

Innis College: The Life of a First-Year Student - International Students

I'm a first-year student in the Faculty of Arts and Science. I'm an international student from Malaysia. Being a student at UofT is such an amazing experience. UofT offers many things that are valuable for students such as the library system. I find that the materials and resources available at UofT are really great and they have helped me a lot in my assignments so far. My favourite library is Robarts Library but I also love the libraries in different Colleges because I can find the books that are not available in Robarts at the other libraries. I'm really impressed with UofT's library system.

Since English is not my first language, communication may be a little bit harder for me. However, I find that people here in Toronto, especially in UofT, are really friendly and helpful. By asking their help, my understanding, especially in my courses, increases. TAs (Teaching Assistants) are really helpful. I've learnt that by asking TAs about the courses or for explanations regarding assignments, you have a better opportunity to do well in your courses. I'm also really glad that I can go to the Innis Writing Centre to improve my writing skills for my essays. Although I'm still struggling to improve my English, I find that being here is improving my English.

I wish I had chance to go to Orientation Week. Since I arrived late here in Toronto, I did not get a chance to go to the orientation events. However, I think I managed to learn a lot about UofT slowly from my other friends. I recommend for new students to go to Orientation, also known as Frosh Week. Orientation Week has social events but also events that teach you helpful things to survive at UofT. If you miss it, then go and seek help from your academic advisor so you won't feel left behind and like you know nothing.

Another important thing I've learnt here is to seek help from an academic advisor. Since I'm not that familiar with the academic system at UofT, I believe that getting advice from an academic advisor is a great help. It will get you on track about your academic performance and how to manage your subjects all year.

Since this is my first year in Canada, the weather has been really difficult to adapt to, especially in winter. Snow is really beautiful but once it snows heavily it gets really cold. So, for anyone new to Canada, please keep yourself warm all the time. You will get used to the cold here after a few weeks.

- First-year Social Science student, home country: Malaysia

First semester was not easy for me and probably not for any first-year student. I was immensely overwhelmed by the huge academic workload and by learning to cook my daily meals for myself in Innis Residence. Exams were relatively challenging too, and socially, I had little connection to friends.

However, I eventually rejuvenated after learning some strategies to overcome those problems. I got involved in Innis intramural sports, playing volleyball, soccer and Ultimate frisbee. I met a bunch of friends here and my "newness" is gone. The Innis College Student Society widened the circle of my social life through a number of events and workshops. The events bring together all Innis students and are arranged to make sure that students interact and get connected. It was at these events that I learned just how different University is from high school.

Daily trips to my Registrar's Office cleared all my academic and financial worries. I personally think that the Registrar's Office is the best resource out of the many resources for students at UofT.

I also registered with the Blueprint program where I get weekly emails for workshops held across campus. In these workshops I learned how to write a research paper, improve my study skills and leadership skills, and also improved a number of other personal skills through the exploration of life off-campus and learning about career information.

- First-year Life Science student, home country: Sudan

I am a first year international student enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and Science. Being an international student from India, my first year of university was not only a transition to a different system of education, but also a transition from one country to another. In addition to adjusting to classes, professors and subjects, I had to familiarize myself with things as basic as the weather, the famous Toronto Transit Commission and Toronto itself.

When it comes to lectures, entering classes that have over two hundred students was intimidating at first. I didn't know who to sit with, whether I could raise my hand and ask a question during lectures, what would happen if I reached late and other related matters. But gradually, I learnt that though the class size was large, most professors are willing to answer any questions and clear any doubts. If not, they are always ready to talk to you before or after class or during their office hours.

In addition, making friends in my classes and outside was a big concern for me. However, I learnt that most students in my classes were first years as well and they were as nervous as I was. All it took was a smile or a casual "hi" for a conversation and now, I have a few good friends in most of my classes. Furthermore, my experiences and the activities at Frosh Week helped me meet people and though we may not be friends, it's always nice to wave at a familiar face in the streets while running to class.

I am also a part of InnisInsight - a club that gives you the opportunity to meet upper years as well as first years from Innis and interact with them at monthly events and workshops. This helped me meet people studying the same kind of subjects and I also

got advice from upper years. In this way, being part of something and being involved was extremely advantageous.

As an international student from a warm climate with mild seasonal changes, a key adjustment for me was the weather, specifically the winter. I was extremely apprehensive when I heard that temperatures in Toronto could go down to -40 degrees! In Mumbai, the lowest temperature I've experienced is 12 degrees! But as we approach April, in retrospect the adjustment wasn't half as bad as I expected it to be. As long as you have a good winter jacket and a pair of shoes/boots that will get you through snow and slush, you can actually enjoy the cold. Walking to my classes in the cold mornings, protected by layers of clothing, is one of the things I will miss the most when I head back to the summer heat in India.

Getting used to the city itself was an important experience for me. I use public transport occasionally and found that everything was well explained and people are always willing to help you out when you're in confusion. Getting familiar with the streets and major areas around campus doesn't take very long. In fact, now, I can give directions to other lost people!

Through my experiences, an important thing I have learnt is first year is a time of discovery and you shouldn't be hesitant to seek help whenever you're in doubt. Be it asking for directions, visiting the Innis Registrar's office for any administrative or academic doubts I have, talking to seniors about what they're studying - all of it has been a tremendous help and converted my first year from a daunting experience to one that has been enjoyable.

- First-year Social Science student, home country: India