

Week Zero

[00:00:12] Sid

G'day, welcome to Western Sydney University. I'm Sid Sharma and I've got things every student should know. Look I've been there not so long ago, I started at a new University as well and I didn't know anyone there. I didn't know where to find help and hey, I didn't even know how to get to my classrooms, but it doesn't always need to be hard. Sometimes all you need is someone to help you find your feet. So over the next few weeks, I'm going to show you how to make the most of your time at WSU.

You'll hear about the best places to grab food on campus, as well as cool places to hang out all around Sydney. And yes, you will get to explore the Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge too, but before we get to all of that you've got to do a bit of what we call Life admin or adulting, basically all the tasks to make sure that you're ready to start class. So let's get to it.

[00:01:08]

Number one.

Get your admin sorted. So you've arrived at WSU, now it's time to get ready for class. To start off, you want to make sure that you've got all of your admin sorted and you've enrolled in your classes for the semester, and to help guide you through I'm sitting here with Pete Hilt. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

[00:01:30]

Yeah so, I'm a Bachelor of Business and Commerce student in my third year but I also work in the course information team, so we assist students with enrolment and that kind of thing. So I've been through this process personally and I help people out all the time, with enrolment and just start getting ready for Uni.

[00:01:48] Sid

So you know everything there is about admin.

[00:01:50] Pete

I'd like to think so, yeah.

[00:01:51] Sid

So look, tell me a little about enrolment. How would I confirm my enrolment first of all?

[00:01:56] Pete

Yep, so the process itself is pretty simple. It's just knowing exactly where you need to go. So, every student has an account on their My Student Records, which can easily be found on the University's website, and you can also get links through your Student email as well. Once you log into there, you complete four steps, and the fourth step of that enrolment process is when you select your units and it's quite clear when you've chosen your units there, that you can see a status and it will say against each unit 'enrolled'.

[00:02:25] Sid

And how would someone go about accessing their Student Email, for instance? For anyone who doesn't know how.

[00:02:31] Pete

Yeah, so if you just went to Google Search and went Western Sydney University, went to the homepage and on the top right hand corner of that website, you'll see a little 'sign-in' to and that has a drop down with Students and there will be an email, my Student Records account, a vUWS account - which is where you access your classes. It's everything you need is just there.

[00:02:51] Sid

From enrolment, how would one go about making their timetable?

[00:02:54] Pete

So once you're confirmed that enrolment is complete and that status bar does say enrolled, you'd want to log into something called Allocate Plus, which is where every student one - selects preferences for their timetable and then when the timetables are published they can make their changes from there. The dates for those at the moment you would have definitely wanted to select the preferences for your classes and you are now able to actually move into the classes and make the changes depending on when you're free or when you have work and that kind of thing, to make it best work for you.

[00:03:24] Sid

Do you have any tips on someone looking to make a timetable that works around their engagements?

[00:03:29] Pete

Yeah, definitely. So, usually when first timetables are published, it's never the timetable you want, but people are constantly churning through classes. So you just want to make sure you're logging in every day, every afternoon, whenever you have time to see if availability comes up in a class and moving around based on where people have left the class and really trying to work a timetable so you have as many free days as possible.

[00:03:54] Sid

Yeah, right so stay on top of it. Check it every day, that kind of thing. Ok that sounds really cool. And so look, now that I've enrolled, I've got my timetable done, where do I go to get my student card?

[00:04:05] Pete

Yeah, cool so you don't actually have to go anywhere, which is the awesome thing about it. You can do it all online. So through either My Student Records account, which we spoke about earlier, you can make your student account through Capture Me process and you take the photo yourself, you send it off to our Student Services team, and then you can pick up your card next time you're on campus. It's really easy.

[00:04:27] Sid

Awesome, well hey Pete thanks so much for having a chat with me.

[00:04:30] Pete

Not a problem, anytime.

[00:04:37] Sid

Number Two. What your responsibilities are now you're a student. This part of the podcast is definitely important, because now you're an international student and there are certain expectations of you. From WSU and from the Australian Government as well. To talk you through them, I'm having a chat to Seon and Rhiannon, they are from the Student Welfare Service.

[00:04:56] Seon

Hi everyone, my name is Seon - I work in Student Welfare Service as an International Student Welfare Coordinator.

[00:05:06] Rhiannon

And I'm Rhiannon, I also work in the Student welfare service as a student welfare officer.

[00:05:12] Sid

So Seon, what are some of the expectations that WSU has for its international students?

[00:05:17] Seon

There are a lot of expectations, but one of them would be the University wants students to check their student emails on a regular basis. Only because that's the main channel that we communicate with the students. So over the coming weeks, maybe students can take some time to be more comfortable with their student email and handbook or My Student Record and after they have enrolled, they can also get familiarised with accessing vUWS, which is student system they use. So another good starting point is navigating our website. There's also a help button on top of the website, which has many answers to frequently asked questions.

[00:05:57] Sid

And Rhiannon, tell me a little bit about what the Australian Government requires of international students, who are here on the student visa.

[00:06:04] Rhiannaon

So, there are a lot of requirements that the government has for students on a student visa. The main one being that a student enrolls each semester in a full time study load. It's also important for students to keep in mind that the government expects them to maintain a satisfactory progression in their academic studies so that they complete their course by the expected date. If for whatever reason a student can't enrol in full time study, or something unexpected pops up, it's really important for them to come and speak to the Student Welfare Service, to get assistance and direction on what to do in their situation. We also know that international students may face a lot of academic related challenges and adjusting to University life in Australia. So we have a number of support programs that are free for students to access. For instance, they can access study smart, which is a free assignment and study help service. Students can access this through the Library, face to face or online and even get help with developing their referencing and how to start an assessment.

[00:07:06] Sid

Number three. Get social. The first few weeks of Uni are such a great time to meet new people. Everyone's in the same boat, just looking to make some friends. And it's a great opportunity to build your social network in a new country, as Seon explains.

[00:07:25] Seon

Because students are coming from overseas and away from their own support network, it's really important for students to set up their new support network as early as possible. At the very beginning, students' concern, students' focus is on their enrolment, so in the first couple of weeks of session, that's all their focus. But they don't really understand the importance of having friends and setting up new network. When they go through tough times during their time here, having the support network is really crucial. Because a lot of international students prefer to talk to their peers than staff members at University.

[00:08:10] Sid

How would you say that an international student should go about making their social connections at WSU?

[00:08:17] Seon

As an international student, we have an international student orientation which is compulsory, so it's a big day. There's a lot of information, hundreds of students and staff members on the day, so it may not be possible to make deep connections on the day, but it's still a really good opportunity to meet other students who will be studying with you. After the orientation, there are also lots of events the University has on campus and off campus, so there are lots of opportunities. One of the social events that I organise with Chaplaincy is Sunday outings. We take new international students to a couple of places in Sydney to explore the landscape but also give them an opportunity to make friendships, especially for those students who are really shy, because what we do on the event is to give them activities and icebreakers because some students told us they don't know what to say after "hello". So it's nice conversation starter.

[00:09:19] Sid

Yeah, it's funny, just a personal anecdote. I went to a University club the other day that I'd never ever been to and I'd been putting it off for 3 years now, cause I was like 'everyone will already know each other there, I'll be there by myself' and then you go and actually everyone there is expecting new students. They are expecting people to come for the first time and they are really open and receptive to that.

[00:09:43] Seon

That's right.

[00:09:43] Sid

That's not what we as students think about all the time, but that's what it's like.

[00:09:47] Rhiannon

Clubs are so great and true point, because you're joining a club based on your interests, so when you turn up there, you're already have something in common with everyone else in the room. So you have a really easy starting off point to making friendships and making connections that isn't as hard as it is to just walk up to someone in a classroom and have a discussion.

Another way that students can form that engagement is through programs such as MATES. So MATES is a peer-assisted mentoring program, where Western Sydney students become mentors for incoming Western students and it's set up as a way for students to maybe ask those questions that they wouldn't feel comfortable going to a staff member with, or having someone who's been through a similar experience that they are currently going through and just giving them a bit of advice, a bit of direction.

[00:10:48] Seon

And if you would like to continue developing your spoken English, we have lots of services and programs. One of them is English Conversation Groups. It helps students practice their spoken English in a fun and supportive environment and we use our students who are in a particular course to facilitate those conversation groups. So it's a great opportunity to practise your English, but also make friendships with other students from other countries.

[00:11:12] Rhiannon

And you'll learn some new slang!

[00:11:15] Sid

That's really important.

[00:11:22] Sid

Number four. If you're struggling, here's where to go for help.

[00:11:26] Rhiannon

So Western Sydney provides free and confidential counselling, disability and welfare services. So those are a great place to start with all those unexpected bumps that pop up in a students' journey through University, whether it's directly relating to their academic life or to their personal life.

[00:11:43] Seon

There are a lot of common fears and hopes that students have, and hopes and fears are like a piece of paper, one side is hope and the other side is fear. So their fears of failing in their degree is their hope in succeeding in their study as well. So all the opportunities and support services at University is here for students to take advantage of and if they do take advantage of our services, we can help them turn their fears into their hopes. It's okay to ask for help and it's actually better to ask for help as early as possible, if you come and speak to us earlier, there might be more options that we can provide for you.

[00:12:24] Sid

How would we go about finding more on student welfare and your department?

[00:12:28] Rhiannon

So, Student Welfare has a presence on almost all campuses at Western Sydney so students can phone us, drop in or send us an email. Our contact details are listed on the website if students just want to search 'student welfare' in the search box.

[00:12:47] Sid

Number five. Check out the Library.

Wherever your main campus is, your student card gives you access to the Library. Bankstown, Campbelltown, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Nirimba, Parramatta, Penrith all have a space where you can study and access help from the Librarians. To find out more, I spoke to Karen. She's one of the Librarians at WSU.

[00:13:13] Karen

Hi, I'm the Librarian at Parramatta City campus. So we service mostly the School of Business in 1PCC vertical campus and also the students at 100 George Street, which is the international college.

[00:13:24] Sid

So, tell me a little bit about the Library system at WSU. What exactly is it?

[00:13:29] Karen

The Library is the jewel in the crown of University life, really! It is the building where you're always welcome, it really feels like that's where you touch base with your studies. Much more than the physical collection, the stacks and the computers that you have access to and the

books, is the electronic resources that are behind the Library system altogether and the support that goes with helping you succeed in your studies.

[00:14:02] Sid

So when people think of Libraries, they think of books and shelves and all the physical elements of it, but the Library is so much more than that, as you said. Why don't you tell me a little bit about the digital service that the Library offers for students?

[00:14:13] Karen

One of the key services that the Library got going is the free digital textbooks for first year students. So you've got 100% free access to your prescribed textbook for your subject as a first year student. So there's none of that weight of carrying the book around, there's none of that expectation of also of having to spend a fortune on your textbooks. They are all provided free to you, as a first year student. It takes a lot of the financial burden off you. On top of that, there's also the digital resources the Library has. We subscribe to over 30 million resources, journal articles, online databases, industry databases as well and subject specific electronic resources. So for Business, we're talking about access to company and financial data and so on.

[00:14:58] Sid

Look, when it comes to international students, how would they make the most of the Libraries at WSU?

[00:15:05] Karen

The best part about the Library is that it is a very safe space for all students to come to. It's air conditioned, we have a study hall system that operates some nights, so you have 24 hours access to the building. There's a security guard, the lights are on, the air conditioning is on, and you can study there safely. So, for international students in particular, if they're living in shared accommodation, or something like that and they are not happy and they don't have the right study environment where they are - maybe it's too crowded, it's too noisy, the Library is always there. You can come in, you swipe in with your card access, you can stay there all night and the security guard will look out for you, it's perfectly safe, especially for females if they are worried about being out late at night. Also, the expectations of the Library have changed, we don't do a lot of shushing. You know, you can be there with your friends, it's quite a vibrant space, there's group study areas, there's rooms where you can close the door and you can make a certain amount of noise without bothering other Library patrons as well.

[00:16:07] Sid

I also hear that the WSU Libraries have something called sleeping pods in them?

[00:16:12] Karen

Yes, cause we recognise studying is hard, especially at certain times of the year, it's exhausting! And there is a sleeping pod that you can actually close the door on. It's like a great big lounge chair. You close the door, it has a vibrating function, it has a meditation music function. Nice 20 minutes and then you're out. They are always in really good spots in the Library too, they are not in heavily trafficked areas. So if you're studying, you can put your books away and go and have a quick little refresh.

[00:16:38] Sid

Yeah, it's like a relaxation moment in there.

[00:16:40] Karen

There's beanbags, there's lounge chairs as well, you know there's all kinds of spaces where you're welcome to spread out.

[00:16:45] Sid

Well thanks for joining us, Karen.

[00:16:46] Karen

Thanks very much! Thanks for having me.

[00:16:53] Sid

Thanks for listening! Make sure you subscribe and check out the other episodes. If you have any more questions, head to westernsydney.edu.au. I'm Sid Sharma, see you soon.