
- Sector specific professional bodies



Important points to remember:

1. Start networking before you think you need to
2. Forget your personal agenda – focus on the connection
3. Think about what YOU can bring to the relationships that you begin to forge (networking should be symbiotic)
4. Like any good relationship, it should be mutually beneficial.

A good contact will be:

- Interested in the long term connection, as well as the here and now
- Willing to offer and accept help and advice
- Able to demonstrate their skill, rather than making unsupported claims

The signs of a bad contact are:

- A lack of credibility.
- Asking for assistance too often without offering support in return
- Focusing only on their own needs.
- Being unwilling to explore possibilities.



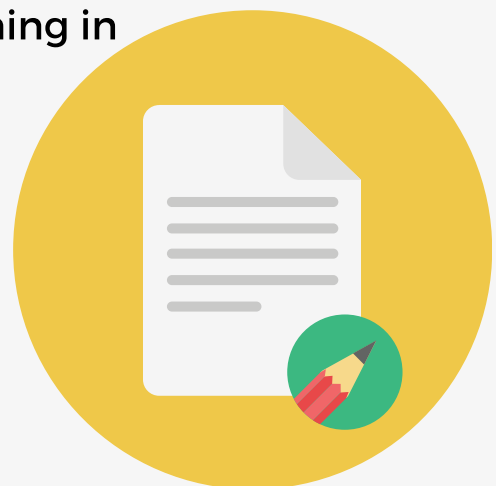
REVISING EFFECTIVELY

Everybody revises differently, and by now, as a sixth form or incoming university student, you most likely will have formed a specific revision style over your schooling years tailored to your needs. However, with the breadth and complexity of the content covered at university, some of these strategies utilised in the past can lose their efficacy.

So whether you study a STEM subject or a humanities, here are some generalised ideas to stick to at university to aid your revision:

Start early

Though this may seem like obvious advice, the benefits of starting assignments and projects early cannot be stressed enough. Organising your revision as early as possible helps identify tricky areas which may require more attention earlier on, allowing you to seek help well in advance of the due date. Sticking by this method helps avoid the stress of last-minute cramming and all-nighters which neither help you perform better in the exam nor solidify the learning in your long term memory.



Plan

The best way to go about planning your revision is to start by finding out your exam format. Being aware of the examination style - whether short written answers or essay questions - allows you to formulate your revision pattern to fit it. For instance, essay style questions may require more specific detailed knowledge of the syllabus, whereas short answer questions are often more generalised and demand a broader approach. Planning well also requires organising a schedule to fit all of the areas that will be covering as part of your revision, but also slotting in study breaks and time off to unwind and spend with friends and family.

Finding what works best for you

Exploring a range of revision techniques early on gives you the ability to gauge the best style to suit you and your exam format. Though you may have a fantastic understanding of the content within your module, if timing isn't your strong suit, or your exam technique isn't the best, your performance will reflect that. So practice several past papers under timed conditions to get your technique just right!

Most importantly, take care of your physical and mental wellbeing. Make sure to be eating healthily, engaging in regular physical activity and getting a good night's sleep to ensure you consistently perform at the optimum level.



BUDGETING AND FINANCE

Developing good budgeting habits early will make your University experience much smoother. Most students tend not to track their spending and can become stressed about their finances as a result.

Why do you need a budget?

- Students who develop a healthy relationship with money early and learn how to stick to savings goals and financial spending limits not only worry less about money, but also have a sum of money saved up for the future.
- Budgeting is a critical financial skill that helps to ensure that you are not spending money you do not have. Having a budget forces you to map out your goals and keep track of your progress.
- It helps you prepare for emergencies.
- Building a budget highlights bad spending habits by forcing you to take a look at where your money is going.



Fixed Costs (recurring costs that are a priority. In some cases, you may get a fine if you do not pay on time)

- Housing
- Books
- Utilities (gas, electricity, water)
- Transportation
- Savings
- Gym membership
- Mobile & internet costs
- Tuition Fees

Variable Costs (With these costs, it may be easier to make savings as you have more control over spending)

- Groceries
- Eating out
- Entertainment
- Clothing
- Prescription/Dental
- Laundry
- Personal care



How to budget?

Your outgoing expenses should always be the same as or less than your income

STEP 1: Add up your total student income - e.g:

- Student loans
- Salary from part-time job
- Contributions from parents or family
- Any savings and returns from investments

STEP 2: Calculate your monthly expenses e.g.:

- Any bills - utilities, phone, internet, etc.
- Accommodation
- Travel

STEP 3: Calculate your weekly budget:

(total income per semester - fixed expenses per semester) / number of weeks in a semester



Tips for saving money:

1. Take advantage of student discounts:

The National Union of Students (NUS) offers the TOTUM card for student discounts and proof of age. It comes with an app to keep on top of new offers and membership is just £14.99 per year. Free discount cards include StudentBeans and Unidays - both are mobile apps which make their money by connecting advertisers to students.

2. Save on travel:

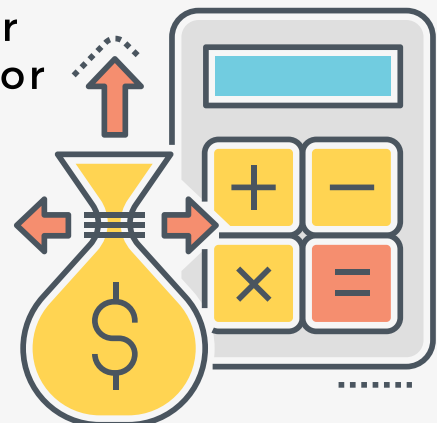
Take advantage of student discounts on travel. For example, if you take the train regularly, a 16-25 railcard will give you a third off all rail fares and will save you around £199 per year.

3. Get organised and meal prep:

Be smart with food shopping and do a “big shop” at the start of the week and reduce the number of takeaways. Better yet, try deleting apps like UberEats and Deliveroo from your phone to keep temptation at bay!

4. Use digital/second hand books

Not all books on reading lists at university are necessary to buy- they can be accessed for free via your university's online library or bought second-hand from Amazon or other online platforms.



MENTAL WELL-BEING

by

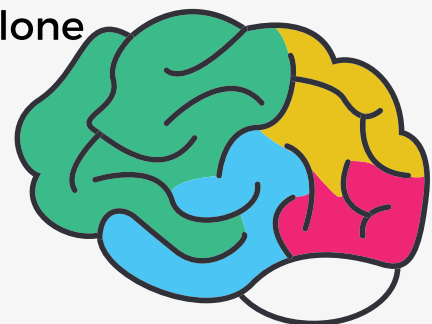


The well-known Somali proverb "Aqoonla'aan waa iftiin la'aan" translates as "Without knowledge there is no light" and in relation to mental health, being aware of how to keep a healthy mind can make a lifetime of a difference.

Mental health is the assessment how a person feels, behaves and thinks

Whilst at University, consider your mental state often to avoid burning out by taking active steps to make a resoundingly positive change. Higher education requires you to be almost completely independent and self-governing which can be challenging for us Somali students having been brought up to be dependent on our family for direction and motivation. It's important to be conscious of how our upbringing can impact on our university experience as you may feel that drive is missing without your family's presence.

So ask yourself, what is the reason I am studying this course? Take ownership for your time and studies and find your reason. As Somalis, expressing our emotions may be a foreign concept but it is necessary for speaking up for our needs. You are not alone in feeling isolated and alone so building a strong support system can help with alleviating this discomfort.



Some of the specific things that, as a student, make you more susceptible to mental health problems include:

- **Age** – a large proportion of students are under 25 and around three-quarters of adults with a mental illness have their first episode before turning 25.
- **Stress** – University can be a stressful experience. Although stress isn't a mental health problem, it can trigger mental health episodes
- **Lack of support** – you might have left home for the first time, or just don't have enough time to see your friends and family

The most common mental health conditions that disproportionately affect university students (Staff Writers, 2014):

Depression

A mood disorder that involves persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities. People experiencing depressive episodes may also experience mood swings, sleep disturbances, appetite changes, and systemic pains that have no apparent physical cause.

Anxiety

Everyone experiences anxiety from time to time. However, mounting, ongoing feelings of worry, tension, and panic that interfere with daily life render anxiety a medical condition. If you feel you may be depressed or anxious, it's a good idea to see your local GP as these conditions can be managed and treated before they exacerbate, often without resorting to medication.



Ways to maintain your mental wellbeing:

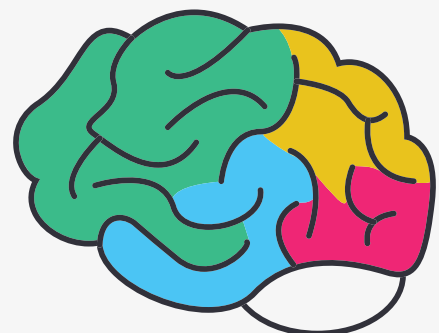
Space

Tailor your space to fit your needs. Segregation of space is very important. You do not want to muddle the lines between study space, entertainment space and living space.

Furthermore, living with strangers can sometimes illicit conflict. Go into these situations with an open mind, set your boundaries from the start, and try your best to understand and educate others about how you would like to live. It is also worth compromising on the little things to ensure that everyone is cohabiting happily. After all, it is your space too.

Self-Care

Balancing work and play is key to stabilising your wellbeing, so do something you enjoy, even if it's only for an hour a day. Furthermore, staying active is correlated to having stable mental health, so prioritise going for a walk or doing a short spell of strenuous activity each day. And remember, consistency is key!





Time

Plan. Plan. Plan. Structure your day in a way that makes sense to you. You don't want to find yourself rushing to do something or go somewhere. Develop a schedule early on and incentivise sticking to it. Taking a mental break when working on a task, can also boost your mood and productivity.

Seek Help



It's okay to ask for help. Services exist for you to utilise in times of need. They are there to support you. Avoid isolating yourself and make full use of them.

Culturally, asking for help appears 'weak' and is generally frowned upon in the Somali community, but bottling up overwhelming feelings of sadness, regret, and/or shame is extremely self destructive. Confide in someone that you trust, anyone. Whether that be via university counselling services or an anonymous hotline, open yourself up to a safe space.



Immerse yourself

Take time to fully absorb the university atmosphere. University life is unlike anything you will experience in life. There is so much to explore and learn. Be confident, be brave, be proud and be you. Yes, you! Keep trying - there's light at the end of every tunnel.

PRACTISING DEEN

by



Transitioning into university life can be a massive change. Initially we tend to feel rather lost and not exactly how to navigate the multiple obstacles. However, life isn't simply about getting a degree, but an opportunity to develop as a confident Muslim.

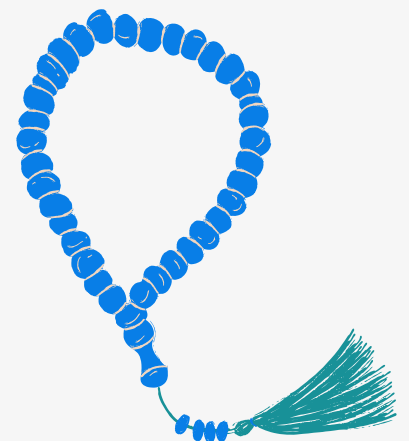
Here are 3 crucial tips to maintaining your deen whilst at uni:

RECOGNISE YOUR BLESSINGS

As Muslims, it isn't that farfetched to start with recognising our blessings. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) offered us some timeless advice, which is particularly pertinent to ourselves as university students.

"Take benefit of five before five: your youth before your old age; your health before your sickness; your wealth before your poverty; your free-time before your preoccupation; and your life before your death."

At university, it's our youth, health, wealth, free time and life that we must seize and succeed with.



BE A TRUE EXAMPLE OF A MUSLIM

Wherever you may be, it is a duty as a Muslim to have good manners and treat everyone with kindness, respect and mercy. In a hadith the Prophet said:

"Nothing is weightier on the Scale of Deeds than one's good manners" (Bukhari).

A Muslim can't be considered a true Muslim if they perform all kinds of worship (i.e. prayer, fast, zakat, pilgrimage etc) in the best way but neglect good manners when dealing with others.

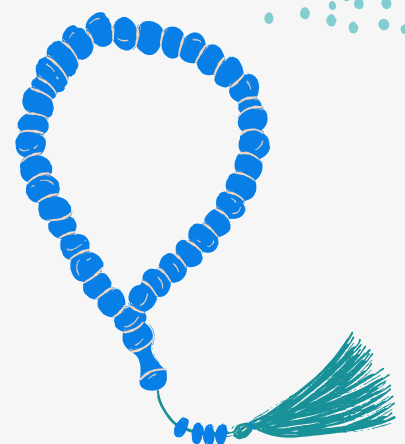
JOIN YOUR ISOC

Your university will have an Islamic Society (or ISOC) which is there to cater for the holistic needs of Muslim students - a place to make friends, to have fun and strengthen your relationship with Allah (swt). Always recall the saying of the Prophet:

"A person is upon the religion of his close friend, so beware whom you befriend" [At-Tirmithi].

Last but not least, be consistent with your prayers and Allah will make you successful. How often do we complain about the delay of good coming our way?

"It is feared for a person that if he makes a habit in delaying his acts of worship, then Allah will test him by delaying everything that is good for him" [Ibn al-'Uthaymeen (rahimahullah), Majmoo' al-Fataawa]



Duas

Studying

اللَّهُمَّ اِنْفَعْنِي بِمَا عَلَّمْتَنِي وَ عَلَّمْنِي مَا يَنْفَعُنِي

“ALLAHUMMA INFA’NII BIMAA ‘ALLAMTANII WA’ALLIMNII MAA YANFA’UUNII.”

Oh Allah! Make useful for me what you have taught me and teach me knowledge that will be useful to me.

Overcoming difficulty

اللَّهُمَّ لَا سَهْلًا إِلَّا مَا جَعَلْتَهُ سَهْلًا وَأَنْتَ تَجْعَلُ الْحَزْنَ إِذَا شِئْتَ سَهْلًا

“ALLÂHUMMA LÂ SAHLA ILLÂ MÂ JA’ALTAHU SAHLÂ WA ANTA TAJ’ALU AL-HAZANA IDHÂ SHI’TA SAHLÂ.”

Oh Allah! Nothing is easy except what You have made easy. If You wish, You can make the difficult easy.

Concentration

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ يَا مُذَكِّرَ الْخَيْرِ وَفَاعِلَهُ وَالْأَمْرَ بِهِ ذَكِّرْنِي مَا أَنْسَانِي الشَّيْطَانُ

“ALLAHUMMA INNI AS’ALUKA YAA MUDHAKKIRA-L KHAYR WA FAA’ILAHU WA-L-AAMIRA BIHI DHAKIR-NI MAA ANSAANI-HI-SHAYTAN.”

Oh Allah! I ask you, the one who mentions goodness and actualises it and commands it, remind me of that which the shaytan makes me forget.

Quick and easy recipes

Many of us go into university with little to no cooking skills or understanding of what a nutritious meal comprises of. More often than not, we resort to unhealthy takeouts and restaurant meals, ultimately resulting in our health and wallets and taking the biggest hits.

Nafiso, a mental health PhD student and part-time food blogger helpfully compiles a couple of convenient, affordable and delectable meals specifically tailored for the average university student to show cooking doesn't have to be expensive and time consuming, but can be delicious and swift.



 @nafisoskitchen

Heavenly Granola

Ingredients

- 4 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 ½ cup raw nuts and/or seeds (I used 1 cup walnuts and ½ unsalted peanuts. Other options include pecans, almonds, cashews, macadamia nuts and sunflower seeds)
- 1 teaspoon crushed sea salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ cup olive oil (or melted coconut oil)
- ½ cup honey (or maple syrup)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅔ cup raisins (or other dried fruit, chop if large)

Method

1. Preheat oven to 180C, fan 160C, gas 4.
2. Mix all dry ingredients in a bowl (apart from dried fruit).
3. Add oil, honey and vanilla extract and mix until combined.
4. Tip granola onto pan lined with parchment paper, push down with large spoon to form an even layer.
5. Bake until golden, about 21-24 minutes.
6. Let the granola completely cool for at least 45mins to allow time for it to stick and harden, top with dried raisins or fruit



Succulent lemon and herb Chicken

Ingredients

- 8 (3 ounces) skinless, boneless chicken thighs
- Zest of 3 lemons
- Juice of one lemon
- 1 tbs paprika
- 1 tbs Italian herbs
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp chilli flakes
- 1 tbs coriander and cumin powder
- Minced garlic (3-4 cloves)
- Crushed salt and pepper
- Olive oil

Method

1. Season the chicken thighs with salt and pepper
2. In a large bowl, combine olive oil, lemon zest, lemon juice, paprika,
3. Italian herb, turmeric, chilli flakes, coriander powder, cumin powder and
4. minced garlic
5. Add the chicken to the marinade and toss.
6. Leave to marinate in fridge, cover with cling film, for at least 30 mins. Overnight is best.
7. Preheat oven to 200°C/ fan180°C/Gas 6
8. Line the chicken on a baking sheet.
9. Bake for 25 mins covered with foil
10. Remove foil and baste chicken with juices and add lemon slices
11. Bake for a further 10-15 mins uncovered, garnish with coriander leaves

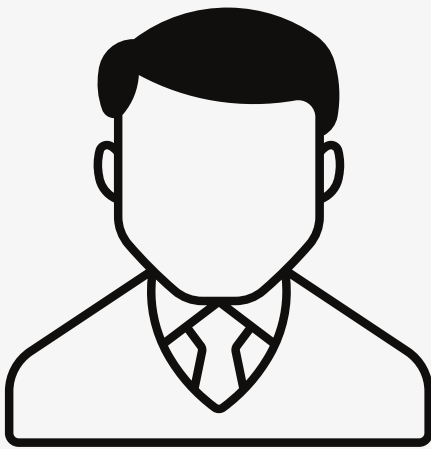
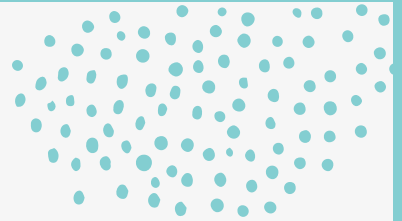




ADVICE FROM FORMER UNDERGRAD STUDENTS



Some general advice...



**Zakariya Yusuf -
Associate in
Technology, Data &
Analytics division @ PwC**



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My advice would be to work incredibly hard, in particular, during your second year as the grades you attain here are used for predictions of your final year grade which is what your prospective employers will look at. I would also suggest seeking to complete an internship at the end of your second year if this option for your degree is available. Furthermore, make sure to practice extensively for exams, interviews and TAKE TIME when it comes to completing online application forms. Many people make the mistake of ping-ponging off CVs and cover letters without much thought and hence miss out on great opportunities.

Above all, my advice would be to make a lot of du'a' to Allah - nothing can be attained without His help, but we must also come with effort. I ask Allah to make your journey at university beneficial, protect you from fitnah and to give you success in this life and the next.

Ameen.

”



For those wanting to pursue a career in mental health...



Bushra Ismail, 2nd year Ph.D. student in Counseling Psychology

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The most significant piece of advice I have for pursuing a career in the mental health field is to identify mentors and other students who have similar interests early on. I struggled to feel connected to the field because I did not know anyone else who was applying to programs or was already licensed.

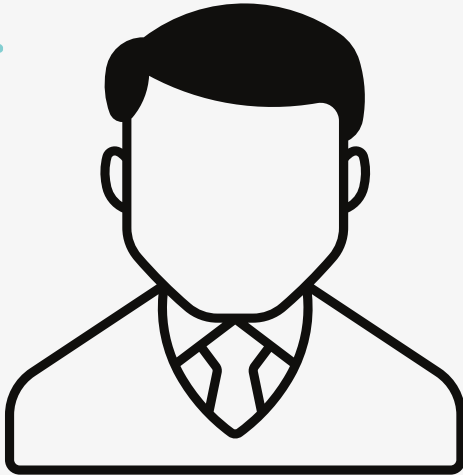
Be bold and reach out.

People are a lot more willing to speak with you than you would expect. It is also okay to change your mind about exactly which degree you would like to pursue.

Fortunately, the path is not set in stone and there are various routes to becoming a therapist.

”

For those considering a career in tech...



**Mohamed
Warsame -
Data scientist**

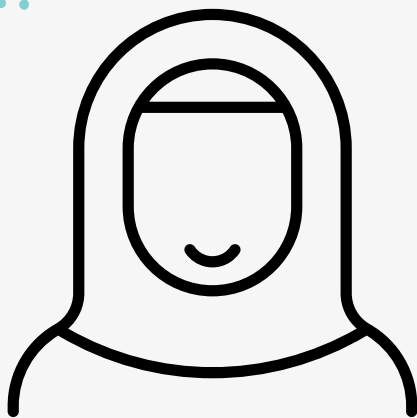
— “

A data scientist should be able to understand a business context, formulate it in a problem setting and subsequently propose a technical solution that meets requirements. Reading all of these difficult prerequisites is probably like swallowing a huge pill that looks as though one would surely suffocate from it. I know, I know, I've been there before. Had I listened to the sheer endless list of requirements to enter the field of data science, I wouldn't have even considered it. But let me tell you one thing, the prerequisites and skill requirements sound a lot more complex than they actually are. You don't have to be an expert as an entry level candidate. Although it is true that a higher degree in a quantitative subject gives you an advantage, you can also supplement a non-technical degree with a coding bootcamp. What matters most in the data science world is a strong portfolio of projects that you present in your Github account (an online source code management platform). Besides that, the most important advice I can give in breaking in is the "hands-on" approach. Don't waste too much time learning theory besides core maths skills such as linear algebra, foundational statistics and calculus. Pick a programming language, download a dataset online and follow coding bootcamps in their application of data science techniques. Develop hands-on experience and showcase your results online!

— ” —

For budding technology consultants...

“If you’re interested in career within Technology Consulting, I would recommend networking with intent. If you know what area you’d like to work in, reach out to recruiters, management, colleagues and friends and build a network for yourself. You can start off with an email with your CV attached but try and take the time to make meaningful applications with roles that interest you and don’t just make applications a numbers game. Also, during your time at university try and use your downtime wisely and get some experience in an internship or placement. At a lot of the firms it is usually paid so, you can get a real insight to what the working world is really like.”



**Sainab Guleed – Client
Delivery Associate at
Accenture**

And finally, for those considering undertaking a PhD in the future...



Halan, PhD Chemical engineering

“PhDs can be a fulfilling experience of contributing to cutting-edge research. I say “can” because your individual experience depends on your choice of topic, supervisor and research group. I want to extend this advice to include your reasons for pursuing a PhD and where you see it fitting into your career aspirations. While that Dr title is tempting, wanting a fancy title is not a good enough reason to do a PhD. Having a clear reason for why you began one can help you reframe difficulties you may experience. No one is a psychic so knowing exactly where that PhD will take you is impossible. However, having an idea of how you see it fitting into your career aspirations is a two for one deal. Not only can it help you choose a topic to get you where you’re going, but it can also act as a source of motivation during your PhD.”

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