



# Key Findings for New University Students

## First in Family: Students Entering University From School

### MAKING NEW FRIENDS AND NETWORKS MAY BE IMPORTANT TO YOUR SUCCESS

School leaver FiF students do not have family members who can help them understand what to expect from university and are more likely than non-FiF students to have made their decision to go to university based on talking with school teachers, careers counsellors and/or the University staff.

These students are less likely to have friends attending the same university than non-FiF students, and are less likely to consider that the information they got from friends accurately reflects what university life will be like.

All FiF students we spoke to identified that developing networks with other students was really important for their ongoing academic success

*“I think university clubs and societies are a really useful place to meet people, make friends, talk to students from other disciplines and gain lifelong skills along the way. This really helps to ground expectations.”*

### What does this mean for you?

**It's time to make new friends and find new support networks!:** Some students find a sympathetic tutor/lecturer or ask other students to help them understand what is required. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

**Develop peer networks:** students found having the support of fellow students and friends crucial. Participate in unions, clubs, and activities and make the effort to make new friends. If your course or university has a peer mentoring scheme – join in if you can!

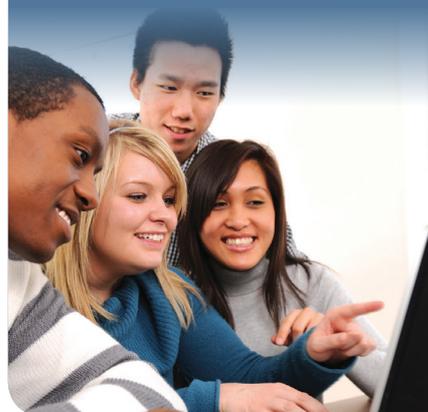
*“Friendships mean a lot, I feel it's important to form friendships in the first year and gaining a friendship group of close buddies really helped. I don't know what I would have done without them.”*

### IT TAKES TIME TO ADJUST

We know that FiF students are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed, but more school leaver FiF students find university very different from school and consider that secondary education did not adequately prepare them for university study.

### BACKGROUND

- FiF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FiF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FiF students.
- Students who are the first member in their family (FiF) to attend university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is to be expected of them.



FiF students often struggle to make the transition to being a student and may initially feel like they don't fit in. They also tend to neglect their own health and wellbeing as they struggle to juggle their study and other responsibilities.

*"Initially I struggled because I couldn't find a 'healthy' balance between my employment, spending time with friends, eating healthy, study and exercise.*

*After the first term I started to learn you have to say 'no' to your friends at times and remember your priorities. Attending as many lectures and tutorials as possible was also important."*

### What does that mean for you?

**Inform yourself:** Find out as much as you can about university before you start by attending Open Days, Orientation week, information and study sessions. Also research about potential careers and availability of jobs both online and through talking with careers counsellors.

**Give yourself time:** Most FiF students find the first six-months to a year the hardest, but once settled in go on to be highly successful students.

*"Uni is tough but worth it, the first couple of weeks are the hardest."*

**Find a balance:** Knowing that it is going to be difficult to manage study and other responsibilities, prepare yourself for university life by working out in advance how you might achieve a balance.

**Focus on the positives:** Remember that university will be worth it in the long run. The benefits you will gain through the new skills you develop and via the job you get as a result of your studies are worth the hard slog!

*"Don't take on too much and be kind to yourself, do everything the lecturers say to start with and be strategic about planning what you intend to do."*

## YOUR EXPECTATIONS MAY BE MORE REALISTIC

As a school leaver FiF student, you may find your expectations are closer to reality than you think. Most FiF students found the university learning environment to be significantly different to High School. For example, you are more likely to anticipate that the amount and difficulty of work at university will be different to High School.

*"Understanding that, unlike school, a lot of learning must be done in your own time. Figuring out how to balance everything was the hardest part, but once it was balanced it made my experience more successful."*

Some FiF students also commented on the unexpected costs of attending university – the textbooks, living expenses etc – and wished they had more savings when they started.

### What does that mean for you?

**Be positive:** The good news is that having more realistic expectations of how different university will be from school will probably help you to make a smooth transition.

**Seek help:** University student services provide courses for students on aspects such as time management and study skills. Find out about these courses and participate whenever possible.

**Plan ahead:** Think about the potential costs of your course (textbooks etc) and plan how you will cover these costs.

*"It was important to learn to ask for help as soon as I didn't understand something rather than waiting too long and then not giving myself enough time to complete tasks."*

## KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM

Almost 80% of school leaver FiF students choose their degree based on interest, and school leaver FiF students are more likely to seek out extra information on class topics they find interesting and pride themselves on being hard workers.

### What does this mean for you?

**Let your interest drive you to success:** Being interested or passionate about your subject area is a good start to driving you forward as you develop study skills and adjust to university life.

*"I have always been a maths/science person. I love it. I love a challenge and mining engineering is precisely what I can see myself doing in 4 years' time. The university is great, all the services and support available to students is more than enough."*

