Many students study alone: external students, mature entry students, parents, and students who work as well as study. This brochure explains some things you can do to help with the process of studying alone.

You may have other responsibilities in your life, but it is important that they do not interfere with your study. To succeed in your study program, you will need to organise your time effectively. This is more complex than just writing out a timetable: your schedule must be practical, flexible and realistic. Some students who have large amounts of time available need to develop good organisational skills. Others who are adding study to an already full life may need to establish new priorities.

**PLANNING YOUR SCHEDULE**

Plan your study on a whole-of-semester basis. Though this may seem daunting at first, it is important to get some understanding of how much work you need to do, and how much time you have to do it. Look at your course outlines for the overall assessment requirements for the semester and mark the due dates for the assignments in a diary or on a calendar. This allows you to see the workload for all of your subjects in the one place.

Now plan backwards from the due dates of your assignments. Give yourself plenty of time to write up each assignment. Different assignments will require different amounts of research and preparation time, and there is often a lot of re-organising to do after the first draft.

Some tasks will require different strategies from others. You may need time to research in a library or speak to someone about an assignment. You may find noting requires less concentration and can be done in a more relaxed atmosphere, or that when you do the final draft of an essay you need several hours of quiet. If you work to a semester plan you can arrange your time to take account of these differences and plan for them in a positive way.

You may find it helpful to make a detailed weekly plan of your time:

- Block out your fixed commitments: lectures, tutorials, travelling time, work, meals.
- Mark in those things that are important or necessary for you: time with family/friends, sport, recreation, housework, favourite television shows.
- Identify times when study will be number one priority for you and let others (partner, children, friends) know that you are not available at these times. You may choose to allocate particular time-slots to particular subjects or activities, or vary this according to demands.
- Check that you have a balance between study and your other needs, including sleep, exercising and socialising.
- Allow some unscheduled time for emergencies that may occur as deadlines come close.
- Use time when you concentrate best for the most demanding tasks.
- Use small blocks of time for ‘busy’ but not deeply intellectual tasks, like photocopying or sorting out lecture notes.
- Develop a filing system that organises notes and handouts, so that you do not waste vast amounts of time searching through the clutter. You may make use of things like labelling papers clearly, using subject folders or plastic envelopes and colour-coding work.
- Re-assess your schedule from time to time. Are you keeping up to date in all your subjects? Do you need to allocate more time to study generally, or to certain subjects? Do you need to study at different times?

**MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS**

If working with other students appeals to you and your circumstances permit, you may wish to be part of a Study Group. Student initiated groups can provide a range of learning opportunities complementary to activities organised through the University. By working directly with other students doing your topic, you can add another aspect to your education.

**ORGANISING A GROUP**

If you live close to other students, you may wish to meet with them on a regular basis. Though there are distinct advantages in meeting in face-to-face situations, this is not the only way of achieving good student interaction. The technologies available to us today mean that personal communication can be achieved by less direct means. This does require experimentation, practice, perseverance and, in some cases, a financial cost. Your own particular situation, including access to technology and the costs involved, will determine the ways you choose to communicate.

Computer networks allow you to communicate using a computer, and e-mail (electronic mail) is a service that all universities support. As well as communicating between friends and fellow students, you can e-mail your lecturers. Chat or instant messaging programs are free and allow you to send messages and attach documents, making online discussion of readings and assignments possible.
A NOTE ON INSTANT MESSAGING (MSN, ICQ, QQ, ETC.)

Most computer operating systems include instant messaging software, but if you want to find more, a search of the Internet will find a number of them that can be downloaded for free. When using these programs, use the same one as your colleagues to ensure compatibility, or check with other group members to make sure you are using one that works with other programs. For example, QQ and Mac Messenger both work with MSN, but ICQ does not. Also, if you use instant messaging as a means of group contact, try to arrange a regular ‘meeting time’ when your group members are online.

Here are just a few suggestions:

- E-mail (an)other student(s) or use an instant messaging program, to share useful readings, discuss ideas, etc.
- Make some quick notes (interesting points, helpful readings, difficulties) about your study, photocopy them and send them to members of the group. Members of the group may respond (a phone call, a copy of a useful article, the name of a book). The next week another member does the same. In this way, everyone receives regular contact with minimal effort.
- Keep regular contact, either individually or as a group.
- Organise a telephone circle or e-mail group so that each person contacts another at a suitable time. In this way, you are in contact with two other people on a regular basis.
- Write your lecturer a group letter or e-mail asking for clarification of particular issues or further reading on specific aspects.
- Use electronic media to communicate information quickly: e-mail, instant messaging, etc.

There are some interesting possibilities for very quick feedback when you combine these technologies. For example:
You could send your notes or ideas on an assignment or task to a student or several students, by e-mail, instant messaging or fax.

The student(s) could fax back some comments, send comments via instant message or you could spend a short time on the phone talking about some of the ideas.

Meeting face-to-face at some time significantly enhances the effectiveness of electronic communication. If face-to-face contact is at all possible you will find it most worthwhile.

EXPECTATIONS

Whether you are meeting together in a face-to-face situation, using technology based methods, or writing letters, it is important that on each occasion those in the group share an understanding of what is to be achieved and how that is to happen.

- **The initial contact** should provide the opportunity for individuals to give some background about themselves so that common interests can be established.
- **Format of sessions** will depend on the purpose of the group. It may meet to discuss the issues just before an assignment is due, or on a weekly basis to share ideas from the readings.
- **Leadership** is an important issue which should be addressed in conjunction with the purpose of the sessions. When communicating electronically with more than two people, it may be advisable to designate one person as a convenor or facilitator to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate.
- **Support** from other students can be good for your morale and motivation. Even more important is the educational experience of participating directly in a community of scholars.