



# Supporting Your Student

A guide to everything you need to know about sending your student to University and were afraid to ask!

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## Preface

As the student in your life embarks on their third level educational experience, at TUS we recognise that this is not just the start of new beginnings for the student, but also for you as a parent / guardian / spouse or partner/ other (we'll call you a "Student Supporter" from here on out).

As a Student Supporter who has your student's best interests at heart, please be reassured that so do we! Even though our relationship is directly with the student, we know that you are still providing valuable guidance and encouragement to them and we hope you'll be reassured to learn about all the great, free resources available to support your student during their time with us.

Whilst it would be wonderful if we could call you on a wet Tuesday morning to ask you to extract your student from the comfort of their bed, for data privacy reasons, we can't. Nor can we give any information over the phone no matter how well intentioned the request or our desire to do so. Our contract is with the student and part of the university experience is gaining the responsibility, autonomy and life skills to succeed. We are also required to comply with GDPR privacy laws so we can't discuss their coming and goings with you unless we have their permission.

Having said that, Student Supporters have a huge and dynamic role to play in supporting students through university and we would encourage you to actively engage in your students learning experience by familiarising yourself with the services, supports and facilities available to your student and encourage them to engage with these and seek help when they need it. Full details of all these supports and relevant staff contacts are available in the Student Handbook on the website. This guide is intended as a reference for Student Supporters. It provides general information about the free supports and opportunities available at TUS which you can encourage your student to help them make the most of their university experience. Please note that the full, most up to date details are best sought through the website and the TUS Virtual Learning Environment "Moodle".

This guide is laid out with reference to the category of concern or struggle your student may face and the relevant supports they can access.

So, without further ado, let us take you through your student's first year experience and we look forward to seeing you at Graduation!



## The Basics

The university year is divided into two Academic Semesters. Semester 1 runs from September to December and includes 12 teaching weeks, divided by week-long mid-term reading week, during which time graduation ceremonies take place. This is a great time to take a break and get on top of some notes, study or assignments. At the end of these 12 teaching weeks, is a reading and completion week and then formal end of semester exams which finish in plenty of time for a well-deserved Christmas break.

Semester 2 runs from January to May and also includes 12 teaching weeks divided by a week-long mid-term reading week and Easter break (usually about 2 weeks), followed by another reading and completion week and then the Summer Exams session.

The university year starts again in August when the Autumn Exam session is held. This exam session is for students who may need to repeat an exam or who have deferred or missed an exam for some extenuating circumstances such as illness or bereavement.

Full details of the specific dates are available on the TUS Website on the Academic Calendar. TUS Midlands is divided into four Faculties which are subdivided into a number of Academic Departments. These Faculties and their Departments are:

- **Faculty of Business & Hospitality**
  - Department of Hospitality, Tourism & Leisure
  - Department of Accounting and Business Computing
  - Department of Business and Management
- **Faculty of Science & Health**
  - Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Biotechnology
  - Department of Sport and Health Sciences
  - Department of Social Science
  - Department of Nursing and Healthcare
  - Department of Bioveterinary and Microbial Sciences
- **Faculty of Engineering & Informatics**
  - Department of Polymer, Mechanical and Design
  - Department of Computer and Software Engineering
  - Department of Engineering and Trades
- **Faculty of Continuing, Professional, Online & Distance Learning**
  - Department of Lifelong Learning

Each Faculty has a Dean of Faculty and a Faculty administrator who look after all of the departments within the faculty.

The Academic Departments have a Head of Department and a Department Administrator who look after the individual courses within their remit. Your student's course will sit under one of these departments and the Lecturer or Head of Department (via the Department Administrator) should usually be your students' first point of contact if they need help with anything.

Every course or programme is made up of a number of Modules each with an assigned lecturer. If a student has any queries relating to the module or the assessments within that module, their first port of call should always be their lecturer. Lecturers at TUS are friendly, informal and approachable.

University is a place of learning. People who attend university leave with qualifications that mean the student has attained

a particular standard or competency in their chosen area and in order to ensure the student has achieved that standard, they have to be assessed.

Assessment comes in a variety of forms these days so all the eggs aren't in one basket. This approach to assessment reduces the burden on students of final exams, but it means they need to be tuned in all throughout the year and delivering on Continuous Assessments such as presentations, assignments etc. These are spread throughout the academic semesters.

Full-time students need to make the most of their week. Whilst timetables typically occupy 18-26 hours per week, they could be timetabled at any time, Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm and the student is expected to be available for university during these times and make necessary travel arrangements to accommodate this.



## The first couple of months

Attending university is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes time to settle in and learn the ropes. At TUS Midlands, we don't bombard students with all they need to know on their first day or even their first week, rather we spread it out to help them settle in over an extended 7 week induction programme of curated awareness campaigns, events and activities called 'TUS Connect & Engage'. Each week has a theme which introduces students to the relevant supports and services available relevant to that theme. We would appreciate your help in actively encouraging your student to engage with this programme as in doing so, they'll be better equipped to tackle the challenges and opportunities ahead. The induction program has a blended approach with some parts online and other parts in person.

The 7 weeks of TUS Connect & Engage starts the week after first year Induction which coincides with their first week of classes. We can't stress how important it is for students to engage with the Connect & Engage programme so that they get the most out of it. It really sets them up for success in University.

You or your student may feel that some parts of this are not relevant to them directly however they could become relevant in second or third year or if your student wants to help a friend who gets into bother.

You and your student don't know what challenges await over the next few years while they are here with us at TUS and neither do we, but what we do know is that those challenges have been encountered by countless students before yours and we have a system in place to deal with them, to help your student manage them and make sure they maximise their potential. Both induction and the Connect & Engage programmes are designed specifically to give your student the skills and knowledge and power to manage anything life throws at them while at TUS Midlands. It's not just about the academic stuff, it's about making friends and expanding their horizons; it's about their holistic development through clubs and societies, looking after their mental health, managing their own finances or eating healthy. It's about time management, managing their sexual health, consent.... all important life skills! The themes of each week are set out below. We appreciate your support in encouraging your student to attend as many of these activities as they possibly can.

### Week 1: Welcome Back and 1st Year Induction

In our first week of term, we will welcome back returning students, new students joining us in advanced years of study and of course our new first years!

For returning students: it's a great time for re-engaging with the TUS community of friends, faculty and support services staff. Student support services are on hand and students are encouraged to reach out for support to help them click back into gear following their summer break. Repeat exam results are on the horizon and students will be provided with information regarding supports and options for moving forward with their studies.

For 1st Years: details of local campus induction activities will be provided along with registration information to ensure our new students know where to go. Students are encouraged to follow TUS social media channels in advance of their arrival on campus and connect with services as appropriate.

### Week 2: Get Connected

During "Get Connected" week there will be a variety of workshops to help students get off to a flying start at TUS. This week is all about settling in and engaging with fellow classmates, as well as connecting with the academic and professional services staff who are here to help students throughout their time at TUS.

Student Leaders will be onsite every day to ensure our new students know where to go on their first day and help our Freshers in their first week on campus. Student Leaders are 'in the know', they are TUS graduates and will be based on every campus throughout the remaining 6 weeks of the Connect and Engage programme to answer queries, guide students to services and classrooms, engage with students on social media and encourage students to get engaged with college life at TUS.

The Students Union will be hosting a fun line-up of events and Clubs and Societies activities will also kick off, providing a great way to meet new friends and develop new interests.

### Week 3: Financial Fitness

This week is all about getting in ship shape, financially speaking! Students will be offered information and advice relating to third level financial supports and will be able to pick and choose from a variety of offerings ranging from information sessions on managing finances to how to budget for college life. Workshops and drop-in clinics will be held throughout the week to facilitate students' financial queries and advise on available supports.

### Week 4: Mind your Health

Health and Wellbeing are of vital importance and Mind Your Health week will focus on promoting our comprehensive health and wellness resources. From fitness and eating well, to managing illness and sexual health, we are committed to fostering a healthy and balanced lifestyle and encourage students to participate in events and opportunities to look after all aspects of their health while they study at TUS. During this week, Student Health will deliver awareness campaigns across each campus. If students have a pre-existing condition or if they have any health concerns, they are encouraged to register with the Student Health Unit on a confidential basis.

### Week 5: Mental Health Matters

World Mental Health Day takes place this week on October 10th. Our Counselling Service will deliver activities and workshops to promote student engagement in proactively managing their mental health throughout this week and their time at TUS.

Walk-in clinics are offered with no appointment necessary for students who might benefit from help and support. Students are encouraged to register for free mental health support with Togetherall, a safe online peer support community for all students which is moderated by mental health professionals and which can be accessed 24/7. Please Register on the Togetherall Website

### Week 6: Boosting Academic Success

Week 6 is all about learning and boosting your academic success. Students will be invited to engage with the Library through drop-in clinics and workshops to learn about all the wonderful resources and supports which benefit all students throughout their academic journey.



TUS will provide information on Academic Integrity to ensure that assignments and projects follow the correct guidelines for using academic sources, referencing and avoiding plagiarism. This will be new information for many, so this week will include lots of opportunity for engagement, classes and resources to help optimise learning for students.

This week students will also learn about tutoring supports and there will be information sessions on time management, getting organised and settling into a routine of good study habits. Our learning support tutors will provide you with the necessary tools and strategies to excel academically and navigate the academic landscape to achieve your full potential. And don't worry, classes & supports will be available throughout the year too!

### Week 7: Community and Culture

For our final week of Connect and Engage we switch the focus from surviving to thriving. Community and Culture week is all about unlocking students' full potential personally, academically and professionally. We take a holistic approach, acknowledging that student growth and development also happens outside the classroom. This week students' can engage with a tapestry of opportunities to help them thrive and engage with their own development. We promote an array of community oriented and cultural opportunities including food, music, clubs and societies and the arts. This is a great time to explore volunteering and take the opportunity to celebrate each other and the wonderful diverse community and culture at TUS. By engaging beyond a disciplinary focus, students will broaden their horizons and begin to build their own narrative and personal brand. We believe that a well-rounded university experience and fostering wider holistic development will enhance the student experience and will contribute positively to graduate attributes.



## How can you help your student BEFORE they start university?

Many first year students will experience some anxiety, loneliness and feeling homesick which is understandable given the tremendous transition that students face coming to university. It is important to remember most students do settle in. Be encouraging and supportive to them during their transition, keep talking to them, and help them identify practical steps that they can take to support themselves.

### Tips that may help

- **Preparation** – any improvement in practical skills will really help – cooking, budgeting, shopping, cleaning, or timetabling - just talking about these things can help improve confidence.
- **Expectations** – Help your student develop flexible expectations by encouraging them to think about different scenarios they may encounter, both positive and negative. It can be helpful to rehearse with them lots of potential versions of how it might be.
- **Emotions** – Let them know that negative feelings are okay. Talk to them about the fact that ups and downs are normal, encourage them to look after themselves, do things they enjoy early on, stay active and get involved in university as much as possible.
- **Friends** – Encourage them to think about the type of friends they would like to have and where they might find them at university. They may make friends in their student accommodation or on their course but it is important to keep an open mind. Help them to investigate what clubs and societies are available that they could join.
- **Stay in touch** – Agree when you will be in contact with each other to give you both reassurance and space.

## How can you help your student WHEN they start university?

Every student will have their own unique experience of university. Most students focus on socially integrating at the beginning and on their studies later. The first 6 weeks can often be the most difficult as your student adjusts to the new changes/environment - reassure them that this usually passes.

### Tips that may help

- **Talk** - ask them how they are getting on but avoid interrogation. Gentle open-ended questions can help such as 'How are things going for you so far?' or 'How are you managing the academic side of things?' Reassure them that it is normal to feel anxious at start of university life but also to check in with them especially if you feel they are not themselves 'You seem quieter than usual is everything ok in university?'
- **Support** - keep in good contact and encourage them while they are acclimatising to their new surroundings. You could agree a visit and get a sense of their new environment, meet their friends, become familiar with Athlone.
- Avoid making any significant changes at home for at least the first semester if possible - they are already adjusting to their new university environment, too much change can be very unsettling.
- Coming home may require some adjustment from both you and your student; as they may have changed in their appearance, views and expectations.



## Withdrawing from a Programme

Nobody wants to think about “dropping out” at this early stage, but it’s important to recognise that things can come up in a student’s life that may mean the timing isn’t right, or perhaps the course they’ve chosen isn’t right for them.

It is crucially important that the student doesn’t just stop coming to university. There is a right way to do it. If at any stage your student is having second thoughts about university or their chosen course of study it is important to reflect on the reasons behind their decisions. Often times, the reason for the student’s decision to withdraw can be mitigated by some of the supports available and the student will be signposted to those supports if they will help the student to stay and succeed. If not, we’ll help them come to an informed decision and if necessary withdraw properly; i.e. in a way that has the least possible impact on future grants / fees etc. It is essential that they come and talk to a staff member in the Student Resource Centre and their Head of Department before they leave.

A Withdrawal Form must be submitted to formally withdraw from the course and there are some key dates to be aware of:

- **31st October:** Students who formally withdraw by completing and submitting a Withdrawal Form before this date, are not liable for fees and can still avail of subsidised fees in the future, maybe on another course or in another university. There may be some effect on the level of SUSI grant in the future depending on the date of withdrawal.

## Struggling Academically

University provides a broad range of learning in a variety of modules and at a different level than the student may be accustomed to. At TUS we recognise that you can’t be good

at everything and extra supports are available for students who are struggling academically.

It is important to note that not all academic problems have academic solutions, for example, a student may be struggling with one particular module, but that struggle may be because it’s at 9am on a Monday morning and the bus doesn’t get in until 9.30am, or at 10am on a Thursday morning and Wednesday night is “the big night out”. It’s important to take a holistic approach and all of the support staff are experienced in helping students identify the causes of their challenges and signpost them to the correct resource to help them.

In general, no matter what the problem – we will guide the student to the best solution for them. The Student Resource Centre is located on the D Corridor which runs parallel to the main canteen in the main building and students can pop into anyone on in the Student Resource Centre and we’ll point them in the right direction.

Initially, the module lecturer will be able to guide the student towards success however, sometimes, students need a little extra help. For this reason academic tutors are provided free of charge to give students a “dig out” with certain modules or topics that are posing a particular challenge. Nobody expects your student to be good at everything, and everyone eventually encounters a program they find difficult. There’s no shame in that, it’s a normal part of learning and that’s why the tutors are here giving free tutorials all year round including in the run up to Autumn repeats.

The academic tutors can be booked by emailing them and students should be encouraged to engage early to make the most of these free tutorials. Further details are available on the TUS website.



Additionally, TUS offers the PASS (Peer Assisted Student Support) programme on some courses. This program affords first year students access to second year students on the same program to guide them through their studies with particular focus on first year challenges. They are timetabled weekly in most programs (subject to availability) in semester one and students should be encouraged to engage with the PASS programme.

If students think they are struggling academically because they are on the wrong course – again, they should talk to a lecturer on their course, their Head of Department or the Careers Officer who can guide them through their options. Your student may have a disability or need some learning support. We appreciate that disclosures of diagnoses or disabilities can be difficult for some students, but we would ask that you actively encourage your student to engage with these services early. They can always opt out later if they decide they don't need them. These learning supports can include, technology solutions, scribes, SNA / PA, extra exam time, quiet exam rooms, lecture recording devices to name but a few. The Disability and Learning Support Offices can help with this and they are located on the D Corridor, parallel to the main canteen along with the rest of the Student Resource Centre.

## The Library

No longer just a room full of books, the library has become an integral part of the student experience. Staffed by friendly staff who are expert in all the subject areas, students are encouraged to engage with the plethora of services offered by the library including workshops, guides and subject experts to guide them through their learning. This is also a warm, well serviced space for your student to study including rooms which can be reserved for group study. It's great if they can get into the habit of using the library early on.

## Struggling with Finances

Going to university is expensive. It's a challenge for everyone. There are numerous financial supports available for students on-campus. For general details about grants, check out [www.studentfinance.ie](http://www.studentfinance.ie).

If a student is experiencing financial difficulties while waiting for a grant / scholarship they should seek advice from the Student Resource Centre, The Students Union or the Access Office. The Access Office administers the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) which is provided by the HEA. Details are available here on the HEA website of many finance options, but contact the Students Union and Access Officer in the first instance who can advise on the best course of action to help your student.



# Personal Struggles

## Mental Health

Starting university can be a wonderful and exciting experience, but it can also bring its own unique challenges. It's natural for your student to feel nervous or overwhelmed during the first few weeks, and it can take time before they have settled in. If your student is having a hard time emotionally, you should encourage them to avail of the Student Counselling Service that is there to help them at university. This service is provided free of charge by qualified and experienced professional counsellors and psychologists. Counselling provides a safe, supportive and confidential environment in which students can discuss any emotional or psychological difficulties they may be experiencing. The counsellor will use their training and expertise to help them clarify what issues are impacting on them and their life, and then facilitate exploration of how they can find better or different ways to support themselves.

### What issues do counsellors deal with?

The short answer is everything, really! They deal with a wide range of issues including depression, anxiety/panic attacks, transitions, mental health difficulties, bereavement and loss, interpersonal or relationship problems, family difficulties, self-esteem, trauma, including sexual trauma, academic issues, eating disorders, self-harm and suicidal thinking. Whatever issue your student may have, we encourage them to seek support.

### How does your student get an appointment?

Students can contact the counselling service in any of the following ways:

- Call the Student Counselling Service Administrator on +353 (0)90 646 8063.
- Email: [Counselling.midlands@tus.ie](mailto:Counselling.midlands@tus.ie)
- Use our walk-in service between 2pm – 3pm daily

The Student Counselling service is located in the John Count McCormack Centre on the 1st Floor.

### Can you talk to a counsellor if you are concerned about your student?

Staff at the Student Counselling service are available to talk to concerned parents/guardians but they will not be able to tell you if your student is attending the service. Neither will they be able to share any information about their wellbeing due to confidentiality. However they are able to advise you in general terms about possible support and resources.

## Medical

The Student Health Service at TUS Midlands located on the 1st floor of the John Count McCormack Centre is a nurse led service, which operates Monday to Friday throughout the academic year with an emphasis on preventative medicine, health education and lifestyle issues. We take care of the physical, psychological and social aspects of student health and health promotion. The service is provided as an addition to the student's own GP or specialist medical service. We can be contacted during our opening hours on 090-6468063 or at [Studenthealth.midlands@tus.ie](mailto:Studenthealth.midlands@tus.ie). We offer a 'sick on the day' walk-in clinic daily from 11.00hrs – 12.00hrs. Out of service hours MIDDOC is available to our students on 1800302702.

## Sexual Health Service

Free Sexual Health & Contraceptive appointments are available on campus. You can book [here](#)

## Pastoral Care

The university pastoral care service is run by Fr Shay Casey. This non-denominational service has offered huge respite to countless students over the years and first years will be provided with Fr Shay's phone number and contact details during induction. Legend has it that Shay's phone number was scratched onto the wall of the cells in the local Garda station. With the recent refurbishment of the Garda station we don't know if it's still there, but we hope your student isn't the one tasked with replacing it. Nonetheless – no problem is too big or too small for Shay and his team of trusted student helpers to sort.

## Students Union

The Student Union is a huge resource of information. They are located in the John Count McCormack Centre, now known as the SU Hub. It gives students a place to chill out, relax, and play pool / table tennis and chat. The Students Union officers are a wealth of knowledge and can help students directly, advocate on their behalf or signpost them to the appropriate place for help with their query.

## Disability

TUS is a place of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. We welcome students from all walks of life and all levels of ability. If your student has a learning difficulty, mental health issue, disability, different ability, neurodiversity or any other issue that can affect their studies – please make sure they let us know. It doesn't matter what the issue is, we are here to help your student manage the issue and help them to self-manage where possible. A huge number of supports are available to students and they may qualify for extra time in exams, a quieter / private space for exams, a scribe, a reader, assistive technology supports; all aimed to make sure your student maximises their potential.

Please encourage your student to engage and register with the Disability Officer (also on the famous D corridor). It may be helpful if you could assist your student to get copies of the various documents / diagnostic reports / GP letters etc., so that we can offer the most appropriate tailored package of supports to your student that we can.

All of this information is completely confidential and will only be discussed with lecturers or heads of department with the express permission of your student. Diagnoses etc. will not be discussed; only the supports the student is availing of and of course, we will work with your student to tailor the supports to what works best for them. They are free to pick and choose from the menu of what's available and opt in or out at any time.





## Making Friends

A great way to make friends and get involved in student life is through Clubs & Societies which can offer them a way to build relationships with other like-minded students across the TUS campuses.

Developing friendships through common activities is very important for the health and wellbeing of your student and we would encourage all students to engage in one of the many options of clubs or societies on offer. If we don't have a particular society that your student would like, then tell them to get in touch with our Societies Officer who will guide them through the process of setting one up! They may even be the inaugural society president! A wonderful achievement and great addition to any CV.

## Challenges for Supporters of Students

Moving to university represents a significant step towards adulthood for your student. Whether they continue to live at home or go away to attend university, the move represents an emotional separation for both you and your student. Your role is an evolving one, supporting them more from afar while they negotiate their new learning environment and build their independence.

Adjusting to this change can be challenging as a student supporter and you may experience a range of emotions. It is okay to feel excited, nervous, upset, sense of loss, set free or anything else that comes along!

### Tips that may help

- Communicate with your partner or friends; talk about how you are feeling, share your worries, process the change/loss.
- Look for the positives that you can find in this new stage; has it created more time in your life that you can use to focus on yourself?
- Readjust your identity as parent/guardian; as you play a new role in your student's life it is important to readjust your identity as a parent/guardian. The goal is to develop an adult-to-adult aspect of the parent-child relationship. Children always need parents/guardians but the relationship may become more peer-like. Accepting that adult children want more privacy in certain areas of their lives is part of this process.

### And remember....

Please rest assured that our team of caring, expert staff are here to help your student at every stage of their journey. Our goal is to help them thrive and support them in realising their full potential. When your student comes to TUS they will be part of a vibrant, exciting and welcoming community. We are well known for our warm and caring culture. Our happiest moments are celebrating with you and your student when they graduate and we will do our utmost to ensure they get there.

Together, we've got this!

