**Job not degree**

One of the most common misconceptions that students have when coming into university is that their degree score is the most important criteria for success in their career. Up until this point in time, that is largely true; your successful admission to the mechanical engineering department at Imperial was mainly due to your academic grades that you have received. Yes, co-curricular activities, your personal statement, your performance in the interview etc. played a part, but the single most important driver was your academic results. At university, however this is no longer the case. The job you come out with should be your career focus whilst at university, not your degree score. People who come on Dean’s List (top 10% of the year) every single year are very often the ones who are left unemployed, as proof of the matter. This is not just within mechanical engineering but across other departments too.

**Get ahead!**

Majority of people lag behind on work. This may manifest as being behind on tutorial sheets, project work etc. As a result, people often get very stressed and worry about failing. To prevent this, we recommend you get ahead! What you will discover is that the workload distribution is not uniform throughout term, in that at the beginning of term you have little to no work, but it increases exponentially with the major deadlines hitting right at the end of term. Therefore, in the first couple of weeks of term you might be very relaxed as you have very little work, but there will be a time later on in the term when it hits you and you are overwhelmed, so don’t be fooled into a false sense of security! Instead, use the time you have at the beginning of term when you don’t have much work to get ahead of the game e.g. by pre-reading and getting ahead on tutorial sheets.

**Take a break – don’t work 24/7**

If you are someone who works almost 24/7 because you are always stressed about work and how much there is to do, you are not alone. Others have done this in the past too, and they score remarkably well as a result. What they regret doing, however, is not taking a break. If you are someone who suffers from anxiety and can’t stop working because of guilt, given how much work there is to be done, then just schedule a 1-hour slot every night, where you will not touch work and will do something that you enjoy. Your degree result will hardly be affected if you work 23 instead of 24 hours in a day, but you will have a significantly better experience as you will have something to look forward to every day.

**Weightage of reports etc and years**

Perhaps the biggest mistakes students on this course make, yet one that is done *so* often, is that students don’t check how much each piece of work contributes as a percentage of your final mark. You will be bombarded with work during the degree, be that coursework, tutorial sheets or project work. Juggling all of this can be very difficult, so it is essential that you know the weighting of each piece of work, so you can spend a sensible amount of time on it. You will find, for example, that lab reports in ME1 and ME2 count for a very small percentage of the year, yet people still spend a disproportionately large amount of time on them. What is equally important, is to actually make an Excel spreadsheet that tells you:

* How much each piece of work counts for as a percentage of the year and letting you input the mark you got in it
* What your current average is for the year
* The average mark you need for the rest of the degree to get a first
* The average mark you need for the rest of the degree to get a 2:1

This is something that only a select few students do, but it is a very powerful thing to do, as it puts everything into perspective, gives you an accurate understanding of what you are on track for and how relaxed/stressed you ought to be, and helps you prioritise work. It will take only a few minutes to make at the start of the year and will be very useful for you throughout the year. You can obtain the contributions for each module in the student handbook on Blackboard and/or the mechanical engineering detailed module description website.

**Bag your marks early!**

In making your excel spreadsheet, you will realise that some years are worth considerably more than others. Here is the current contributions of each year towards your final degree mark:

* ME1: 0%
* ME2: 25%
* ME3: 37.5%
* ME4: 37.5%

You should be aware of this, and bear this in mind. Some people regret working so hard in first year and neglecting social aspects of their university life, given that it doesn’t count. You might wonder then, why should I try at all then in first year, why should I not just enjoy my university life? Some ,people take this approach and fail the year (ME1 failure rate is approximately 10% every year). Also, in ME1 if you try, you will be able to figure out what works and what doesn’t in terms of revision etc. Degree work is completely different to anything at school, therefore ME1 is a useful learning opportunity if you try. Also if you do not put in any work and just do the bare minimum to scrape a pass, you may struggle in ME2 due to lack of knowledge.

Its also worth noting that if you do well in ME2 and ME3, you can make your life much easier in ME4 as you will not need to score as highly to get whatever grade you are hoping for. People in the past have done so well in ME2 and ME3 that they need less than 40% in ME4 to get a 1st! ME4 is also more technically challenging, therefore it may be sensible for you to bag your marks in ME2 and ME3 for this reason as well.

**Cw is marked out of..**

At some point in your degree you will all discover this for yourself; it is extremely difficult to obtain an exceptionally high mark in coursework. Coursework is generally marked out of 85%, as opposed to 100% which is the case for an exam. In an exam, if you get every question correct, then they have no choice but to give you 100%. In coursework, however, as it is subjective, even if your work is perfect, you will likely only get a maximum of ~85% as the department is keen to ensure the average mark obtained is around 65%.

**Network**

This point is not as important as the others on the list, but for those of you who are passionate about engineering, it may be helpful to network with some of the lecturers and build good relationships with them. Having good relationships may help you secure UROPs, or it may help you get a good FYP in ME4 in a field you are passionate about, or they may be more willing to accept you for a self-proposed LRP or DMT or FYP.

**Mech eng friends**

When you come to university, you will undoubtedly want to make friends. Make lots of friends, especially those doing mechanical engineering. Why? Because the people on your course will be the people you spend most of your time with. This is because this degree is very intense and time consuming. If you don’t have friends on your course, then chances are you will not enjoy your degree. If you are stuck on something (which will happen frequently), say a piece of coursework for example, then having friends on your same course will be extremely useful!

**It gets better every year!**

If you are not enjoying the degree, then just remember that it gets better every single year. ME1 is the least enjoyable – you don’t know what you are doing, everything is new to you, and it is very overwhelming. By ME2 you now know what you are doing, and this year is much more enjoyable than ME1, albeit if there is more work. In ME3, you have much more spare time, and freedom; not only do you get to pick 5 optional modules of your choice, you also have much fewer contact hours than ME2. And ME4 is even better – it is very similar to ME3, except now, instead of DMT which is a group project, you have FYP, which is individual. You therefore have even more freedom than ME3 as you are in full control of this project.

**Older years**

Make sure you have friends in older years – this is a must! Doing so will make your degree significantly easier. They have literally just been in your shoes, so they will be able to offer you fantastic advice, and help you avoid making mistakes. The advice is not restricted to just your course, but can be for career guidance or housing advice etc. Try and stay in touch with the ‘parents’ you get allocated through the mums and dads scheme. If you haven’t got the most caring and supportive ‘parents’ then try and befriend others through friends in your own year perhaps.

**Mentality of Lectures**

Through school, you may have developed the mindset that the ‘right’ thing to do is to attend every lecture. We’re not saying don’t attend lectures by any means, but we’re saying don’t be close minded about not attending them and don’t attend every lecture religiously out of fear. Some people don’t find lectures useful – some find they can’t keep up with the pace of the lecturers, some don’t find the lecturers to be very effective teachers, for some it just doesn’t match their learning style. As a mechanical engineering student, you are very privileged in that the department has gone to the effort to produce course notes for nearly every module taught. You might see this as the norm but ask around people from other departments and you will soon realise how lucky we are, in that students from most other departments have to learn off lecture slides alone. Many students find it more effective to therefore teach themselves from the thorough course notes that we have, at their own pace, instead of attending ‘lectures’ for the sake of it, struggling to keep up/getting distracted during the lecture and then having to relearn the content from the notes in the future anyway. If you are someone who goes to lectures and goes on their phone for majority of it - don’t waste your time going to lectures!

**Panopto discovery**

Panopto was a luxury a few years ago… many lecturers preferred not to Panopto, and only a select few did. Now, however, every single lecture is recorded on Panopto - do not take this for granted. By default, many students believe that going to lectures is the right thing to do and neglect Panopto, and use it only if they have missed a lecture for a genuine reason. It is only until very late in their degree do they realise how useful it actually is. Do you understand everything that is being taught in lectures? Are you able to keep up with the lecturer’s pace?

**Societies**

Your university experience is not complete if you do not take part in societies, and they are essential if you are doing a course as tough as mechanical engineering. Don’t think that because your course is so time consuming, you do not have time to do any societies. Attending society events is fantastic as they take your mind off your degree. As well as being a great opportunity to meet new people and make new friends, they will also give you the chance to gain new experiences in different activities and look great on your CV. People often regret not doing societies, as by the time they want to take part in them, they feel too old for them. Certain societies people typically only do in their first 2 years; therefore, you might feel uncomfortable if you are the only one in your year at these events. Many societies also target their events at freshers specifically. As well as this, if you join societies in later years, that is absolutely fine, but you may find it harder to join groups that have already formed. Therefore get heavily involved in societies right from first year. People often sign up to hundreds of things at Freshers’ Fair. It is better to do a select few societies (maybe just 1) properly, then to do numerous ones superficially.

**Solutions**

If you have solutions to tutorial sheets, make the most of them. Some people avoid them entirely as they feel this is not aiding their learning, but in reality it is just the same as looking a the mark scheme for an exam question. It will save you plenty of time - attempt the question, if you can’t do it, then look at the solution for a hint, and keep doing so until you complete it. Don’t spend too long on the attempting part as this is inefficient and you may be going on the wrong lines. Even if you are able to solve the questions without the solutions, it is still worth looking at them as the solution may provide a better way of solving it or you may find that your working is not entirely correct. Equally, don’t be fooled into thinking you are fully up to date as you have done all the tutorial sheet questions if you have just copied out all the solutions. Make sure you actually understand everything the solutions have done and can reproduce them.

**Supervisors**

One mistake that people make is that they chose projects in ME3 and ME4 based purely on what they find most interesting and exciting, and ignore their supervisor. Some supervisors are notorious; this may be for being extremely harsh markers, or for not giving out high marks, for being unhelpful, hard to find or constantly contradicting themselves and what they want throughout a project. Even if you are an expert in the field your project is in, if you haven’t got a good supervisor, you may still hate the project and get a bad mark. Don’t make this mistake! Before selecting a project, make sure you ask around to others in your year or those in the year above if they know how the supervisor is. Even if the supervisor is someone who has lectured you before etc and appears very nice and friendly, don’t be fooled into thinking they will therefore be a good supervisor - some of the nicest lectures have been known to be the meanest markers!