

STUDENT CONNECT MENTOR NEWS

Issue 2; April 2009

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Chaplaincy Team

Contact:
chaplains@nuigalway.ie

Student Health Unit
National Diagnostic Centre
Phone: 091 492604.



Student Counselling Team

Contact:
counselling@nuigalway.ie

GREETINGS

Greetings and welcome to the second edition of the Student Connect Mentor News. We would like to congratulate and thank Mentor Leaders and Mentors for all the work they did this year in helping First Year Students integrate socially and academically into student life. Our thanks also goes to the Mentors and First Year Students who took part in the "Issues Group" which met to discuss issues which arose during this academic year and to suggest improvements to the programme in future years. Views from this years Mentors and from the "Issues Group" feature in this issue.

Our major focus in this, the second issue of Student Connect Mentor News, is Exams; we have articles on the Exam De-Stress Programme, Exam Regulations, and Tips for Exams.

But we are not exclusively Exam focussed. This issue also gives you "Guidelines on Writing a Personal Statement" when applying for Postgraduate Courses and also information how to become part of the Student Connect Mentor programme for 2009/2010.

Best Wishes for the Exams and for the future if you are moving away from NUIG,

Una Mc Dermott and Matt Doran

EXAM DE STRESS



Cindy Dring
Health Promotion Officer
Phone: 091 492048

The programme includes a variety of treatments to reduce your stress such as Massage, Reflexology, Reiki, and more!

The cost per session is only €10.00. The programme will run from 20th April to the 1st May. For more information and to book a place, email: cindy.dring@nuigalway.ie

EXAM REGULATIONS

All staff in Student Services would like to take this opportunity to wish you all the very best of luck in your exams. The timetable was released on Friday, March 13th . To help you through the exams we have just a couple of reminders:

I.D. Card and Venues

Be sure you know the venue of the exam well in advance—don't leave it to the last minute!! Also, bring your student i.d. card with you as you will be asked for it.

Exam Security Group

Students should also be advised that if any incident in the exam hall leads an invigilator to suspect that a breach of the Exam Regulations may have taken place, that a full report will be made to the Exams Security Group and that the student may be called for interview by the Group to advise them of the details of the incident. Where a student is found in breach of the Exam Regulations a range of penalties may be applied.

At the end of the exam

Students will not be able to leave their seats in the exam hall until all scripts have been collected. In this way we hope to avoid situations which have occurred in the past where students have taken their exam script with them from the exam hall.

Personal Belongings

Students are advised not to bring valuable items to the Exam Halls as we will not be able to guarantee their safety, this includes lap-tops.

The Exam Regulations and further information can be found on the Exams Office webpage:

Tips for Exams

www.nuigalway.ie/exams



WARNING – Energy drinks and exams



Energy drinks don't 'give you wings' but they may give you panic attacks, heart palpitations, headaches, nausea, nervousness, insomnia, or a 'jolt and crash episode' (a feeling of increased alertness and energy - the jolt - followed by a sudden drop in energy - the crash). This certainly won't help you to do well in your exams. To reduce the risk of any of these unpleasant or dangerous side effects, limit your consumption to no more than one per day, drink them slowly, don't drink them every day or close to bedtime, or, better yet, avoid them altogether.



Exam Skills – Quick Tips for Better Performance



Time is running out and my brain feels like it's going to burst! What can I do to get the information out of my brain and onto the exam paper?

Revise actively Think up questions about the material before you start and seek answers as you study. Turn statements into questions, and think about how the material relates to what you already know.

Reason: Real understanding comes not when we stuff information in, but when we draw it out. Exams require this same 'drawing out' of information. Learning occurs when new short-term memory material connects or integrates with what you already know (material in your long-term memory).

That sounds easy enough. Is there anything else that might help?

Organise Look at the subject matter in terms of **facts** (what do I need to learn?), **principles and concepts** (what do I need to know?), and **applications** (what must I be able to do with these facts and concepts to show that I understand them?).

Reason: Packaging, labelling and linking information gives us a set of cues so we can more easily recognise and

t's one thing to be able to do this at home, but it's another thing to be able to do it in the exam hall!

Rehearse the exam format. Set your own exam, based on past papers.* Similar questions tend to come up again and again. Practise answering a full exam question in the allotted time.

Reason: A memory crammed with facts, but with no idea of how to write an examination answer is doomed to failure. Practising the exam techniques will also reduce anxiety and save time in the exam hall.

How am I going to keep functioning at peak level until exams are over?

Get appropriate rest, exercise and nutrition. Get at least 6 hours of sleep a night, eat a balanced diet and avoid alcohol or too much caffeine.

Reason: Your mind and body are connected. These things matter and will affect your performance. Just ask any

I'm still worried that the stress will get to be too much.

Prepare a mental refuge. This only takes seconds. Imagine a scene that is a safe, warm, secure and peaceful refuge, to be used as an emotional air-raid shelter when stress threatens. Imagine this scene as vividly as possible, including sounds, sensations, tastes and smells. Once you have chosen your mental refuge, remember it and practise recalling it when you are not under pressure so that you will be able to conjure it up instantly when you are.

Reason: Stress can appear in one or more forms at exam time, but you can keep it at a healthy level and survive the worst attacks if you prepare a method of dealing with it beforehand.

Only a few days to go and I have loads to do!

Avoid cramming. Start as soon as possible. Review what you know rather than trying to learn lots of new material at the last minute. And start earlier next term!

Reason: Short-term memory hasn't enough space for all you need to know. Also, cramming stupefies long-term memory (where well-learned material lives) and can set you up for panic and "blanking."

If you have worked all term but now have three exams in five days so only an evening to review already learned material

Write out a course summary. Reviewing the basic course structure will help you remember, comprehend and retain the material.

Go over study questions, main points of notes and assignments, skim read texts, drawing out the information from your memory rather than trying to cram more in.

Stay calm, confident and focussed. Take breaks in your studying, get 6 to 8 hours sleep, and remind yourself that working hard all term really will pay off.

If you have slacked off and are now justifiably worried –

Gather information about what is likely to be on the exam. Find out principle themes, sub-topics and major illustrations. Memorise them!

Use every trick you can, such as word association, rhymes, enumeration and sentences from acronyms.

BE SELECTIVE! Memorise major themes, then decide what supporting material to concentrate on. Remember, examiners actually want you to do well. The idea that they are plotting trick questions to catch you out is nonsense. They want to give you a chance to show how good you are.

Rehearse your mental refuge. Try to be kind to yourself. Get at least 6 hours sleep.

Views from last year's Mentors

Every year the feedback from Mentors is very important to us. As a result of feedback from the 07/2008 Mentors we introduced a system this year where Mentor Leaders provided most of the training to new Mentors. They were also a source of advice to the Mentors throughout the year. Mentors were required to meet with their First Year Students within 4 weeks from the start of the 1st Semester. From initial feedback from this years mentors the level of contact increased between Mentors and 1st years. A new communication system was also piloted this year through "Your Space" and all communication will be used via this internal social network system next year.



Two of our Mentor leaders, Michael Regan and Elizabeth Mulry, enjoying a break during this years training session with a few of their Mentors.

Apart from the normal contact via text and email, the Mentors resolved approximately 70 issues ranging from academic, personal, health, finance etc. We asked Mentors if the training was adequate for becoming a Mentor and 100% agreed it was. A typical response was: "Found that I learnt a lot more than I expected from the day. It was very worthwhile". We also asked them what their best and worst experience was as Mentor. 99% of Mentors had no "worst" experience, while the best experience was described by most Mentors as "*getting the unique opportunity to help them [first years] to settle in a new environment and to help them embrace the college lifestyle and pass on any advice*". A female Mentor described her best experience as "*I was able to share my experience with the first years some of whom were nervous on their first day. Also I see from around the Faculty building that the people who were in my group that I showed around the campus hang around with each other and I think that its great that the student mentoring was the reason for these friendships*".

We asked too what the benefits were to the Mentor and the student. The predominant comment in relation to the benefit for the Mentor was "*the chance to give back to the University community that has given so much to me and help 1st year students through what can be a very difficulty transition*". Another common comment was: "*The skills learned during the year i.e. leadership skills, team work, etc. are not just useful for undertaking mentoring but will be of value in life and career*". Most Mentors also felt a huge sense of "*satisfaction*" from helping First Years out. When asked about the benefit to First Year Students the main comment was "*settling into college life and having the option of help from a fellow student*".

A GREAT BIG "THANK YOU TO ALL THIS YEARS 192 MENTORS"

The success of the programme lies with those who volunteer to be Mentors. We are currently looking for students to sign up to be Mentors to the 2009 batch of First Years. The more volunteers we have the more successful the contact between Mentor and First Years will be. And we are especially interested in hearing from experienced Mentors to volunteer as "Mentor Leaders" for next year.

This year we will also be piloting a mentoring scheme for 2nd, 3rd and subsequent year undergraduate students. We are also piloting a mentoring programme for Research Postgraduate Students – if you are interested in becoming a Mentor in one or more of these schemes please tick the appropriate box on the [application form](#). For more information please email: una.mcdermott@nuigalway.ie or contact Una on 091 495282

Applying for Postgraduate courses??

Guidelines on Writing a Personal Statement

A personal statement gives you the opportunity to present aspects of yourself and your background that may not be apparent from the other parts of your application. This statement is a chance to show you have the commitment and qualifications to work or pursue further study in your chosen field. While personal pronouns are acceptable, starting every sentence with “I” is not advisable! You may feel self-conscious “selling” yourself, however, do not be too modest! You need to provide evidence that you have relevant requirements in an interesting, authentic, succinct, structured and personal way.

What are the steps to writing a good statement?

1. The first step is to be clear on what is required. The Postgraduate Admissions Office in NUI Galway, for example, states that “unless indicated otherwise, all applicants to taught programmes only must enclose a typed personal statement of approximately 600 words explaining why you wish to undertake the programme(s) of your choice, outlining how it fits into your career objectives.”
2. Then brainstorm and research your self-assessment, based on questions such as:
 - Why did you choose the programme / job?
 - What are your past successes?
 - What are your core values and interests?
 - What got you to this point in your life? (Events, people, ...)
 - What is distinctive about me? List at least five key attributes.
 - What learning influences have shaped me? (Give credit to people, books....)
 - What special courses, modules or skills would make me more successful?
 - What challenges have I overcome in my academic, work or personal life?
 - What are my career goals?
3. Plan the structure of the personal statement and divide it into ‘chunks’, including an introduction and conclusion. You might consider focusing sections on: Outlining why you chose this programme or job; Relevant academic or work qualities attributes and achievements; Evidence of relevant personal qualities or skills that make you suitable. Back up statements with evidence.
4. Do not procrastinate! Write your first draft and you will feel better right away. It is much more productive to craft and develop something written than to worry.
5. Write your introduction last. Do not begin with “My name is...” Spend time crafting the first sentence. You might start with a quotation or an interesting point.
6. Print it out and have at least two other people proofread it. A good test is to read it aloud and see if it slows the reader’s progress – make it easy to read.

We would be delighted to give you feedback on the personal statement at the Career Development Centre . *If you are just beginning and want ideas, examples or feedback. Please drop a copy in to the Careers Development Centre or email: careers@nuigalway.ie.*