

FRESHMAN BOOKLET

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES

Dear Students,

The Department of English and American Studies extends a formal welcome to you all. We are very happy to have you at the Catholic University in Ruzomberok. To make your university experience more complete, and to help you find your way in the labyrinth of academic and social life, we compiled a list of things that you need to know about the Department and about some practical issues first-year students (or “Freshmen”) may want to keep in mind when they plan their university studies.

I. General Information about the Department

First of all, always remember that the teachers of the department are all human beings – with their good and bad sides, as everyone. You should keep in mind that they are not here to scold you and make your life miserable. They are all very open and understanding people, so all you have to do is to communicate with them in an appropriate way, and they will always try to help you. They will share hard work as well as fun with you (as you will see at the Thanksgiving / Christmas party). They are all looking forward to cooperating with you and showing you your own hidden abilities.

Our offices are on the 3rd floor of the Philosophical Faculty Building.

II. Academic Life (Dos and Don'ts)

The transition from secondary school to university is a very exciting, but at the same time, fearful, process. As a university student, you will enjoy more freedom and independence, but it is up to you how you use these. You will have to find and maintain the right balance between your social and academic life. Studying and cooperating with your teachers and fellow-students can be very exciting, or, if you fail to manage your time well, a real pain. Your university-experience will be what you want it to be. Here are some tips and hints that will help you make the most of it.

a. Classes

Attend, take notes, participate!

- Although **lectures** are not compulsory, and many students mistakenly interpret this *option* as a *right* to be absent, we would strongly recommend that you attend your lectures as often as possible. It is useful because you will have a lot better insight into course content and a more thorough understanding of the material discussed than in a case where you have to collect all the information alone.
- **Take notes.** It is the first step in familiarizing yourself with the course material. It will help you systematize information, and by taking notes, you will already be studying. On the other hand, it is a lot easier to study from your own notes than to spend time trying to decipher another person's note-taking method before you can actually start studying.

- Seminars (and sometimes lectures too) give you the chance to participate. Take this chance and **speak up!** It is easier to study things when you actually discuss them, plus you'll have the chance to ask questions and formulate your own opinion. University courses are not about re-producing information in a parrot-like way; you need to be able to apply what you have learned. Participating in classroom discussions will help you develop skill to think critically and independently, and to formulate your own ideas in a logical and concise way.

b. Assignments and Reading Lists

- Your professors will provide you with a reading list of compulsory and recommended texts for each course. These lists are available on the course syllabus and on the university's website too (in Moodle). It is your responsibility to get these texts and to bring them along to seminars where they are discussed.

- **Use the library!**

Do not exclusively rely on the Internet! Although many of your compulsory readings will be available online, you will find a lot of things in the University Library. Unbelievable as it may sound, there's real cool stuff there, books and everything, a lot of interesting materials that will help you complete your assignments and prepare for exams. Also, content on the Internet is often unreliable, and its academic quality can be questionable too. So **do not rely exclusively** on popular study aids like SpakNotes or Wikipedia. Information provided there will not make up for the close reading of texts and your own critical engagement with them.

If you are uncertain about how and where to find things in the library, or just want to know more about the services the library offers, sign up for their **"Introduction Class."** They will teach you how to use the catalog and the electronic databases, how to locate material, and many other things that will come handy during your studies.

- An **Assignment** usually comprises a shorter or longer written task. It can range from a short review to a short essay to your answers to a set of study questions. Longer assignments can be longer essays, seminar papers, or term papers. Longer assignments contain a research component too.
- Don't run screaming to your professors to ask for material, check the library first – the **online databases** too! Also, if you cannot find a book or an article in the collection, just make use of the **inter-library loan** service.

Remember! You are now a university student, which means that you will be expected to study, complete assignments, prepare for exams and solve all sorts of study-related problems **independently**. Staff are there to aid you, but your university years are also about developing your skills to take initiative and work independently. On the other hand, many of your tasks will be more easily tackled if you **cooperate** with your fellow-students. Sharing workload and studying together (especially as regards preparation for exams) will lead to better performance and a much better atmosphere in your group.

- **Invest into your studies.**

Being a university student requires intellectual as well as financial effort. You are preparing for your future career, so do invest into it. Sometimes you will have to buy textbooks or other course materials. This may sound like a hefty investment, but it is actually worth-while. This is not a waste of money as, for starters, this is how you start building your personal library, and, from a more practical point of view, you will use many of those books (primary texts and secondary material alike) not only once but multiple times during your studies (when preparing for seminars, when preparing for

exams, and when preparing for state exams). Moreover, you will use them later on in your career too. This is especially true in the case of language books – for you, these should have the same importance as an anatomy book for a medical student.

Remember, you may not always need to buy brand-new books, you can get them from older students, and you can pass on the ones you really-really do not need to future students.

- **Prioritize** and manage your time, keep the deadlines (start in time).
- Follow the **style sheets**/guidelines for formatting your assignment closely; make sure your submission is properly referenced.
- Don't miss the deadline! Hand in your work in the exact format (print or electronic) your professor requested it. (In other words, don't send it as an email attachment when a print format is expected).

c. **Plagiarism**

- **Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of other people's works, words (spoken or written) or ideas.** For a detailed explanation, see the Study Guide ("Informácie o štúdiu", available [here](#)) and your Academic Writing course.
- **Never plagiarize!** It is a severe case of academic dishonesty, and you'll get busted anyway. If you are caught plagiarizing, you will automatically fail the course without the possibility to resubmit the work in question, and your case will be sent forward to the Disciplinary Committee. Bear in mind that at worst you may be expelled from the university, so it really does not worth the risk.

d. **Exams**

- **'Sign up & show up'.**
Exams can be taken on the dates, and **only on the dates**, when they are offered. Usually three exam dates are given, one of which being the re-take. Sometimes the number of students per date is capped at a maximum, so bear this in mind when you plan your exams. Your professors give exam dates well in advance in AIS, and are very often open to negotiating possible dates with you. Therefore, do not expect your professors to give you an extra individual exam when you fail or in case of no-show.
- **Plan ahead!** Do not think you will get a better mark if you postpone your exams until the very end of the exam period. This normally results in extra stress – and very little sleep on your part, which may have an adverse effect on your performance.
- **Do not sign off!** It does not pay off at all, and will take away useful time from other exams.
- When there are several exam dates, do not expect to get the same set of questions on every date – that would be highly unfair to those who go first, plus, the whole concept of the exam would become obsolete and ridiculous.
- **Start reading on time.**
Remember! You cannot start preparing for your exam at the beginning of the exam period. If you manage your time and work through the semester and get familiar with compulsory texts as well as lecture notes too, you will not have to panic before the exams. Incredible as it may sound, but your professors don't expect you to re-invent the wheel! They just expect you to be familiar with the items on the reading list and to critically and creatively engage with the set texts as well as with the issues touched upon in the lectures/seminars.

- **Language Competence at Exams.**
Given that you are students of English, your language competence (both written and oral) will be an integral part of the assessment of your overall performance. In other words, very poor English CAN (and in fact WILL) result in a lower mark. So don't take any chances, brush up on your grammar and make sure you master the necessary vocabulary as well. (Don't forget! One very easy way to acquire the necessary oral fluency is to participate actively in class-discussions.)
- **Results.**
Exam/test results are normally entered into AIS by a set deadline. Be patient and wait until your results are available, do not send emails asking about exam/test results – especially not one day after the test.
- e. **Communicating with your professors**
 - Take notice of the **Consultation Hours** – and make use of them! Your professors have these time slots built into their schedules so that they can meet and advise you on matters of your progress. These are the times when you can visit your professors outside of contact hours (lectures and seminars).
As there are many students who might be looking to meet their professors during Consultation Hours, it is advisable to make an appointment (via email, or in person).
 - **Show up!** It is impolite to book a time slot and then not show up. This way you are taking away valuable time from other students and from your professor too.
 - **AIS**
The University Information System is a very useful thing and was designed to help you get the information you need on the times of courses, course materials and descriptions, exam dates and times, and, most importantly, your marks. Also, you will register for courses and exams here. Make sure you **check your AIS account at least once a week**. When the Faculty, the University, or your professors want to send group emails about class news, special events, days off, and other general information, or if they just want you to remind you of a deadline, they will do it through AIS. If you only open your account when you register for subjects and exams, you will miss out on a lot of things.
 - **Emails**
 - If you do not have an email address, **get one!** Make sure you let the Study Department know about the email address that you check on a regular basis. Also, try to have a **user name** that is **appropriate** for the purpose and that you will never feel intimidated about. So instead of going with fantasy names, like “sweetlola,” “applepie” or “guyofyourdreams” try to have a user name that makes you easily identifiable (such as your actual name, or your initials). You do not want to deter your professors, and you do not want your emails to be automatically filtered as **spam** as a result of the security settings of faculty accounts. Cases have been reported when emails featuring fancy user names were not delivered into professors' inboxes.
 - It is recommended that you try and **keep your university communication separate from your personal messages**. Also, as communication concerning academic affairs as well as extra-curricular activities and events is exercised via email, it is highly recommended that you check your emails at least once a day.
 - As a principle, bear in mind at all times that it is polite (and wise) to **use a register appropriate for your purpose**. As emails sent to your professors count as

instances of formal/business communication, make sure you comply with the standards that apply to this register.

- Always start with a **greeting**.

Note however, that when you are writing your email in English, the greeting is different from that of the Slovak standard, so instead of saying 'Hello' or 'Good morning', you might consider going with the more standard 'Dear Dr./Mr. XY'. Also, **avoid piling up titles** and degrees in front of and after the name of your professor as it is not common in English. Lengthy greetings will not put any benefit on you and are completely unnecessary. So instead of 'Dear Mr. Dr. Prof. XY Ph.D', simply write 'Dear Dr./Doc./Mr./Mrs./etc XY'.

- When contacting your professor, **state exactly who you are** (name, year, program of study, course – as appropriate)! This is important in order to avoid misunderstandings as your professor may not readily know who you are and which one of her/his courses you are attending.

- **Subject line: state clearly what your query is** in the 'Subject' field of your email.

- **Usage/spelling:** make sure you re-read your email before you send it off. Obviously, we all make mistakes, and your professors are well aware that English is a foreign language for you. But the style and the register you are using tell a lot about you. As a principle, don't worry about mistakes, worry about sloppiness.

- Sign your email.

- **When in doubt, ASK!!**

- Remember! You are a STUDENT which means that you have the full right NOT TO KNOW things.

- Do ask if the information you need is not (clearly) given or can be misunderstood. Your teachers will be happy to clarify anything related to the course content-wise as well as administration-wise. Make sure, however, to ask specific questions and don't start by asking your professor to repeat everything that (s)he said in the lecture. Try to pinpoint specific problems you want them to clarify.

- **Always make sure you ask the right person.** Do not easily rely on half-truths and anecdotes provided by older students. They may be able to help you with a number of things, but in most cases it is best to go directly to your professors or the Head of Department as it is them who are able to adequately answer your question and give you the help you need.

- However, **DO NOT ask about the obvious!** For instance, check first if the information that you are looking for is available on the University's website, or contained in the course syllabus. That goes for reading lists, general course requirements, exam dates and times, length and format of submitted work as well as information that was given in the lecture.

III. Social Life

- **Socialize frequently.** Don't forget that friends won't always come looking for you. Meet people, talk to them, ask questions. If you take an interest in people, people will take an interest in you. Everyone is actively looking for people to be friends with and go out with, so take your chance.

- **Be on good terms with your flatmates.** This doesn't mean you have to be best mates with them, but bear in mind that you are together almost 24/7 and share a

kitchen/common wall. Being on bad terms with flatmates brings your whole flat down, so do your best, even if you're not that fond of them, to include yourself and them in activities such as going out, shopping, going to the gym, etc. There will be times when you will be angry at one flatmate for leaving your milk out, or another for not washing up your bowl they just used, but being on good terms with them can prove beneficial.

- **Don't let going out consume you or your money.** You're a university student, of course you want to go out! But always keep an eye on how much you spend. The last thing you want is to end up having a lot of debts and not be able to afford those necessary purchases such as food and paying bills. Drinking may be a well-known student activity, but be aware of others possibilities, such as the gym, societies, and club meetings.
- **Don't leave all your work until the last minute.** This may seem very tempting as you will have longer deadlines, and longer holidays, but the deadline will come nevertheless. A very useful strategy is to get your work done as soon as you get it, or as soon as possible. This way, ideas are still fresh in your mind and you will have more time for relaxation after finishing work, and will not have that annoying thought in the back of your head that you really should have started working on your assignment a week ago.
- **Don't turn into a night-creature.** This is also very tempting, as your parents will not be nagging you about going to bed at a reasonable hour. But you should still set your own bedtime, because going to sleep at 6am and waking up at 4pm will not get you anywhere – neither with your studies, nor with your social life. University is fun but difficult; give your body the rest it needs.
- **Stay on campus as much as possible.** Whether it's homesickness, a job, or a boyfriend or girlfriend from home, try not to leave campus too soon or too often. The more time you spend on getting to know the campus and your new friends, the more you'll feel at home there. Take advantage of all the cultural and social events that happen on campus.