

SAGE Student Success online platform

Personal development and wellbeing: module overview

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Choosing a university or college course is an exciting challenge: you think about the course you want to do, then you start to think about which campus would suit you, then you calculate whether you are going to get the grades that will make for a successful application.

But where are *you* in this process? You are there, but perhaps by implication only. You might choose a course based on your best subjects at school or college, but is the subject one that you will love, with enough passion to get you through a whole degree course? You are thinking about the practicalities of a campus, such as how far it is from home, whether it provides good links to part-time work perhaps, whether it has a good reputation. But is it a place that you would be happy to call 'home' for much of your time over the next few years? Then you think about your grades, and that is enough to make anyone anxiously yearn to do well enough to qualify for the course – and by now you have probably lost the sense of your own happiness and wellbeing entirely.

So, let's go back to the beginning. You are the one who will be taking the course – not your family or friends, supporters or teachers. Just you. That means that you need to choose a subject that you are sure you want to study, on a campus that feels comfortable to you, in a university or college that will allow you to develop and shine as a student. Once that is in place--and you will have several options that fit this bill--you can begin to fight for your place, believing that it truly is the right decision for you.

When you begin your life as a student in Higher Education, it is understandable that you will focus on a narrow version of yourself. Will I be as clever as everyone else? Do I know enough already, or will I find this too challenging? Will I make the right choices? All of this ignores that fact that life on campus is about so much more than learning and assessment. It is about you as a person who is about to enter what might be the most important years of your life.

You are going to change, and how your friends and family see you will change. More than that, you will want to change because this is your chance to frame much of the rest of your life. Change, as everyone knows, can be challenging. In fact, it can be downright difficult, and successful change demands that you

take care of yourself. Your wellbeing comes first, then the change can happen in a positive way.

This module begins by taking you through three steps to sustained wellbeing. You will want to *find your feet* as soon as you can. This is not because you could not make up later for any confusion or miscommunication-- you could. It is because you will not want to waste time and energy on the basics of university or college life when you could be diving into your studies and your new social life.

Finding your feet is much easier if you can *build your support*, and this is the second skill in this module. You will not need to build this support from scratch – one of the best ways to build an effective support network is to recognise the supporters you already have in place. That way you can identify and appreciate the help you already have from family, friends and other supporters. You will then spot the gaps where you need some additional, different types of support on campus. That way you can make a deliberate choice to find the right people to secure that support.

Your strong support network will change over time, expanding as new demands arise and, later, as you begin to develop a professional network. Just knowing that you have a support network in place will make you feel braver about the new challenges that your campus life will bring, and this is going to be important. The best support you have might well be the new, stronger person you become as you *build your resilience*.

Some of your personal development will happen almost without your being aware of it. You must produce an essay on time, so you develop your time management. If part of your learning and assessment takes place online, your *technology skills* are bound to sharpen. The most successful students, however, tend to take a more proactive approach. They make the decision to develop their learning technology skills, for example, rather than waiting for the development to happen when they are too busy to really make the most of it. These students recognise that taking control and *making good choices* will be key to their success. Some of the choices will be major, such as the degree course you choose to take; some will be less major but will still be important, such as the modules or minor courses you choose to study.

University and college systems are designed to guide students through choices, offering a step-by-step approach as your course develops. However, it is still

left to you to know yourself well enough that you can decide, for example, which assessment type would suit you well on a module, and what you might need on your course in terms of ways of learning. *How you like to learn* is not something you might have thought about too deeply in the past but now is the perfect time to analyse your learning preferences, so that you can make sure that the style of instruction you receive suits the way you like to learn.

You cannot guarantee that every learning opportunity will be perfectly suited to how you like to learn, and this is a good thing: life after graduation will not be entirely suited to your every need either. Learning to be flexible and resilient is part of your goal as you study. Exploring *new ways of learning* is one of the most rewarding aspects of your study journey and can bring huge long-term benefits by enhancing your professional skills base.

You will want to enjoy your campus life and *make the most of your opportunities*, and this is going to be difficult if you have not mastered the tricky art of *managing your time*. The advice we offer you here will set you up well in this respect. Time management is a facet of personal development that will offer lifelong benefits, and you are in the ideal position to explore and practise time management techniques whilst you study.

As you travel through this module you cannot expect to conquer everything at once. Instead, take a small step, put that new piece of development firmly in place, then come back to the module again to plan your next move. You have time to do this, and it is a more secure way of embedding the personal development you want alongside the wellbeing you need. You can also make all of this *count for your future*. Your professional life is not something that happens away from, and only after, your study life: it is part of the same journey. Recognising your marketable skills as they develop will ensure that you can sell them effectively in future.

There is one small step that you can take repeatedly as you study. Take a moment. Take a whole morning if you need to...but just sit, reflect, and congratulate yourself on how far you have come. A solid support network in place? That was down to your effort. Your wellbeing feels secure? That is because you took steps to protect and nurture yourself. Excited about the future? You are shaping that future. Have time to achieve success and enjoy the journey that you are guiding for yourself, step by step? Your time management and decision-making skills are paying dividends. A huge pat on the back to congratulate yourself on how far you have come, and a little pause

to consider where you are going next, with this module beside you as a guide, will be a satisfying moment, and one that is well deserved.

Suggested Readings

1. Faulkner, M. L., & Nierenberg, A. (2017). *Networking for College Students and Graduates: Nonstop Business Networking That Will Change Your Life*. Nierenberg Consulting Group.
2. Zahariades, D. (2020). *The Mental Toughness Handbook: A Step-By-Step Guide to Facing Life's Challenges, Managing Negative Emotions, and Overcoming Adversity with Courage and Poise*. Independently published.
3. Bikart, J. (2019). *The Art of Decision Making: How we Move from Indecision to Smart Choices*. Watkins Publishing.
4. Long, R. (2021). *Building Wellbeing and Resilience: How to Help*. Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd.
5. Clear, J. (2022). *Atomic Habits*. Random House.

Self-Assessment

I am not sure how to face the first few weeks on campus (maps onto skill 1 “Finding Your Feet”)

1. I am not sure how to go about building a support network (maps onto skill 2 “Building Your Support”)
2. I find it difficult to cope if anything goes wrong (maps onto skill 3 Building Your Resilience)
3. I need to improve my use of technology for learning (maps onto skill 4 Using Technology for Learning)
4. I am not sure how much choice I will have as I study (maps onto skill 5 Making Choices)
5. I am sometimes uncomfortable how I expected to study (maps onto skill 6 How You Like to Learn)

I want to explore some new paths to successful learning (maps onto skill 7 New Ways of Learning)

6. I am unclear about the opportunities are open to me (maps onto skill 8 Maximizing Your Opportunities)
7. I never have enough time and feel under pressure (maps onto skill 9 Managing Your Time)

I want my hard work now to help me in my career (maps onto skill 10 Making It Count for Your Future)