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Engaging with university learning

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Efforts spent engaging with the university and developing your study skills will make your nursing or midwifery course so much more of a pleasure.

This chapter sets out to help you settle into university learning, and introduce you to changes and challenges, so that you can become actively engaged with the educational and other experiences the course will expose you to. If you immerse yourself in the course, the experience of being at university and the study possibilities, you are likely to be more than just successful. You are likely to enjoy your studies and develop habits and attitudes that will enhance your learning well beyond completing the course. 'A higher education experience is not a commodity, it is a participatory experience' (Harvey 2006:15); research by Forbes and Spence (1991) indicates that the quality of your engagement in learning tasks is key to learning. Your engagement with the university and the learning opportunities it offers directly impacts on your progress and success.





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Introduction

By now you will probably have been officially welcomed to the university by some very senior person such as the Dean, a professor or a head of department, in an impressive lecture theatre. You may already have felt a twinge of underlying anxiety that often accompanies change or new experiences. Ten years ago most people entering nursing or midwifery would not have envisaged going to university but these subjects are now firmly located in university departments or faculties where they make up a major proportion of student numbers.

Yet a degree or diploma may not be your main purpose. You may simply wish to extend your career as a qualified nurse or midwife by undertaking additional learning or, more likely, you are in year one of a three-year course which will lead to an initial qualification in nursing or midwifery. In either case you may feel very much the novice as a student in the university setting. However there are many people within the university and practice settings, often older, experienced nurses or midwives who are willing to assist you in a fairly smooth transition into university life as pointed out by Watson *et al.* (2006) in a national survey. You are in good company.

Some aspects of studying at university are very different from school, college or the workplace. This is especially noticeable if you have been out of education for a few years. Most nurses and midwives, or nursing and midwifery students, do not start a university course directly from school or college. Your university is aware that many of its students are mature and so have particular needs.

Work at university can be divided into the 'subject content' which focuses on the knowledge you gain about the subjects related to nursing or midwifery and 'process' which relates to the ways in which you gain that specific content and demonstrate this as evidence of your learning.

Subject content

During your course or module you will pursue knowledge and understanding, and develop cognitive, practical and transferable skills related to the world of your selected branch of nursing or midwifery. Professional values and attitudes will also be developed through theoretical and practical learning opportunities and experiences, though these may be less explicit in teaching and assessments.

While some 'subject content' will be valuable across all courses and disciplines, and indeed you will share some modules with students from other courses,





much of it is quite specific to your own course. It is however likely to include the following areas:

- the theoretical basis of your defined area of practice, e.g.
 - anatomy and physiology
 - applied psychology and sociology
 - legal and ethical issues
 - pathophysiology
 - pharmacology
 - therapeutic interventions
- current issues in the context of health care practice
- evidence-based practice, research and its application to practice
- strategies for assisting individual clients in the changing context of health care environments
- theoretical ideas which underpin practice
- using information from a variety of sources in order to gain a coherent understanding of theory and practice
- working as part of an inter-professional team
- career opportunities and challenges ahead; beginning to plan a career path.

The acquisition of the subject content will move you along the continuum from 'novice to expert' in nursing or midwifery considerably, as described by Patricia Benner (1984).

Study skills: the process of learning

Whilst this book draws on a range of examples from relevant subject content its main focus is on the processes. You will need to engage with these processes in order to successfully master the necessary content, gain competency and pass the assessments in both theory and practice. Clearly you have much to contribute to the learning process but taking you from novice to expert in terms of the processes involved in study and learning will mean engaging with university learning in many of the following areas:

- taking control of yourself, motivation and organization
- information technology and using the library
- developing strategies for successful learning
- reflective learning from practice placements
- becoming competent in literature searching





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- proficient use of evidence and research
- demonstrating critical analysis and higher-level skills
- expertise for success in selected career pathways
- continuing professional development and becoming a lifelong learner.

The ways in which you learn the specific content varies but will include:

- a wide range of teaching methods, e.g.
 - lecture, seminar, group work
- developing and using skills, e.g.
 - information seeking
 - reading effectively
 - note taking from many sources
 - understanding academic language
 - managing time and prioritizing workloads
- understanding and becoming proficient in:
 - essay and report writing
 - referencing sources used
 - research methods
- confidently managing:
 - working as part of an inter-professional team
 - presenting information to colleagues orally, in writing and electronically
 - revision
 - examinations and other assessments
 - dissertation.

Becoming skilled in *studying* is often overlooked by students. Some of the activities listed above will obviously require you to develop skills such as 'information seeking' via the library and the internet. Others such as revision or seminar work will be far less obvious. Yet in all of these, developing study skills can make your performance more expert, require less effort and will result in gaining far more from activities compared with a friend who has not made the effort to become skilled as a student.

Overall, if you become skilled at the processes of learning you will develop independence and be able to take responsibility for lifelong learning and your own professional development. You will advance as a student from 'novice to expert' too. Students who take note of the need to learn the processes and not just the content work efficiently and more effectively. Developing your study skills for success will move you from an indecisive novice beginner to a confident, independent, efficient student with expertise in many of the processes of learning.





Registration on a course

This is boring but essential. Be prepared to patiently produce documents, fill in forms, sign declarations, sit in front of a digital camera for your ID card, and ensure that details are all correct. Always use your full correct name in the correct order. Your attention to detail will avoid delays and problems at a later date and if there are big queues or spare time you can use it to get to know some of your new colleagues.

Registering for the correct course and completing all the documentation is vital for:

- access to university library and computer systems
- communications from different university departments
- ensuring you appear on official module and course lists
- invoicing for modules and courses, accommodation and fees
- personal details on awards
- physical access to facilities
- receiving your bursary
- receiving your invitation to the award ceremony
- confirming details with the Nursing and Midwifery Council which maintains the register of nursing and midwifery qualifications.

Ice-breakers

Some ice-breakers chill my spine! You may be cajoled into participating in ice-breaker activities designed to facilitate the process of getting to know people who are newly brought together in a group: your cohort of students and associated staff. These take various forms from drinking coffee and mingling in a socially conducive setting to the more bizarre 'games' where you are required to characterize yourself as an animal of your choice! The intentions are good and indeed the sooner you do begin to form working relationships and friendship groups, the better. Relationships will inevitably shift and develop as the course progresses since it is unlikely that the person whom the seating arrangement places you near on day one would have been your first choice companion for three or more years. For pre-registration courses the overall group numbers will be large so it is impractical to become study buddies with them all but you really should make an effort to establish healthy working relationships and friendships with several people.





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Even if ice-breakers are not your favourite pastime, small groups are popular and will be used within the course, so do take the opportunities as they arise, or create your own. One way of beginning this process is to join with others, perhaps between four and ten people, in the following exercise.

Exercise 1.1

This simply asks you to spend some time thinking about Challenges, Concerns and Contributions. Individually or in a group compile three lists:

- 1 Challenges: in anticipation of the course, based on your current understanding, note the things you are likely to find challenging. Remember many people thrive on challenges and these may be positive, such as the challenge to develop the confidence to cope in an emergency situation.
- 2 Concerns: here you should concentrate on those things that may provoke slight anxiety based on your understanding of the demands of the course. Make a list identifying causes of your main concerns.
- 3 Contributions: this may need more time and thought and typically produces the shortest list. However, this need not be so. Think about your experiences and achievements in all aspects of your life. Consider how these have prepared you for nursing or midwifery and the particular course you are registered on. You may feel the need to consult family members, friends or work colleagues as others may have more insight into your strengths than you have. The aim is to devise a list of attributes, skills, knowledge or attitudes which will contribute to success on the course for you and others.

Challenges

If you can, discuss these with colleagues and in particular identify where and how these challenges may be met and what support may be necessary to help in their achievement. Jot down questions that remain unanswered.

Concerns

Mingled with the excitement, you will naturally be concerned about some issues and it is wise to identify these and deal with them at an early stage. Many adult learners will begin to feel a lack of confidence in their own abilities particularly as the demands of the course become apparent. Other issues or common concerns reported by student groups at the beginning of courses include:

- an undisturbed place to study
- availability of tutorial staff





- being away from home
- finances
- finding materials for study
- level of difficulty
- level of support available
- other commitment, e.g. child care
- overall workload
- particular weaknesses, e.g. academic writing, client-related fears
- risk of failure at exams.

Discuss items on your list with others and allow them to express their concerns. Then move the conversation on to possible solutions or strategies to avoid the issue getting to the stage of becoming a real problem. In a small group there is likely to be someone who has experience in coping with these or similar concerns. Share ideas, and even jot down things which appear to have potential to assist you. Also jot down concerns or questions that remain unanswered.

Near the beginning of a course or module many of these issues will be addressed explicitly, perhaps during Freshers' Week or an induction day. However, much of what is presented soon becomes a hazy memory so do file most of the paperwork so that when an issue arises a few months into the course you will be able to locate the detail you need. Even if you cannot there are several easy ways of locating course-related details to answer your specific questions.

You may try:

- other students on your course
- course-specific notice board
- reception staff
- faculty or school student support office
- personal tutor
- course director
- module leader
- university website
- the student union.

And if all else fails the university will have a large centralised department often called 'Student Services' which perhaps should have been your first port of call. They will direct your questions to the appropriate person or department and provide help with things like:

- essential needs
 - accommodation
 - catering





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- funding (e.g. NHS bursaries)
- medical services (e.g. local GP)
- specialist advice
 - chaplaincy
 - counselling
 - employment opportunities while a student
 - disabilities office
 - dyslexia
- directions to
 - learning and study support
 - mental health support services
 - nursery
 - sports
 - welfare and hardship
 - careers guidance.

Anything left on your list of jottings may form the basis for one of your first tutorials.

Contributions

Everyone will have different starting points on a course and their contributions to their own and group learning will vary accordingly. With the average age of pre-registration students being around 29 (Royal College of Nursing, 2004) undoubtedly a typical group of pre-registration students is made up of those with a multitude of family and career experiences and associated expertise. Qualified nurses or midwives undertaking continuing professional development (CPD) courses will similarly have many skills and much knowledge and experience which is transferable to their new student status.

A key distinguishing feature at the start of pre-registration courses may exist between the school leaver and the mature entrant. Each group typically feels disadvantaged in comparison with the other. Desirable characteristics assumed to be associated with these are listed in Table 1.1.

These typifications, if true for individuals, will certainly be helpful in some circumstances. Over time however they balance each other out so that neither group is disadvantaged, and where working friendships emerge between the mature and the school leaver entrant, each group will benefit from sharing skill sets. Irrespective of your starting point, do not underestimate the fact that you, and your new peers, have a lot that will help you cope with the changes and meet the challenges you currently face, more so if you make a conscious decision to offer and receive mutual support.




Table 1.1 Assumed characteristics of students

School leaver	Mature entrant
Confidence as a student	Confidence as a person
IT literate	Life experiences
Proficient at studying	Personal or family illness or childrearing experience
Recent experience of courses and exams	Able to deal with children
Lots of spare time	Practical skills, especially if experience working in health care
Few outside responsibilities	

What the university expects

The ethos is different from school. You are expected to be self-motivated and once work is set few will check up on you. Once your work is submitted there are no opportunities to resubmit in order to gain additional marks. Deadlines for coursework are set and exam schedules are published; beyond these dates penalties are imposed if they are missed.

On campus and in placement

There are university-wide regulations but you may be asked to be involved in drawing up agreements about expectations within the faculty. These are designed to promote participation and mutual respect amongst peers and between peers and staff. For some the nuisance value of mobile phones, including (irritating) text messaging, attendance and promptness will be key issues which may hinder group learning if not addressed. Any such rules will be well publicised and they can be used in exceptional circumstances to challenge unacceptable behaviours. Certain professional expectations are enshrined in the Nursing and Midwifery Council Code of Conduct (2004a) and in advance of registering a qualification the university will be asked to provide a declaration of good character (Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001). If there are serious issues your university may exclude students from the course on the grounds of professional unsuitability. A mature approach however will ensure that behaviour is generally professional and conducive to learning.





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Relationships

Establishing good relationships and communications with key people and departments in a huge organization, such as a university and its associated NHS and other health care providers, will make the course that much easier. These may be formal:

- academic supervisor
- course administrator
- course director
- library staff
- link tutor
- mentor
- module leader
- practice facilitator
- secretarial staff who deal with bursaries or manage the diary of academic staff
- staff within placements

or largely informal:

- peers
- personal tutor
- university reception staff
- staff who receive and distribute coursework
- students from other groups
- students on related courses, e.g. physiotherapy, medicine, clinical psychology, social work
- technicians who provide IT support within the university.

These and many others will have some relationship with you or your work and you may need to obtain their assistance at various points in the course. You will need to respect and appreciate their roles and responsibilities to ensure your engagement is as productive as possible. Most pressing however will be your experience of the actual teaching and how you and your peers engage with this for effective learning.

Methods of teaching and learning

Most students would expect the course to have lectures and seminars and provide opportunities to develop a wide range of practical skills, mainly in placements.





However, nursing and midwifery students will be exposed to a wide variety of methods of teaching and learning, some of which may take you out of your comfort zone.

Exercise 1.2

- Think about your most recent experience of undertaking a course, study day or school
- Try to list all the methods of teaching you were exposed to
- Add to that list methods you have heard of but have no direct experience of
- Of these identify those you encountered most frequently
- Identify which is the one you are MOST and LEAST comfortable with
- Try to list a few reasons explaining your preferences

Clearly there are approaches to teaching that suit you. Perhaps the method you identified as most comfortable is the one you have been exposed to most. However, this may not be the most effective and if you engage only with the methods you are comfortable with your experience at university will be limited, especially on a nursing or midwifery course. Some subjects lend themselves to effective delivery by lecture and these will form a key part of your academic experience. However, if you identified role-play amongst your least favourite methods, you are in very good company. But if organized and handled well, role-play can provide powerful learning opportunities, invaluable when applied to real patient care situations.

Getting the best from your course

The range of methods employed will provide something for everyone, but it is important for you to make sure that you make the most of every opportunity. I have sat through lectures and occasionally the group consensus was ‘what an utter waste of time!’ You may experience this occasionally but often you have the ability to make lectures and other forms of learning more effective. So if you enter with a closed mind, for example determined that you hate debates, then your attitude may just make debates a non-event for you and their quality will be diminished for your group because of your withdrawal.

What follows (Table 1.2) is a list of the types of educational experiences you will encounter within the confines of the university. Some of them form essential prerequisites for any learning that may occur in practice. For instance pre-registration students must demonstrate basic competence in skills such as





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Table 1.2 Range of educational methods

Method	Main features	Getting the best from this method
Lecture	<p>Topics are introduced to large groups by a formal presentation, often with limited interaction between lecturer and students</p> <p>These are frequently supported by a PowerPoint presentation</p> <p>Lecture programmes will often be supplemented with appropriate required reading</p>	<p>Prepare by looking at the title of the lecture in advance and explore the meanings of new terminology</p> <p>Do some advance reading that may be suggested in course documents to provide an overview</p> <p>Ensure you are alert and on time, perhaps arriving early to get a reasonable seat</p> <p>Bring the necessary equipment and develop your note taking skills</p> <p>Jot down questions, often they are welcomed during or at the end of the lecture</p> <p>Do not hesitate to stay back to explore things further with the lecturer unless they are obviously in a hurry</p> <p>PowerPoint presentation or lecture notes are usually freely available to students in electronic format</p> <p>Follow up with further reading as required and attend to your notes with particular attention to the session objectives</p>
Seminar	<p>Topic orientated and take the form of a presentation by lecturers, individual students or small groups of students</p> <p>The style may be informal and one key aim is to allocate around one-third of the available time for discussion since critical comment and discussion form an integral part of a seminar</p> <p>This is a method often used for both learning and assessment</p>	<p>This approach can be very productive and stimulating for learning and exposing your knowledge or attitude 'gaps'</p> <p>If you are presenting the key is preparation, so ensure you over-prepare</p> <p>If this is a group effort meet with others to negotiate roles and responsibilities</p> <p>When speaking you cover much more than anticipated in the allotted time</p> <p>Decide on any communication aid e.g. flip chart, poster, PowerPoint and check their availability</p> <p>Be prepared for silence when you ask 'Any questions?' by bringing thought-provoking statements and possibly slightly controversial questions to pose</p> <p>Write some notes soon after your seminar and follow up queries that were not fully exhausted; you may have to present a write-up for marking!</p> <p>Where the seminar involves mixed disciplines use these to consider an inter-professional perspective</p>





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		<p>If you were not the presenter remember being 'active' promotes your own learning; be willing to discuss the topic and do some reading and thinking in advance</p>
Tutorials	<p>A discussion session which is chaired by a member of staff and consists of any number of students from one to approximately twenty</p> <p>Used to discuss new concepts being introduced in lectures and issues that emerge solely from the student's own agenda</p>	<p>One-to-one tutorials are less likely to be offered, but much can be gained from the participation of peers</p> <p>Attend promptly and after preparing properly</p> <p>Mobile phones have many uses but not in tutorials</p> <p>Remain focused, the lecturer is likely to have a whole list of groups and will not have time to waste or go beyond the time allocated</p> <p>If the topic is open, or the agenda is yours to determine, ensure you have some key issues or questions to discuss</p> <p>Take a few notes and do follow-up on suggestions made, e.g. to introduce a new perspective (such as patients' wishes regarding the provision of information prior to surgery), or read certain named articles</p>
Role-play	<p>An imaginable but fictional situation is presented and you will typically be given an outline of the role you are required to take on</p> <p>The session may be video-recorded for later analysis by yourself or a wider audience</p> <p>Sometimes used for assessment</p> <p>Requires small groups where trust is established between members</p>	<p>Carefully read any instructions and discuss the remit with the session leader</p> <p>Do not instantly dismiss this as unrealistic, give it a fair chance</p> <p>To act out situations may be safer than meeting them in reality for the first time</p> <p>Be prepared to support the facilitator and colleagues, a mature approach will add value to this method</p> <p>While you are attempting to use empathy in engaging with the role-play this may develop as part of the post-role-play analysis</p> <p>Discuss the extent to which this has prepared you for a real clinical encounter similar to the role-play scenario</p> <p>Ensure that you and other participants involved are clear that role-play requires people to take on the role of other people; participants were not being themselves!</p> <p>Review the learning and learning deficits this may have revealed and consider writing a reflective account in your portfolio</p>

(Continued overleaf)





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Table 1.2 Continued

Method	Main features	Getting the best from this method
Web-based learning/ projects	<p>These may form a major component in some courses</p> <p>They vary greatly but consist of interactive material presented via computer, often a system such as 'Web-CT'</p> <p>Patient scenarios may be included using video clips</p> <p>You will be expected to participate, contribute to discussion forums and submit work in the form of tests, quizzes, reports or essays via an electronic Internet-based platform</p>	<p>Take time to undertake any suggested preparations such as a launch event or online PowerPoint presentation</p> <p>Read and abide by the university policy covering the use of computers</p> <p>Make sure you are clear about your role; some aspects of web-based learning will usually be assessed</p> <p>Understand whether your submissions are public (like a discussion board) or private (like e-mail)</p> <p>Check any work carefully before you upload it to the web-based site as your errors may cause embarrassment; usually only key lecturers have the authority to alter or delete your submissions</p> <p>Make sure you are polite and concise in any submissions and ensure they can be clearly linked to previous submissions (threads) where appropriate</p> <p>If you are allocated to groups keep in touch regularly with other group members – the IT system will make this easy to achieve</p> <p>May follow the format of an online seminar in virtual time involving members of the inter-professional team</p> <p>N.B. Your lecturers will have an electronic log of ALL your interaction within these sites (except where there is an e-mail function which remains private) and there may be a minimum requirement for participation</p>
Problem-based learning	<p>An instructional method involving small groups or teams used to gain knowledge and problem-solving skills. Here the problem is presented via 'triggers' before the relevant material has been learned (Wilkie 2000:11)</p>	<p>Take note of the 'triggers', which may be written scenarios, photographs or video clips and brainstorm with the team to identify gaps in knowledge</p> <p>Discuss the areas where pertinent information is required in order to identify/solve the problem/s</p> <p>Ensure good team working and be clear about your accepted responsibilities; and deliver the goods!</p> <p>Be supportive of your team members</p> <p>Some find this approach difficult to engage with as it leaves uncertainties but try to reserve judgements on this method until well after the completion of the tasks</p>





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Formal debate	<p>A 'chair' and two teams are required</p> <p>A clear statement is devised: the 'motion', which should be published in advance</p> <p>Outside speakers may be invited to take these roles but if students do so they may be obliged to argue against their own personal convictions</p>	<p>Volunteer to join the panel if the opportunity arises</p> <p>If not do some advance reading around the motion and if possible form an opinion</p> <p>Be open to listen to both sides and put your questions through the chair to panel members</p> <p>This method has the potential to sharpen your critical-thinking skills on matters related to ethics, attitudes and values</p> <p>Allows you to see things from a different perspective and even if your views are not altered during the course of the debate you will gain valuable insights</p> <p>N.B. Some panel members may have been arguing against their personal convictions</p>
Guided study	<p>Printed or online guide which is lecturer-directed</p> <p>Involves students seeking information on specific topics designed to enable further development of knowledge and critical thinking</p> <p>These may be incorporated into the timetable for the purpose of feedback and discussion aimed at sharing and consolidating learning</p>	<p>These are likely to be clearly linked to the outcome of a course or module and may form an essential integral part of the learning required</p> <p>Read the instructions carefully and do not hesitate to seek clarification from lecturers</p> <p>Determine if the activities and outcomes could be best achieved by collaborating with selected colleagues; if so form a team</p> <p>Feedback opportunities are important to ensure learning has been accurate and no key points are missed, so use them fully</p>
Simulation	<p>The situation may be similar to role-play but you assume your own identity. The situation consists of a scenario in a classroom or clinical laboratory, possibly using a mannequin (SIM MAN)</p> <p>Useful to simulate cardiac or other physiological disturbances and provide rapid feedback</p>	<p>The great benefit here is that you act in-role, as a nurse or midwife (student) and practise clinical skills and decision making</p> <p>The more you engage with this the more potential for learning</p> <p>Provides opportunities for team work, rehearsing emergencies and learning where the 'patient' is an expensive mannequin rather than a priceless human being!</p> <p>Important to reflect on this experience preferably within the team involved</p>

moving and handling in a skills laboratory before being allowed to proceed to clinical placements. By actively engaging in each of these as you encounter them, you will be able to exploit them fully for their educational value both in terms of subject content and skills and competence in the processes of learning.





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Exercise 1.3

Consider those methods you like and review whether your own approach could be made even more effective, for example skim-reading prior to a lecture. Select ONE method that you are unfamiliar with or dislike.

- Make a special effort to engage with this method at the next opportunity
- Reflect on your experiences and discuss these with student friends or academic staff

Match the following topics with a suitable method of teaching and learning:

- 1 cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- 2 stigma associated with learning disability or mental health
- 3 the anatomy of the nervous system
- 4 the Children Act and its implications for children's nursing services
- 5 assessment and detection of domestic violence during pregnancy.

It may be clear that the most effective methods in each of these examples provided will differ and in order to get the best from the course appropriate matching of methods to topics will be necessary. As a student you will do well to extend your repertoire and embrace many of these methods.

Engaging in established quality systems

Your university has a commitment to providing an excellent service and this will be made explicit in its mission statement. While you may sail through your course without any knowledge of this, the aspiration to provide excellence needs to be checked and who better to consult than you? Directly or indirectly it is students who pay towards the running of universities and your views on the nature and quality of its provision are important and will be sought. The course or module leaders need to know how well their plans are being delivered. You will be given feedback on your performance and the university certainly needs feedback from you. This is most frequently requested via evaluation questionnaires or other methods at the end of modules or placements.

Other formal mechanisms will be in place such as a system where several student representatives from each course intake will meet senior university staff periodically to share information and raise issues of concern. In addition to this, where new courses are being planned there will be invitations for students





to contribute views. Courses where the NHS or other bodies are stakeholders will have regular meetings with key senior academic staff and managers and often there is a constitutional requirement for students' views to be represented. Actually putting yourself forward on to some of these groups will have positive benefits to you; it will help you to network and develop communication and other skills.

- Get to know which issues are taken to which groups or meetings
- Consider becoming a group representative
- Liaise with your representatives and ensure you are kept well informed; this is likely to involve keeping an eye on the appropriate notice board or website
- Do not hesitate to ask your student representatives to bring issues for commendation or concern to their regular meetings

If there are areas of excellence and you have benefited from these it will help if you voice your views. More important, perhaps, if there are concerns or inadequacies, unless you voice these they are unlikely to improve and they may have a negative effect on the quality of your learning opportunities. A mature approach is required, systems to deal with such issues exist, and you may need to be specific about the circumstances. If you have suggestions that may be feasible to improve conditions or solve problems they are likely to be well received.

Referencing

While you are expected to use sources of information, essentially the work you produce, such as an essay, must be your own work. Your university will provide guidance on working with others, collusion, cheating and plagiarism. Plagiarism is classed as a form of cheating and is discussed more fully in Chapter 9, but 'many studies show that the bulk of plagiarism can be attributed to students who do not understand academic requirements' (Joint Information Systems Committee, 2005). In view of this you will need to become familiar with referencing.

This consists of a system of using and listing the sources you have used in an academic piece of work, for example an essay, report or reflective account of practice. One of the key functions of any referencing system is to enable students to accurately attribute ideas to their original sources. In making such a clear statement you may avoid the possibility of naïve plagiarism. There are a number of referencing systems, the commonest in nursing and midwifery is the Harvard system. Most universities will have their own particular version of the Harvard system. While others have written in detail on this topic (Gopee, 1999), here





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you are advised to become familiar with the particular version approved by your university.

Key elements of the Harvard referencing system

- Provides instructions on the detail required in text, i.e. the body of your essay and the alphabetical list required at the end of your work
- Demonstrates precisely how to use 'quotations' or citations in the text of your assignments
- In the text usually just the author's surname and the year of publication are required often in brackets (surname, year)
- Distinguishes between books, journal articles, websites and other sources
- Makes a distinction between a reference list and a bibliography
- Prescribes the order in which detail should be presented within these lists
- Prescribes the use of punctuation, *italics*, **bold** or underlining

It may be quite alien to read text which is frequently interrupted by authors' surnames and years, more so to get used to writing using this style of referencing. An alternative referencing system is the Vancouver system. This system will be found in some journals and uses numbers in the text, usually in superscript with the detail provided on a list at the end of the article or essay.

The exact detail is best discovered from your own university course handbook or website but it is an academic convention that you must rapidly get to grips with. In year one your lecturers may be lenient but by year three failure to adhere to the system in operation is likely to lose you marks.

Conclusions

University will present a challenge to many nursing and midwifery students. This challenge represents positive opportunities to engage with the methods of teaching and learning and the array of departments and people who play a key collaborative role in helping you to make your student experience a success. Midwifery and nursing are rapidly developing professions: the subject content of ten years ago will not meet the needs of today's clients. Experience mingled with up-to-date knowledge and skills are vital and a commitment to lifelong learning is rapidly becoming the norm. By becoming more expert in the processes of learning you will develop independence and confidence as a student; this is vital to enable your practice to be evidence based. Engagement in learning therefore reflects commitment to patient care today and into the future.

