



Making friends

“Smiles are contagious and a great way to make friends”

The first weeks at university can seem daunting if you aren't lucky enough to be taking some friends along with you. Luckily, it is also a terrific opportunity to make new friends.

Meeting new people and expanding your social network is probably easier than you think. Try some of these ideas out:

Join an interest group. There's plenty of them on offer and they range from film groups to language clubs to sporting groups. Look on notice-boards, university issued pamphlets and advertisements, and also check out the online university classifieds.

If you can't find a group to interest you, you could always start your own. Any of the aforementioned advertising methods should work for you.

Volunteering can be a great way to meet people. Most universities are looking for buddies to befriend international students. This will introduce you not only to a new student, who is also hoping to make friends, but also other volunteer students who are already established at university. Joining a university newspaper or radio station is also a good opportunity to make new friends.

Combining work with meeting people is a tried and true method. Perhaps you can promote your current work or a product on-campus through handling out fliers. Perhaps, your boss would appreciate you carrying out a survey on his/her behalf. University students are a market all of their own.

Just getting a part-time job is sometimes an excellent method for meeting fellow uni students particularly if your job is on-campus or a night club or fast food outlet.

Most universities also offer special nights that anybody can come along to such as a film night or a sight-seeing trip or even a disco.

Keep a look out for student union bulletins to keep up to date with what's on offer.

By always being alert for opportunities to meet new people and make new friends around campus you're sure to find something that is comfortable for you. When you do meet new people, be interested in them, ask open questions and remember to smile a lot because smiles are as contagious as yawning and a great way to make friends.

Lauretta Davies

Ask the Union



“Feeling nervous and intimidated I walked into the offices of my union”

Gippsland University is not only the place where I am now carrying out my fourth and final year of study but it is also the place where I finally realised, after two years of study, what a significant difference a student union could make in a student's life, including my own.

I used to think that I knew the basics of what a student union does, but it was when I began to stop just walking past the Union and actually walk into it that I finally began to truly understand why universities have one.

If you type 'student unions' into your internet search engine it will come up with many different web pages full of explanations of what their purpose is within a university. What I gather from these definitions is that they provide services to students and represent their views within and outside of a university on all types of student related issues.

But what I do not believe that the internet tells you, more importantly what it does not show you, is how much a student union goes out of their way to assist a student when they ask for help.

Last year the Student Representative Association (SRA) at Gippsland, which I was a member of, was having trouble organising the annual SRA student ball. It seemed like we were experiencing first hand Murphy's Law of 'if anything can go wrong, it will' and trust me it was.

Budget cuts meant we lost hundreds of dollars worth of sponsorship, our venue which we had held the ball at for as long as I could remember closed down and the band we were hoping to use was touring overseas. It was pretty safe to assume that we were struggling.

Feeling nervous and intimidated I walked into the offices of my union and asked for help. I was surprised at how willing to help and generous they were, and in the end the SRA Ball turned out to be fantastic event. From this experience, I took with me the knowledge that your student union does not know that you need help unless you ask for it, but that when you do ask, they will help wherever they can.

It is not only the students that need help, sometimes our student unions need some support too. They have increased difficulty with tight budgets, which have been dramatically reduced since 2005 when the Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) laws came into play throughout Australia. After more than 30 years protesting the new laws, VSU came in and now without the compulsory fees the support a union can give its students is continuously diminishing. ☐

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