

ORIENTATION

By

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**Motho ke motho
ka batho.**

**Umntu ngumtu
ngabantu.**

A person is a person
because of other people.

African proverb





WHAT IS ORIENTATION?

Welcome to Orientation! Orientation is an intensive journey of discovery that introduces you to how UCT works, what your degree entails and other important information. You'll be exposed to some of the excellent science and research that is done in the Science Faculty. You'll discover some of the fun activities and societies on offer – and learn what it takes to thrive at UCT. Orientation Leaders (OLs) will guide you through this journey and help you adjust to life at UCT.

There are three important aspects to the first week of Orientation:

- **BSc degree information:** In order to choose suitable courses, you need to know what science is on offer at UCT and the different pathways that you can take to get a BSc degree.
- **Computing and digital literacy sessions:** You'll be shown the basics of how to use a computer and UCT's online platforms.
- **Registration:** You will register as a UCT student and sign up for particular courses. You do this by a process on UCT's online admin system (PeopleSoft), which you'll be guided through.

As you move between Orientation sessions, you'll have opportunities to meet other students. This may seem daunting, especially if you are introverted by nature, but study buddies are important and Orientation is a good time to connect with other students. For the first time in your life, all of your classmates love science!





During the second week of Orientation, you'll learn more about UCT:

- **Student support:** You'll be introduced to the different kinds of support available to BSc students (e.g. the Science Faculty's student support system, Student Wellness Services, Careers Services, Disability Services and Campus Protection Services).
- **A campus tour:** OLs will help you find your way around campus.
- **Guidance:** Senior science students and others will advise you on how to stay safe and thrive.
- **Clubs and societies:** You'll have an opportunity to find out about UCT's many societies and sports clubs.

Orientation might feel overwhelming. You may feel overloaded with all the new information or experience culture shock. This is normal. In these moments, try to breathe and just enjoy the fact that you are here – you have achieved your dream of coming to UCT.

This chapter is meant to help you enjoy Orientation rather than being overwhelmed by it. We provide the information you need on how UCT works and the support structures available to you on your journey to becoming one of UCT's prestigious graduates. We also share advice from OLs and other UCT science students.

Coming to a place like UCT isn't always easy. It's exciting, scary and overwhelming at the same time. Right now, I'm carrying my dreams, my family's dreams and my community's dreams. *Umthwalo wam' uyasinda* (my load is heavy).

Maqhawe Matshayana

BSc Hons (Human Geography)
from Mdantsane, Eastern
Cape



UCT: A WHOLE NEW WORLD

When you arrive at UCT, you realise that it's a very different world from school. You may no longer be the shining star in your class or the smartest person in the room. You are now among many other talented and gifted students, with many with different cultures and backgrounds. The teaching methods are new and you probably need to take your digital literacy skills to a new level. The freedom that comes with being at university is exhilarating, but it comes with increased responsibility; you are now accountable for the choices you make, such as choosing to attend lectures or not or choosing whether to go out the night before a test. All of this newness is a big challenge, but you are tough! You can thrive at university, even with all the challenges.

The UCT academic calendar

The university year contains two teaching semesters, each of which is divided into two terms. Exams are written at the end of each semester. The terms are only 6 weeks long and are much shorter than school terms. This means that you have to work harder and learn faster than you did at school. Being a student is a full-time job and requires 40–50 hours of work per week. The short semesters also mean that, unlike school, there isn't time to catch up if you fall behind. The exact dates for each year are available at [UCT terms](#).

Degree terminology

The most important thing you need to figure out during Orientation is which courses to take. In order to do this, you need to familiarise yourself with some essential terminology:

The jump from high school to varsity is a huge one. School doesn't really prepare you for the change. UCT feels like a different and foreign place – might I say, a different world! It gets going quick and UCT soon feels like a rollercoaster just as it drops. Somehow you need to know how to walk on both feet before being taught to crawl. Truth is, it's a journey and you will only learn 'how to' as you go.

Orateng Mogadigwane

BSc (Genetics and Human Anatomy & Physiology) from Pretoria, Gauteng

Orientation (2 weeks)	
Semester 1	Term 1 (6 weeks)
	Mid-semester break (1 week)
	Term 2 (6 weeks)
	Exams (3 weeks)
Mid-year vacation (4-5 weeks)	
Semester 2	Term 3 (6 weeks)
	Mid-semester break (1 week)
	Term 4 (6 weeks)
	Exams (3 weeks)
December vacation	



Majors: Your majors are the subjects in which you specialise in the final year of your BSc. You choose your two majors during Orientation. It is possible to change your majors later on, but this may mean your degree takes longer to complete.

Curriculum: Your curriculum is the selection of courses that you take. In your first year, you will take three or four subjects in each semester.

Core courses: For each major, you are required to pass certain core courses that prepare you for the major. If you fail a core course, you must repeat it; this could mean that you do a mix of first- and second-year courses next year.

Electives: Depending on your majors, you may have space in your curriculum for core courses belonging to other majors. These courses are not compulsory for your majors but are instead optional courses that you 'elect' (choose) to take, thus they are called 'electives'. You can choose any electives whose lectures don't clash with your core courses. It is, however, wise to be strategic and choose electives that widen your degree options, in case you want to change your majors in the future (without lengthening your degree time).

The Science Faculty Handbook (available online) contains all the rules pertaining to the BSc degree and details of each course. If you want to know more about a course (name, content, lecturer, lecture period, etc.), look up the course in the handbook. (If you open this handbook and immediately feel overwhelmed, don't freak out. You are not alone! Everyone, including your lecturers finds this handbook confusing and complicated.)

I'm sure right now you're feeling incredibly overwhelmed because *kuningi mani lesinitjela kona* (there's a lot we're telling you). But you don't have to worry, no one is expecting you to be able to do everything just yet. *Nisafika, titsatsa sikhatsi letinfo* (you've just arrived, these things take time).

Anele Matsebula

MSc (Geology) from Eswatini



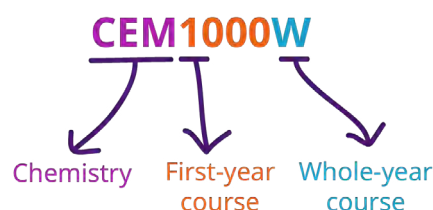
Pre-requisites and co-requisites: Some courses have **pre-requisite** courses (called 'course entry requirements' in the Science Faculty Handbook) that you must pass beforehand. Some courses have **co-requisite** courses that you must take at the same time.

Course code: Each course has a unique course code that provides essential information about the course. For example, the code **BIO3002F** tells you that this is a level 3 (final year) biology (BIO) course that runs in the first semester (F). Here are all the codes that tell you when a course occurs:

- **F** – First-semester half-course
- **S** – Second-semester half-course
- **W** – Whole-course taught over both semesters
- **H** – Half-course taught over both semesters
- **P** – Summer-term half-course (optional course that runs for four weeks after the November exams)
- **L** – Winter-term half-course (optional course that runs for four weeks after the June exams)

Credits: Each course is allocated a certain number of NQF (National Qualifications Framework) credits. Each NQF credit means that you should expect to spend about 10 hours working on that subject; e.g. for an 18-credit course, you would expect to spend 180 hours in total on the course. You need a minimum of 360 credits for the BSc degree, but the core courses for your particular majors may add up to more than 360 credits.

Fees: Your tuition fees are calculated based on your curriculum (i.e. how many and which courses you take).



The number of courses you take affects your fees and your workload. Think carefully when choosing courses.



Postgraduate study: After you complete your BSc degree, you can take a one-year honours degree (BSc Hons) in one of your majors. You can then do a masters' degree (MSc), which usually takes two years, followed by a doctorate (PhD), which takes at least three years to complete.

Digital basics

There are special sessions in Orientation to help you with Wi-Fi access and introduce you to the digital landscape at UCT. Here are the main digital tools and apps you will use in your studies at UCT:

- **Wi-Fi:** UCT's Wi-Fi network is called Eduroam. You have unlimited access anywhere on campus and in UCT residences.
- **Email:** Your UCT email address <studentnumber@myuct.ac.za> is the official channel for communication from your lecturers, as well as from finance and admin staff.
- **PeopleSoft** is UCT's system for admin (such as registration and updating your contact details).
- **Amathuba** is the online platform where you'll find resources for your courses. You can access it on your laptop and phone.
- **Microsoft apps:** As a UCT student, you can install Microsoft Office software on your laptop at no cost. Useful Microsoft apps include Word (for creating documents), Excel (useful for analysing data) and Teams (for online meetings).

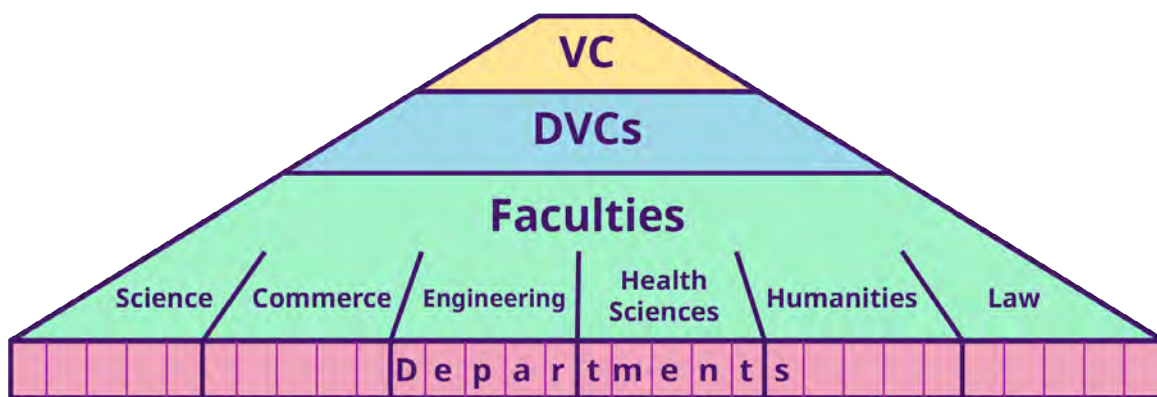
You can get help with your laptop and phone at UCT's Information and Communication Technology Services (ICTS) Front Office (in the Computer Science Building, next to Cissie Gool plaza, opposite the food court).



Who is who?

During Orientation, you'll meet people with different titles. If you are curious about these titles and would like to know what they mean, then you need to know a bit about how UCT is structured. UCT has six faculties, each of which is divided into departments (the Science Faculty has 12 departments). Each department is responsible for research and teaching in a particular subject (also called a 'discipline'), such as mathematics or biology.

It's polite to address an academic by their title and surname. If you don't know their title or surname, you can play it safe by using 'Prof'.



Here is an overview of what the titles mean:

- **VC:** The academic head of the university is the **Vice-Chancellor (VC)**. (The **Chancellor** is a figurehead who will tap you on the head at graduation, but does not get involved in the day-to-day running of the university.)
- **DVC:** The VC is assisted by three **Deputy-Vice Chancellors (DVCs)** – each of whom has a different portfolio, namely: Teaching and Learning; Research and Internationalisation; Transformation, Student Affairs and Social Responsiveness.
- **Deans:** Each faculty is headed by a **Dean**, who is assisted by **Deputy Deans**.
- **Head of Department:** Each department is led by the **Head of Department (HoD)**.
- **Lecturer:** The job of a lecturer is research, teaching and administrative work. Your lecturers may have the title 'Dr', which means they have completed a PhD (doctoral degree). Some of them may have been promoted to **Associate Professor (A/Prof)** or even full **Professor (Prof)**, based on the quality and quantity of their research. (It doesn't mean they are better teachers.)
- **Course Convenor:** Most courses have more than one lecturer, each of whom lectures for a few weeks. The Course Convenor is the lecturer who has overall responsibility for the course.



There are also other entities in the university, such as the **Department of Student Affairs** (which includes the residences and Student Wellness Services) and **CHED** (the Centre for Higher Education Development), which supports the faculties in their teaching and includes Career Services and the Writing Centre. The **Council** is like the board of a company and is responsible for the overall governance of the university. Big decisions are debated in the **Senate**, which includes all professors and leaders. Overall, the university is a complicated structure, but you don't need to know all the details.

How teaching happens

Teaching at university is different from school. In this section, we explain how the timetable works and how teaching happens. We also explain how your performance is assessed.

Timetable: In the Science Faculty, lectures take place during the mornings, whereas practicals and tutorials are in the afternoons. The lecture timetable is the same every day (e.g. biology is always in period 2), but each afternoon you will do something different. If you take three courses, then you will have three lectures per day (one per course), and you will be busy for at least three afternoons. The rest of the time you should spend in a study space (such as the Science Learning Centre in the Chris Hani Building), working on your own or (preferably) with a group of study buddies who will help you keep on track.

Lectures	Period 1	8:00-8:45
	Period 2	9:00-9:45
	Period 3	10:00-10:45
	Period 4	11:00-11:45
	Period 5	12:00-12:45
Lunchtime/meridian		13:00-14:45
Practicals and tutorials	Periods 6-8	14:00-17:00

Lectures are how most teaching happens at university. A lecturer provides a lot of information in a short space of time to hundreds of students sitting in a large lecture theatre. Lectures are generally not interactive, although some lecturers allow time for questions. Some courses (such as first-year computer science and statistics) have replaced lectures with online material.



Tutorials ('tuts') are an opportunity to consolidate your learning. You will work in small groups, usually with **tutors** (senior students) to help you. Tutorials happen differently in different subjects, so you will need to pay attention to find out the 'rules of the game' for each subject's tuts.

Laboratory practicals ('pracs') are opportunities for you to learn important laboratory skills. You will learn to use specialised apparatus, take measurements, analyse data and write reports. Pracs may also help with your understanding of theory, but this is usually not the primary aim. Pracs take place in a laboratory, usually with students working in small groups, with **demonstrators** (senior students) available to help. Practicals usually take 2–3 hours to complete.

Field trips are offered in some courses, where you are taken outside 'to the field', i.e. an environment where you can see practical examples and learn field skills.

Amathuba is the online platform that is used to support UCT courses. Each course has an Amathuba site where you can find resources such as course hand-outs, reading material, past tests and memos, lecture notes and lecture recordings.

Assessment: At the end of each course, you will be allocated a mark for the course. You need 50 % to pass. This mark will be made up of a **coursework mark** (sometimes called a 'class record' mark; calculated from marks for tests, quizzes, practicals, tutorials, weekly problem sets, assignments and maybe even a mark for attendance) and an **exam mark** from the June/November exams. The exam mark usually counts about 50 % of the overall course mark.



Due Performance (DP): In order to be allowed to write the exam, you must meet certain DP requirements; for example, you may need to get a certain minimum coursework mark and/or obtain a minimum mark for your lab reports. If you don't meet these requirements, then you get 'DP Refused' (DPR) and you fail the course.

Course outline/handout: Each course has a document known as the 'course outline' or 'course handout'. It will be on the course's Amathuba site and a hard copy may be handed out in the first lecture. This document outlines the course content and explains everything about the organisation of the course, such as assessment, DP requirements, any prescribed textbooks and important dates.

THRIVING AT UCT

There's a lot more to being a student than getting a degree. There are many societies and clubs that you can join. If you are in a UCT residence, there are res activities and sport. You may have access to parties (and alcohol and drugs) like never before. You will encounter diverse people, whose beliefs and values differ from yours. You may experience romance. You have many choices, so how do you choose what's best for you? And how do you stay safe in the midst of it all? In this section, we cover some important basics.

One thing I have observed is that staying true to yourself in whatever you do will be what keeps you sane.

Sydney Muganda

BSc (Computer Science & Statistics) from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Freedom and responsibility

When you come to university, you are catapulted into adulthood. Suddenly, your whole life is in your hands. You can choose whether to study and how you spend your leisure time. That sounds wonderful! But with freedom comes responsibility – you are responsible for your own choices and actions, and will live with the consequences.



How do you decide what to do? Two simple principles are: (1) stay committed to your academics; and (2) always prioritise your personal safety and well-being. Also remember that peer pressure is just bullying by another name.

Be safe on campus: UCT is an open campus; anyone can just walk onto it, including criminals. The reality is that crime is a problem in Cape Town and students get mugged for their laptops and phones, especially at night. Try to walk in a group if you must be out at night. (If something does happen, contact Campus Protection Services immediately.)

Clubs and societies: UCT has many student-led societies and clubs, which are visible during Orientation. You can sign up for a year's membership. Any cost is charged to your fees account. Societies and clubs can be supportive social spaces where you can acquire useful skills. However, beware of overcommitting. Less is more: choose one or two activities at a time and commit to them. You can join a UCT society or club at any time during the year through Peoplesoft.

The nice thing about university is no one tells you what to do. But that is also the bad thing about university.

Ajani Mnyandu

BSc Hons (Oceanography) from Clermont, KZN

Before joining clubs and societies, find out the time commitment and any costs involved

Yes, *uzele zona izincwadi*, but *awuzelanga zona zodwa* (you are here to study, but not only that). Be involved in other activities, allow yourself *ukuthi uhlangane nabantu abantu* (to meet other people). Extra activities will help you *ukuthi ukiphe istress* (relieve stress) and *uzothola* (you will find) people to lean your head against.

Bongi Ngomane

BSc (Biochemistry and Human Anatomy & Physiology) from Jozi, Gauteng



Managing your money

As a university student, you should pay careful attention to your finances. You need to take care of your own financial needs (paying for things like toiletries, groceries, books and having fun), and you also need to make sure that your UCT fees are paid. You may also be required to send money back home. It's important that you develop basic financial literacy and money management skills. Mastering these basic skills will serve you for the rest of your life. You can get information about your fees from the **UCT Fees Office**. If you're funded through NSFAS or a bursary, get to know the **UCT Financial Aid Office**.

Here are some tips for managing your money:

- Draw up a monthly budget that accounts for all your expenses.
- Plan ahead for any additional expenses, like travelling home at the end of the semester.
- Do not overcommit to clubs and societies, as this can become quite costly.
- Be upfront with your family about your financial situation and do not overcommit to helping at home if you do not have enough money to survive in Cape Town.
- Take a free online course on financial literacy or watch YouTube videos on how to manage your money.

NSFAS has an annual R50 000 cap on accommodation costs, which means NSFAS students are responsible for paying the remaining cost, so need to think carefully about what this means for their particular financial circumstances.

**Trigger warning:**

This next section includes references to gender-based violence.

Rape culture and consent

Sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence are unfortunately extremely common in South Africa. A study published in 2024 found that 36% of South African women have experienced physical or sexual violence, with 24% experiencing violence by an intimate partner [1]. Sadly, universities are not immune to this epidemic. Almost half of UCT's female students report that they experience inappropriate behaviour within the first month of arriving at university [2]. The first term is seen as a 'red zone' [3] because of the high rates of sexual assault on campus. We should all contribute towards a safe environment for ourselves and all members of the UCT community.

A culture of consent is one where people treat each other with care and respect, and sexual partners are considered equals. This means that every person has the right to choose whether to agree to sexual activity and can cancel their consent at any time. In any romantic or sexual encounter, we respect the decisions and boundaries of others.

In contrast, rape culture blurs the lines on what is considered consent and allows for sexual advances to be made even when a person has not agreed. Rape culture is perpetuated through sexist language and the objectification of women's bodies, which together create a society that disregards women's rights and safety. Rape culture harms everyone, including men and LGBTQI+ people.

UCT stands against rape culture. UCT stands for the rights of all people to consent to everything that happens to their bodies. Any sexual contact without consent is regarded as sexual assault.

If someone is quiet or doesn't respond, this does not mean they are consenting. It's common for people who have experienced sexual violence to find they are unable to move or speak.



ALL ABOUT CONSENT



Silence is
not consent



Arousal is
not consent



Uncertainty is
not consent

It is not possible to obtain consent from someone who is:



Drunk or high



Asleep



Unconscious



A minor



Being pressured,
bullied or manipulated



Being forced



Or may have had
their drink spiked

Navigating consent

Freely given consent
is mandatory,
every time

I know we
did this before
but I'm not keen
today

YES! YES! YES!

Rather than waiting
for a 'no', be sure
there's an active 'yes'

**Creating a culture
of enthusiastic consent**

Stop if you suspect
that your partner is
not 100% comfortable

I think we
should stop
here

How does
this feel?

Check frequently
for ongoing consent



RAPE CULTURE INCLUDES

Sexually explicit jokes



Tolerance of sexual harassment



Pressure on men to 'score'



Pressure on women to not appear 'cold'



Defining 'manhood' as dominant and sexually aggressive



Defining 'womanhood' as submissive and sexually passive



Assuming only promiscuous women get raped



Assuming that only 'weak' men get raped



Trivialising sexual assault



Victim-blaming





The importance of help-seeking behaviour

During your time at UCT, you will encounter dilemmas, complications, setbacks and other challenges – both in your studies and in your personal life. In these situations, reaching out for help will make a huge difference in your life. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it takes courage and strength. We encourage you to pro-actively seek help whenever you might benefit from it. There are many support services available to UCT students, but you won't benefit if you don't ask. In the Science Faculty, there are numerous people available to help you:

Classmates: Don't overlook your classmates as a source of information and support. Asking a classmate is probably the fastest way of getting a response. It will also help you form relationships with potential study buddies.

Student Advisors are lecturers who, on top of their teaching and research, advise you on your curriculum, both at registration and during the year. You can email them or visit them in their offices. (Contact details at: [Student Advisors | Faculty of Science.](#))

The **Science Faculty Office** has staff dedicated to helping BSc students with administrative issues and providing information. (Email sci-science@uct.ac.za)

The Science Faculty's **Student Development Officer** supports students in all aspects of their academic and personal lives. Their role includes advising on academic and personal issues; providing information and guidance on UCT's policies and procedures; referring students to other support services, such as counselling or tutoring; and providing emergency consultations for students in distress.

If you experience personal tragedy, such as the loss of a close family member, it's important to prioritise your personal well-being and the needs of your family.

The Science Faculty's Student Development Officer can advise you. Grief counselling from Student Wellness Services can be highly beneficial. You can take a Leave of Absence from your studies to attend to personal matters, and your lecturers can give extensions for assessments.

I'm Mohammed Kajee, the Science Faculty Student Development Officer. Contact me with all your queries – no matter how big or small, I am here to help.



Email
mohammed.kajee@uct.ac.za
WhatsApp
065 884 2265



Lecturers: You have three options for communicating one-to-one with a lecturer: after a lecture (but there may be a long queue); during their weekly consultation/office hours (advertised in the course handout or on Amathuba); or by email (usually <firstname.surname@uct.ac.za>).

Mentors: You can sign up to join a weekly meeting with a mentor (a senior science student), in the Science Faculty's mentoring programme. A mentor provides general advice but is not expected to help you with course content or assignments. Details on this programme will be sent to you via email during the Orientation week.

Class Representatives: Every course has at least one class rep who plays the role of communicating any requests or issues raised by the class to the lecturer. The class rep can raise issues anonymously.

Science Students' Council: The SSC is made up of BSc students and represents student interests on Science Faculty committees.

It can be confusing to know who to ask for different kinds of help. During Orientation, you receive the *Faculty of Science Student Information Booklet for Science Students* and a one-page 'How can we help you?' guide. Both provide a lot of information and contact details.

Keep the list of numbers we give you, because at some point in your time at UCT, *ngitotidzinga* (you'll need them).

Anele Matsebula

MSc (Geology) from Eswatini



Advice from Orientation Leaders

When we asked some OLs what advice they would give first-year UCT students, based on their own experiences, most of them spoke about the importance of asking for help. Here is what some of them said:

Sphiwe Nyoni

BSc (Computer Science & Biochemistry) from Orange Farm, Gauteng



I know what you're thinking right now, in and out of UCT, *ngi thole ispani* (get a job), but don't get fooled. I remember I had the same mindset, *ke nahana hore dintho ditlaba easy nyana* (thinking that things will be a bit easy). *Ke kgutlele hae batho ba bone hore kesetswa UCT* (so, I could go back home and people will see that I am from UCT). When you find yourself in a state of depression, do not be afraid to seek help, Student Wellness is there to assist. To all males out there, it is okay to express emotions. It's okay to feel depressed. I know I was and I wish I'd reached out for help.

Sisipho Tukushe

BSc Hons (Computer Science) from Khayelitsha, Western Cape



As a first-year student, I came in guns blazing coz I was a top learner in high school and I was the GURL. I was helping people though their academics. When I got to second year, I struggled, *bendilila ndindodwa* (I was lonely) and I didn't open myself up. What helped was engaging with other students, tutors and lecturers. They are there to help you, to share your experience and provide a helping hand. After all, we are all here to *dala* (create) a good future for ourselves, so let's open ourselves because *izandla zimahlambana* (hands wash each other).

Unkazimulo Zuma

BSc (Earth Science), from KwaMashu, KZN



Kodwa sengiphetha (but I've realised) that it is almost impossible to do this thing alone. Be okay with relying on those around you. My degrees have been teamwork. I genuinely wouldn't have been able to do it without my classmates, friends and general support. The bottom line is, *bengingeke ngibe ilutho ngaphandle kwabantu abaseduze kwami* (I wouldn't have been anything without the people I was close to).



Calvin Swart

MSc (Oceanography), from
White River, Mpumalanga



I was born in Mpumalanga, but grew up in Ireland. At the age of 25, I decided to go back and study. Boy, was I was unprepared for how difficult it would be, not only academically but also socially. I struggled massively through first year trying to do everything on my own and ultimately failed. Only in second year, when I asked for help and was forced to partner up with my classmates, did I begin to excel. I can now proudly say I finished my undergrad with not only great results, but great friendships. In Irish, I say *go raibh mile maith agat* (thanks a million).

Bongi Ngomane

BSc (Biochemistry and
Human Anatomy &
Physiology), from Jozi,
Gauteng



University isn't for you *ukuthi ubulawe umthwalo* (to be killed by burden), now when you start feeling *ukuthi kurwef* (it's tough), you have to reach out and get help. *O seke wa swela ka gare* (don't die from inside), *re mo go to thusa wena* (we are here to help you). *Sisonke lana* (we are together here). I started on the three-year programme and *ngabona ukuthi ngizosindwa* (I saw that I will be burdened), so I extended some courses, *lokho kwenza iprogramme yami ibe yinde* (that made my programme longer) but *leswi swilulamile* (it's fine).

Matimba Maholobela

BSc (Computer Science &
Statistics), Bonn Village,
Limpopo



Find someone you're comfortable talking with (where there is no language barrier). It can be a student advisor. You can be accompanied by a friend if you're not comfortable. *Kombela ku pfuniwa ka munhu loyi angataku twisisa hi ririmi ra wena na swona uva u tshuxekile ka yena* (find someone who will be able to help you in your home language and be free when speaking to them).



Belonging at UCT

As you experience the newness of UCT (and possibly some culture shock), you may find yourself wondering whether you really belong at UCT. The truth is, you *do* belong here if you want to be a scientist or can see how a BSc will help you achieve your life goals. (If not, please book a consultation with Careers Service as soon as possible. The BSc is tough enough as it is, but you'll find it impossible if you can't see the point of it.)

Your experience of belonging will increase as you find spaces in UCT where you feel you fit in. It helps to find like-minded people, perhaps in your courses or your residence, or in religious meetings or sport. You may find that people who seem different from you actually share your values or interests. Thandiwe (not her real name) offers some wisdom from her own experience of fitting in.

My first-year journey taught me to never compare myself with others but rather believe in my potential.

Mpho Sehlabo

MSc (Oceanography) from Botshabelo, Free State

You don't have to have everything figured out right now, just keep an open mind.

Nonhlanhla Hlatshwayo

BSc (Genetics and Biochemistry) from Newcastle, KZN

My
story

I was losing myself just to fit in

Thandiwe*BSc student*

Varsity is very different from high school. It is filled with these beautiful opportunities to enhance your character and find things that excite you and that you are truly passionate about. Along with these experiences comes the responsibility of choice. You have to know when something simply looks shiny on the outside, but is not worth it.

During my first four weeks in varsity, I felt alone. I tried to make friends, but it didn't really happen. This led to me pushing myself into different friend groups at res that didn't really go with who I was. But the fear of loneliness was so strong. I found myself going out on weekdays when I should have been studying. I was losing myself just to fit in.

That is when I remembered why I came to Cape Town. I started making new friends within my faculty and we immediately clicked - we shared almost the same problems and the same goals. It was refreshing to fit in without trying. I learnt that sometimes life gives you people that are not going to stay but are just there to teach you to make better choices. I learnt that finding your people in varsity is difficult. But if you remember where you come from, it becomes clearer. My parents' words kept me going and helped me realise that we are all different and come from different backgrounds.

Learning to avoid the noise and make my own peace is what guided me to know when to fit in with people who match my energy and who don't make me feel like I have to change who I am and what I believe in. It also guided me to know when NOT to fit into situations that won't benefit me in any way. I realised that some people and some experiences or situations are not bad, they are just not for me, and are not worth the risk of my sanity and future.



YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS!

Orientation is the first step in an exciting journey of discovery and learning. The BSc is a rewarding degree that opens doors beyond university, with careers in science and beyond. At the same time, it's a tough degree because scientific concepts are difficult to master. And it's tough to manage the academic challenges if you are also looking after yourself on your own, probably for the first time in your life. However, you have already overcome challenges to get into UCT, and you are tough enough for this degree. It's now up to you to take responsibility for making the most of every learning opportunity, while staying well and safe. Science is tough, but so are you!

If you have found this chapter helpful, then you'll find the other chapters in this book helpful to guide you on different aspects of your UCT journey. Orientating to the different aspects of UCT doesn't end when lectures start. Instead, Orientation is an ongoing process throughout your first year, as you move through the different seasons of the academic year, such as the first tests, the mid-semester break, your exams and returning home mid-year. It's wise to embrace all the help you can get on the challenging but exciting first-year journey.

Being at UCT, one of the things I learned personally was how uni is not just an academic learning experience, but a wider and full-on personal journey. This includes at times not always succeeding or running into setbacks. I think those moments shape your character as an individual and will help you grow the most. But, all in all, these will be some of the best and fondest times of your life, or they'll be the turning point of your life, or both.

Sydney Muganda

BSc (Computer Science and Statistics) from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



Read/watch more

Information about how UCT works, including admin processes

The UCT ChatBot (WhatsApp 087 240 6965)
'Science Undergraduate' Amathuba site (login at <https://amathuba.uct.ac.za/>)

Information about Science Faculty courses

The science handbook ([UCT Handbooks](#); use <Ctrl>F and the course code to find a course)

Curriculum advice

[Student Advisors | Faculty of Science](#)

Help with registration or admin

The Science Faculty Office
(Email sci-science@uct.ac.za)

Life direction

Careers Service (book a free consultation at <https://mycareer.uct.ac.za/>)

Physical or mental health support

Student Wellness Services ([SWS bookings](#))

Funding and NSFAS issues

[UCT Fees Office](#) and Financial Aid (email financialaid@uct.ac.za)

GBV survivor support

The [Rape Crisis](#) and [Me Too movement](#) websites have many useful resources. Rape Crisis provides free confidential counselling for rape survivors at their offices in Observatory, Khayelitsha and Athlone. They have helplines in English (021 447 9762), isiXhosa (021 361 9085) and Afrikaans (021 633 9229), and WhatsApp counselling (083 222 5164).

UCT's term dates

[UCT terms](#)



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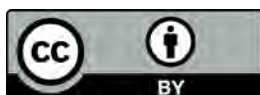
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