

TOWARD INDEPENDENT LEARNING

Study Support Services

Welcome to Monash University. If you are beginning your first year of university study, you may, like many of your classmates, be uncertain about what you will find. This paper will tell you something about how the University Counselling Service helps students to develop effective approaches to studying at university.

In some important ways tertiary study is likely to differ from your earlier school experience. Maybe you are convinced that nothing could ever be as demanding as Year Twelve! There will probably be fewer assignments, more unscheduled time, and less individual guidance from your teachers. You may be wondering how well your study methods and communication skills will be suited to your new academic work.

Fortunately, most students adapt well and enjoy the increased independence that they find at university. For some students, however, the transition is more difficult, and they may experience a loss of self-esteem and motivation. This may be accompanied by a sense of alienation from the institution, the staff, and fellow students.

Why do some students, in spite of qualifying for university, fail to fulfil their academic potential? Why are some students disenchanting and disappointed with their tertiary experience, and fail to find the motivation needed for independent learning?

Clearly, there are no simple answers to these questions. It is very difficult to draw conclusions about cause and effect. However, some “truths” do emerge from the available research-based literature about student performance. At the University Counselling Service we believe that these observations have important implications for students, and they serve as guides to our development of study-related services. These truths arise from the basic observation that study skills and personality factors interact in complex ways as a student meets increasing requirements for independent learning.

The term “skill” is not a very apt term for the ability to study, because it suggests that there is a prescribed best way to study, and therefore there should be a good manual showing the steps to follow. In this sense the term is an oversimplification. We use the term “study skills” in a very broad sense, to indicate those attitudes, methods, strategies, and behaviours with which a student approaches his or her academic education.

Although effective study methods vary from one student to another, these are some “truths” about effective study skills for university students:¹

Success is related to amount of time spent studying. High achievers tend to be systematic, regular in studying. They:

¹ Adapted from Main, Alex (1980). Encouraging Effective Learning: an approach to study counselling. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

- **attend lectures and tutorials**
- **know how to use library facilities**
- **have a positive attitude toward their course and institution**
- **prepare for classes**
- **enjoy their studies**
- **tend not to procrastinate excessively but do work better when “pushed”**
- **take time for rest, relaxation, and socialisation.**

Developing one’s own effective methods of study seems to depend on such personality factors as the following:

- **curiosity**
- **sense of purpose**
- **intrinsic interest in the subject**
- **mature attitude, as shown in:**
 - *ability to delay gratification*
 - *tolerance for discomfort*
 - *ability to accept responsibility*
 - *flexibility in the face of flawed conditions*
 - *self-analytic approach to studying*
 - *self-discipline*
 - *ability to develop a balanced life-style*

Study skills programs at the University Counselling Service aim to assist students in developing their own personal approach to effective study. We see students individually, and group sessions are offered at some times during the year. In individual counselling we encourage students to think about their own particular needs, keeping in mind that their own experience provides a useful guide to their best study methods. When personal problems tend to interfere with ability to focus on academic subjects, we explore with a student some ways to resolve these issues. Our group programs address the topics which are most often raised when students come to discuss their concerns about study.

For details about current programs, please enquire at the Counselling Service, pick up our information sheets, or see our Web site. To discuss ways to meet your particular needs, make an appointment to see a counsellor, who will be pleased to help you to develop your own effective strategies for independent learning.

