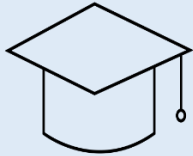


# Unit 1: Student life and adjustment



*“A being in continuous becoming.”*

Wolff-Michael Roth



# 1. Unit 1: Student life and adjustment

## 1.1 Introduction

In this unit, we explore the experience of being a first-year student at university. We begin the unit by discussing the importance of establishing a solid identity and give you some tips and ideas for how you can strengthen your identity development at university. We then discuss some of the adjustment issues that students may encounter as they transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar. These issues typically include practical, social, academic and financial adjustment. We end the unit by giving you strategies for successfully managing this adjustment.

The statement, "*a being in continuous becoming*" is apt in that it reflects your core work this year. To become. You will shape your identity continuously as an adult. We can never say we are finished with the work of defining or creating ourselves. You were shaping a very important part of your identity through your experiences in junior and high school. And now, as you begin a new chapter in your life, a lot of what you experience in this year and onwards, will contribute significantly to your renewed identity. We hope your journey towards "becoming" is enriching and empowering.

## 1.2 Learning outcomes

*After working through this unit, you should be able to:*

- apply the strategies for adapting to a university environment.

## 1.3 Assessment criteria

1. The seven-vector model of identity development is described.
2. The practical, social, academic and financial adjustment issues that students face are critically discussed.
3. The strategies for adapting to a university environment are applied.

## 1.4 Learner activities

*For this unit, students are expected to:*

Before Class	During Class	After Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access the prescribed reading / audio-visual materials for this unit.</li><li>• Come to class with a general understanding of the content and be prepared to participate.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in a Life Skills workshop on <i>Student life and adjustment</i>.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete the following activities and tests that will form part of your final assessment for this module: <b>1. Activity 1: Hotspots on my campus</b> <b>2. Quiz 1</b> <b>3. Unit Test 1</b></li></ul>

## 1.5 The Seven-Vector Model of Identity Development

The following information was adapted from an article by Reis (no date) entitled *Theories and Models of Student Change in College*.

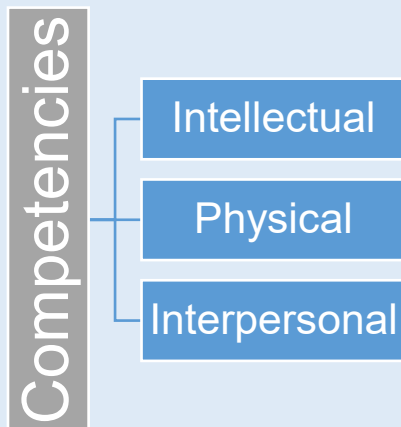
Chickering (1969) identified seven vectors of development, each of which has several subcomponents. This model is used to describe the developmental issues that students at university may encounter. The vectors are "major highways for journeying toward individuation – the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being - and also toward communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national and global society" (p. 35).

In other words, as a student at university, you are preoccupied with a need to establish or nurture your own unique identity, whilst also identifying with others – peers, mentors, lecturers and the greater community.

This model should guide you in terms of some of the tasks or activities that you can engage in this year to shape your holistic identity development. You are not expected to master all areas in your first year. You might find some areas are more significant to you right now than others. You have a long and exciting journey ahead of you and it is important that you pace your development over the next few years. The seven-vector model should just give you the bigger picture in terms of student identity development and some of the tasks that will become necessary for your overall growth and wellbeing.

We will discuss the vectors in detail below and give you a list of activities you can engage in to strengthen competence in each area.

### 1.5.1 Achieving competence



According to Chickering (1969), the university years lead to increased competence in intellectual areas, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal relations with both individuals and groups. Increases in intellectual competence are particularly important and involve knowledge acquisition; increased intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural sophistication; and development of higher-order cognitive skills.

This vector should help you appreciate that being a student at university is not only about your intellectual achievements and academic journey. You are ultimately on a journey of personal discovery that should allow you to nurture all facets of your experiences. Strengthening your interpersonal muscles is quite an important skill. You need to develop strength and skill in meeting strangers and making friends.

Developing your physical competence involves being physically capable of completing tasks and exposing your physical wellbeing to a variety of meaningful experiences such as sports and recreation, competition and creation, fitness and leisure activities etc.

As a student, you can engage in the following activities to help strengthen your intellectual, physical and interpersonal competencies:

#### **Intellectual competence:**

- Learn to use the library resources.
- Strengthen your information literacy skills.
- Improve your reading and writing skills.
- Attend student development courses and workshops.
- Consult with your lecturers, tutors and mentors on a regular basis.

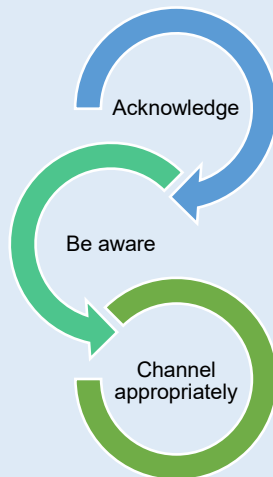
#### **Physical competence:**

- Engage in athletic/recreational activities.
- Take care of your physical health (e.g. exercise, eat right etc.).
- Participate in projects that allow you to create and compete.

### **Interpersonal competence:**

- Build and nurture your relationships.
- Don't spend all your time alone.
- Get to meet new people.
- Participate in various clubs and societies available on campus.

### **1.5.2 Managing emotions**



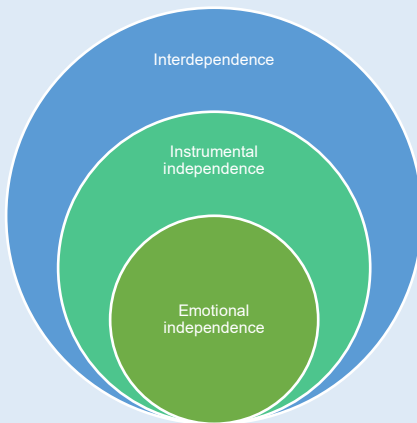
Students must recognise and wrestle with emotions that can interfere with the educational process, including "anger, fear and anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, and dysfunctional sexual or romantic attraction (Reisser, 1995). Development occurs when students learn to control impulses and to develop appropriate responses (both immediate and long-term) for handling intense, potentially disruptive, emotions. Not all emotions are negative, however, and movement along this vector includes increased capacity to experience feelings such as wonder, sympathy, relief, caring, and optimism. Growth comes with learning to balance tendencies towards assertiveness with tendencies towards participation.

To help you manage your emotions, try the following:

- Engage in activities that promote overall personal wellness (e.g. attend workshops on stress management, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence etc.).
- Consider personal therapy to help manage your personal and/or relationship issues.
- Celebrate your success and achievements.
- Develop your emotional intelligence.
- Nurture a positive self-image and engage in positive self-talk.
- Adopt good eating and sleeping habits.
- Engage in regular personal and academic goal setting.

In Unit 3 we will look at managing emotions as part of being emotionally intelligent.

### 1.5.3 Moving through autonomy toward interdependence



Development here involves increased emotional freedom from the need for reassurance and the approval of others as well as greater instrumental independence, the self-sufficiency evident in individuals' ability to organise their own affairs, solve problems, and make decisions. Movement on this vector is generally toward interpersonal relations that rest on equality and reciprocity and that occur in a broader theatre involving community and society. Balance emerges between the need to be independent and the need to belong.

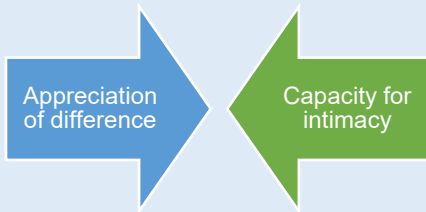
The following activities can assist you to nurture your autonomy (independence):

- Be aware of your individual responsibilities as a student at university.
- Plan your career path and set goals in relation to your chosen identity.
- Learn how to use university resources independently.
- Learn how to live alone and be independent OR
- Learn how to live with your parents/caregivers *as an adult*.
- Engage in conscious financial planning towards the goal of being self-sufficient.

To develop a healthy sense of interdependence, try the following:

- Ask for help when you need it.
- Engage in activities that allow you to meet new and different people.
- Strengthen your social support networks.
- Keep in touch with distant friends and family members.
- Establish clear and solid boundaries with the people in your life.
- Engage in activities that will allow you to improve your social skills.

### 1.5.4 Developing mature interpersonal relationships



This vector's definition reflects the view that students' interactions with peers provide powerful learning experiences and help shape the emerging sense of self. Maturing interpersonal relationships reflect an increasing awareness of and openness to differences in ideas, people, backgrounds, and values. "At its heart is the ability to respond to people in their own right" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48), respecting differences. Movement along this vector also entails an increased capacity for healthy intimacy and commitment, for relationships that are increasingly independent and founded on mutual interdependence. The vector involves the complex interplay "between autonomy, interdependence, and intimacy" (Reisser, 1995, p. 508).

Developing healthy interpersonal relationships at university cannot be emphasised enough. This is one of your most significant experiences. Who you choose to spend time with and love is an important part of shaping your identity.

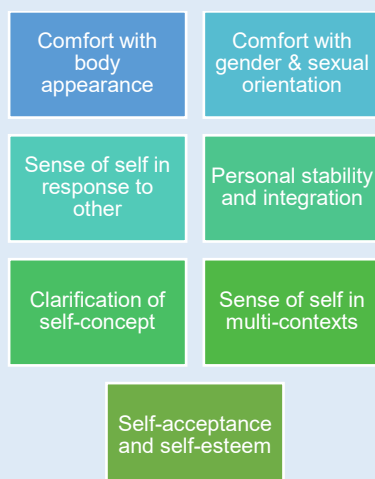
Interpersonal relationships are important to overcome feelings of loneliness, to understand our emotions and to be a mirror to our own behaviours. It is through interacting with others that we shape our identities. We know ourselves as friendly, kind and loving through our engagement with family, friends and others.

During your time at university you will form a range of significant relationships depending on your needs and experiences. Friendships are usually the first to form. Friendships are important for meeting your need for support, encouragement and leisure. Other relationships that may form this year include love or intimate relationships, work relationships, mentor relationships etc.

Regardless of the type of relationships you may form, some of the essential ingredients for healthy, mature interpersonal relationships include:

- Open communication.
- Mutual trust and honesty.
- Clear and defined boundaries.
- Freedom to be oneself.
- Healthy co-dependence.
- Passion.
- Shared attraction and interest.
- Respect.
- Commitment.

### 1.5.5 Establishing identity



This vector, shaped by movement on the previous vectors and influencing progress on subsequent ones, is pivotal. It includes conceptions of physical characteristics and personal appearance and extends to comfort with self-conceptions relating to gender and sexual orientation. Identity formation also involves a developing sense of self in a context shaped by historical events and social and cultural conditions and by issues emanating from family and ethnic heritage. Self-esteem and stability grow. "A solid sense of self emerges, and it becomes more apparent that there is an I who coordinates the facets of personality, who 'owns' the house of self and is comfortable in all of its rooms" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49).

As stated earlier, you are a being in continuous becoming. Shaping your identity is most significant during this time. One of the essential tasks of being at university is to decide who you want to be as a working professional for the rest of your life. The proverbial question "Who am I?" attempts to address this task.

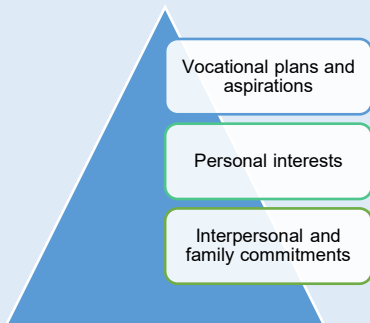


To take steps towards establishing a healthy identity, try the following:

- Reflect on your core values and beliefs.
- Engage in new activities that can lead to self-discovery.
- Nurture your self-esteem.
- Ask for feedback from people you respect about your strengths and weaknesses.
- Accept yourself as you are.
- Be unapologetically you!

There is a wonderful quote that says, "Find out who you are and do that on purpose."

### 1.5.6 Developing purpose



According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), expanding competencies, developing interpersonal relationships, and clarifying identity require some sense of direction and purpose. Development along the sixth vector occurs as an individual answers not only the question "Who am I?" but also "Who am I going to be?" and not just "Where am I?" but "Where am I going?" Growth requires increasing intentionality - developing plans that integrate priorities in vocational goals and aspirations, interpersonal interests, and family. The emerging identity and values help guide decision making.

Ask yourself the following:

- What comes naturally to me?
- Is my qualification aligned with my passions, career aspirations, and goals?
- Who am I going to be?
- Where am I going?
- What do I want to be remembered for? What will my legacy be?

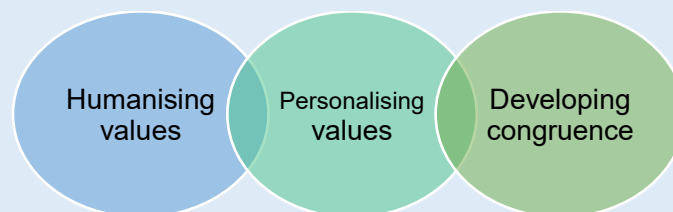
To help you strengthen your purpose related to your choice of study, try the following this year:

- Go for career counselling at Student Development and Support (SDS) if you are unsure about your career path or qualification.

- Job shadow people in the industry to get a realistic picture of the work you will one day do.
- Speak to your lecturers about possible career paths in your industry.
- Attend curriculum vitae (CV) writing workshops and learn about effective job search strategies.
- Improve and practice your interviewing skills.
- Explore various other careers linked to your qualification.

You should not wait until you are about to graduate to start thinking about the world of work. All the skills and experiences you are going through from your first year are shaping the kind of graduate that you will be. Start working on those skills now!

### 1.5.7 Developing integrity



Growth along the seventh vector involves clarification and rebalancing of personal values and beliefs. Values previously taken on authority are reviewed, and those found consistent with the emerging identity are retained, personalised, and internalised. In other words, things that you were always told growing up can be challenged or questioned now that you are becoming your own individual. Your emerging values and identity find expression in ways that manifest themselves in socially responsible behaviour.

To help you strengthen your integrity:

- Revisit your core values and beliefs.
- Do you have new thoughts on these values? Anything you would like to change?
- Are you acting in accordance with your emerging values?
- Get into the habit of practising what you believe to be true or valid.

On the next page you will find a table that summarises Chickering's model.

**1.6.8 Table 1: Chickering's Theory of Identity Development**

Vector	Achievements
<b>Developing Competence</b>	<p><b>Intellectual competence:</b> developing knowledge and skills related to particular subject matter</p> <p><b>Physical competence:</b> developed through physical productivity (artistic, recreational, manual labor)</p> <p><b>Interpersonal competence:</b> the development of understanding, communicating, and interacting with others.</p>
<b>Managing Emotions</b>	<p><b>Recognize and accept emotions</b></p> <p><b>Appropriately express and control them:</b> Understanding appropriate release of emotions with the flexibility of control or learning to express them</p>
<b>Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence</b>	<p><b>Increase emotional freedom</b></p> <p><b>Emotional Independence:</b> Emotional independence means freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval.</p> <p><b>Instrumental Independence:</b> the ability to organize activities and to solve problems in a self-directed way, and the ability to be mobile</p> <p><b>Interdependence:</b> having the awareness that others are connected to the individuals actions</p>
<b>Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships</b>	<p><b>Interpersonal and intercultural tolerance</b></p> <p><b>Appreciate differences:</b> the ability to respond to people in their own right rather than as stereotypes or transference objects calling for particular conventions.</p> <p>create healthy intimate relationships</p> <p><b>More reciprocal and empathetic:</b> Development means more in-depth sharing and less clinging, more acceptance of flaws and appreciation of assets, more selectivity in choosing nurturing relationships, and more long-lasting relationships that endure through crises, distance, and separation.</p>
<b>Establishing Identity</b>	<p><b>Acknowledge differences in identity development:</b> gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation</p> <p>Identity formation depends in part on the other vectors: competence, emotional maturity, autonomy, and positive relationships</p>
<b>Developing Purpose</b>	<p><b>Career goals</b></p> <p>Commitments to personal interest or activities</p> <p>Strong interpersonal commitments</p>
<b>Developing Integrity</b>	<p><b>Humanize and personalize values:</b> Shifting away from automatic set of values to developing one's own values while also respecting the differences of others values or point of view</p> <p><b>Develop congruence:</b> Our core values and beliefs provide the foundation for interpreting experience, guiding behavior, and maintaining self-respect.</p>

(Chickering, n.d.)

(Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010)

## 1.6 Adjustment issues and strategies to cope

In this next section we will introduce you to some common adjustment issues that first-year students at university face. To begin, click on the link to access the article [\*"Social and academic adjustments of first-year university students"\* by P. Mudvhovozi](#). After reading the article, you should answer the questions that follow below. **Note:** Your ability to answer these questions will prepare you for your first mini-online test.



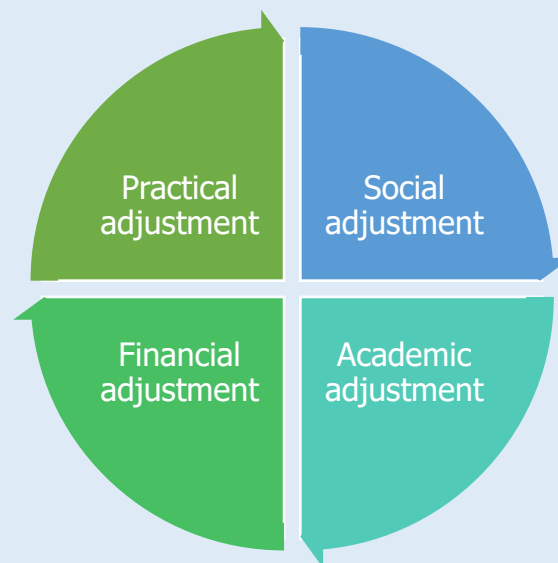
### Reading tips!

- Read the article several times (use a method like SQ3R).
- Use a highlighter to highlight the main ideas.
- Look up words that you are not familiar with (and try to use those words again in your conversations with friends and peers).
- Make a one-page mind-map (summary) of the main ideas.

## Questions

1. Define adjustment.
2. The authors describe university as both "exciting and challenging". Explain this statement in your own words, making reference to some examples from the text.
3. Why is successful adjustment to university important?
4. What does social adjustment at university entail for first-year students?
5. What role does family relationships play in a student's ability to adjust to university?
6. What role do financial needs play in a students' ability to adjust to university?
7. How do most university students experience a university classroom as compared to high school?
8. What role does attending university orientation play in adjustment?
9. In the article, students from a university in Zimbabwe were interviewed on what adjustment challenges they faced. List the adjustment issues that were discussed.
10. Which of the adjustment issues listed in your answer to the above do you relate to most?
11. What strategies for coping with stress did students in the study most identify with?
12. Can the results of this study be generalised to all students in Africa? Why or why not?

Students entering a new university environment generally tend to experience challenges in the following four areas: practical, social, academic and financial adjustment. We will discuss these areas in a bit more detail.



### **1.6.1 Practical adjustment**

Physically adjusting to a university environment is a very normal part of the first-year experience. It can involve a feeling of being physically lost on the one hand, not knowing how to get from point A to B, to trying to find ways to meet your most basic needs – for food, accommodation etc., on the other. Students who struggle with practical adjustment can often feel bewildered, confused and ashamed. You are not alone. Many students struggle with this.

**The following are some of the most common practical adjustment issues that students face during their first year at university:**

- Navigating their way on & off campus;
- Finding appropriate accommodation;
- Accessing affordable, reliable transportation to and from campus;
- Accessing resources – e.g. textbooks, stationery;
- Getting medical needs met;
- Buying and preparing food;
- Managing their money;
- Buying clothes;
- Staying safe and secure on and off campus;
- Making time for relaxation and entertainment.

**Strategies you can use to cope with your practical issues:**

- Make a list of all your required resources - the things you need in order to practically adjust this year. Some are available to you free of charge, others you must purchase.
- Make a budget for the items that you need to buy.
- The library, for example, might stock copies of some of the textbooks you need!
- You can also pair up with another student in class (a study buddy) and see if you can't share the cost of buying certain material that can be shared.
- Do some research on the various transport options available to you. Choose the option that is most convenient and cost-effective.
- A big challenge with transport is being stuck in traffic! Always arrange to leave early so that you can arrive on campus on time for your classes. Being stuck in traffic is not a good excuse for missing a class, test or exam!
- Sharing accommodation with other students is a cost-effective option. The burden of cooking, buying groceries etc. is sometimes easier and cheaper when you have someone to share it with.
- Check out some YouTube videos on meal prepping. This is a very cost-effective, healthy and time saving activity that can assist you with the chore of buying and preparing your own food.
- Do some research on budget friendly healthy foods and make sure to plan your meals around your day.

**1.6.2 Social adjustment**

Relationships are an important part of surviving the feeling of isolation and aloneness that can often come from being in a new place for the first time. In your first year, you may unfortunately feel alone in the beginning, but you should also see this as an opportunity to meet people that match your values!

**The following are some of the most common social adjustment issues that students face during their first year at university:**

- Making new friends;
- Being involved in intimate relationships;
- Managing conflict in relationships;
- Peer pressure;
- Establishing or nurturing a spiritual or religious identity;
- Dealing with diversity;

- Social support networks;
- Balancing freedom and self-discipline;
- Missing home;
- Becoming independent.

Peer pressure can be a significant challenge in your university years. It is when you feel compelled (or pressured) to participate in something because your friends or peers are doing it. This pressure comes from wanting to conform, fit in, not miss out (FOMO) or be different. Students who fall victim to the negative effects of peer pressure may find themselves engaging in risky behaviours such as binge drinking, smoking drugs or bunking classes.

It takes a certain amount of healthy self-esteem and a strong will to not let peer pressure derail you. Remind yourself why you are here. Whilst social relationships are important, establishing them should never be at the expense of your identity and wellbeing. Conforming to the status quo is also outdated. Being different and not ashamed or afraid of that difference is healthy. You might need to seek advice on this issue so that you can adjust appropriately and find a balance between being yourself and making friends and being part of a bigger social network. Don't be hard on yourself. Everyone, at some point or another, has had to deal with the pressure to conform.

**Strategies you can use to cope with your social issues:**

- There are many opportunities for making new friends: in class, the library, by attending a sporting event, clubs and societies etc. Contact your Student Affairs and Extracurricular Development (SAED) office to find out more about the clubs and societies that are available on your campus.
- Appreciation for difference and diversity is very important. At university you are exposed to many different cultures, religions, identities etc. Seek to be curious about the people around you and try to get to know people who are different from you!
- Remember that most first years are trying to make new friends this year but may be afraid or shy to ask. Make the first move!
- Work on your self-esteem. This is sometimes a barrier to interacting socially with others. And as we discussed earlier, low self-esteem can make you make poor choices in an effort to get others to like or accept you. Accept yourself first, as you are.

### **1.6.3 Academic adjustment**

You will definitely notice the difference from high school to university when it comes to things like the workload, how lecturers teach compared to your high school teachers, and also the structure of your academic timetable! It can feel overwhelming at the beginning and you can also fall into the trap of bunking classes because no one is really monitoring you, and you have a lot more freedom at university than you did in high school. It is important to take control of some of these issues before they ruin your chances of success.

**The following are some of the most common academic adjustment issues that students face during their first year at university:**

- Comparing high school to university;
- Choosing the qualification that is right for you;
- Managing the workload & volume of work;
- Attending classes & avoiding the temptation to bunk;
- Performance anxiety;
- Meeting deadlines;
- Managing your time;
- English proficiency;
- Developing new study methods;
- Asking for help.

#### **Strategies you can use to cope with your academic issues:**

- Managing your time is very important at university. You will need to create a timetable, to do list, keep a diary etc. in order to keep track of all your academic (and social) activities.
- Make use of the support systems available to you. These include your mentors, tutors, lecturers, support groups and other services on your campus.
- You should attend regular workshops on study skills in order to learn effective ways to study!

We will discuss this topic in more detail in Unit 2.



## **1.6.4 Financial adjustment**

A very common reality for most students at university is the financial struggle that comes with being a growing adult. You are now probably learning to be more financially independent from your parents or caregivers, and that is not easy. You are also probably realising how many of your needs require money, and you need to think carefully and critically about your cash flow.

**The following are some of the most common financial adjustment issues that students face during their first year at university:**

- How they will pay for their fees;
- Finding affordable accommodation;
- Money for basic needs such as food, clothing, transport, medical needs;
- Money for entertainment and lifestyle;
- Paying back student loans;
- Supplementing income (e.g. finding a part-time job).
- Pressure from peers to "have it all".




### **Strategies you can use to cope with your financial issues:**

- Be realistic about your circumstances. One of the worst things you can do this year is to compare your life to someone else's. Stop comparing now!
- Work on getting your basic needs met first. Anything else is a nice-to-have, which is nice to have but should not be the reason you feel you are lacking.
- Identify your sources of income. Whilst you might have to depend on others for some of your financial needs, also think about how you can create opportunities to meet your needs on your own, e.g. through part time work.
- Spend the money you receive wisely. Make sure that your most important needs are met first before you start spending money on things that you don't really need.
- You might have to explore the option of working part-time. There are many student jobs out there that allow you to be flexible with your time. Do some research so that you can choose the options that work best for your schedule and that are not so demanding as to distract you from your most important goal: graduating!

We will discuss this topic in more detail in Unit 5.

## 1.6.5 Possible reactions to adjustment challenges

It is normal to experience some of the following reactions as you adjust to university. If the negative feelings persist for a long time, it is important that you seek help!

		
Positive	Insecure	Angry
Excited	Overwhelmed	Anxious
Happy	Unhappy	Isolated
Independent	Desperate	Homesick
Motivated	Indecisive	Lonely
Enthusiastic	Confused	Stressed
Free	Worried	Disappointed
Ambitious	Lost	Scared

If you experience any of the following, you need to seek the necessary support:

- Failure to attend lectures regularly;
- Inability to connect with the study material/content;
- Lack of purpose for the qualification you are studying;
- Lengthy periods of stress and anxiety;
- Depression;
- Inability to make friends or lack of a social support network.

Visit a Student Development and Support (SDS) department on your campus for help in managing some of these feelings and behaviours.

Now that you have come to the end of this unit, complete the following activity to assist in your adjustment to your campus environment. It will assist you in learning more about the important areas on your campus, and you will be able to reflect on how these areas can help you adjust to university!

Click on Activity 1 on myTUTOR to access the activity for this unit. Once you have completed the activity, proceed to Quiz 1. **NOTE:** You must successfully complete the quiz to be able to access Test 1 for this unit. You may complete the quiz as many times as you wish.