

Information for new mature- aged students

New Mature-Aged Students sometimes feel somewhat daunted in beginning university. So...let's look at a few basic facts:

- Students aged 25 or over are about 30% of the undergraduate population at Curtin. So – anyone who looks a little older is not necessarily a staff member. It could be another student just like you.
- Students aged 25 or over are more likely to be enrolled part-time than those under 25. This means older students tend to disappear from campus unless they actually have classes.
- Entering university well after school leaving age is a very common thing. But because you don't enter the University as a cohort like school leavers, you can feel a little alone.

There are also some very common concerns for new students:

The following are some examples. If you are worried about any of these - you are quite normal!

"I'm a fraud - there must be some mistake about why they let me in"

This is a very common worry. Often, older students have used a non-standard entry process – and there is a suspicion that you might have somehow "slipped in". This is not so. If the University has allowed you to begin your course, then the University believes you have the ability to pass it.

"No-one else comes to university at my advanced age"

As we have seen with the above facts, this is not so. In fact, it is no longer unusual for people to enter university and change career paths more than once in their lives.

"School-leavers seem so young and so very competent/confident" (Or else "School-leavers seem so naïve and air-headed")

Oddly, school-leavers also have their stereotyped views of older students – either seeing you as infinitely full of wisdom and life experience or hopelessly old-fashioned fuddy-duddies. None of these are true. People are just people, with different qualities and different things to contribute.

"How am I going to balance study with all the other demands on my time?"

This is a very good question indeed. Successful mature-aged students are often pretty ruthless with time management. They set clear study goals, use whatever scraps of time that are available – and most amazingly, they study even when they don't feel like it.

“How do I find... (name any campus location in this blank space)”

Everyone gets lost at first. Sometimes new students do not get from the car park to classroom. Within a short time, you will find all the locations that you actually need to know about. The multitude of other classrooms, labs etc. won't matter.

“The library seems huge and very complicated.”

Yes it does. But the library offers a range of tours. And the staff are immensely helpful in advising new students on how to use their resources. Pay them a visit and/or have a look at their web site at <http://library.curtin.edu.au/>

“How will my partner and/or kids cope with me studying?”

The time you'll spend on being a student has to come from somewhere. And sometimes, that it time that you used to do things with or for your partner and/or children. It's important to discuss this with others in your family so that they are aware that you not only will need to attend classes but also will need unmolested study time.

“The idea of doing assignments scares the pants off me and I have not got a clue what standard of work is expected of me.”

Before we begin a course, none of us know exactly what is required. Your lecturers are approachable on this. And you can get some excellent help on how to study effectively from Student Learning Support – see their web information at <http://learningsupport.curtin.edu.au/>

“Computers? I have trouble enough fixing the digital clock after a power failure.”

Students arrive with a wide variety of IT experience. PC Champs is a support program designed to help students who have had little exposure to the use of computers. See further information at http://cv.curtin.edu.au/programs/pc_champs.cfm

“What is the meaning of all the jargon words that lecturers spout all the time?”

Hmmm. You go into a lecturer, and come out feeling like a foreign language has been used for the past hour. You do need to make sure you develop a knowledge of the technical terms used in your discipline – and often your understanding lags a couple of weeks behind what is being taught in class.

“This is costing me an arm and a leg. I really hope I don't mess it up.”

Fear and despair is behind this one. Many new students are very conscious that university education is not free. If anxiety is really getting in the way of your studies, you might find it is useful to speak to one of the counsellors at the University Counselling Service – see further details at <http://counselling.curtin.edu.au/>

“I don't know anybody here.”

And neither does anyone else much at first. It is really useful to make a few friends and colleagues in your course. Research shows that students who form at least one good relationship at Uni are likely to be more successful. So...make the effort to

introduce yourself; have a coffee with someone. Try to make contact with other new mature-aged students. Developing a support group can be a critical factor in being successful. Maybe – if you have time – even get involved in some extracurricular activities or volunteer programs.

So - what can you do to make a good adjustment to university?

A few tips –

- There will be "up" times and "down" times. Sometimes you will be optimistic and right on top of things. Others times, you may feel anxious and wonder why you ever entered university.
- Keep your expectations realistic. Students are fallible and are going through a time of transition. You probably won't get a distinction for every assignment.
- Problems are OK. Students learn through having to solve problems. Failing to face up to problems is a bigger problem than the problems are in the first place.
- University is full of sources of help. One of best pieces of advice a new student can have is to seek out the help available
- Get into the library early and learn how to use it.
- Ensure you know the requirements of the units you have enrolled in. *Every* unit supplies you with an outline of its objectives and assessment structure.
- If you are unsure about how to study effectively, there are many printed, audio-visual and internet sources which provide very useful information on how to study effectively at university level.
- If you experience problems of any sort - study, physical/health, conflict, disability, career, personal - recognise it as soon as possible, and take steps to deal with it. A good starting point if you are unsure how to address a difficulty is to make contact with the Counselling Service.