

‘Now I’m here, what should I do?’: Exploring student use of time during the transition to university

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The first year of university is not a homogenous time; fluctuations exist in the study demands put on students at different times of the year. These study demands also influence their engagement in external activities, such as socialising with peers and maintaining regular sleep patterns, which may influence the success of their transition and ability to engage in this new learning space. Numerous studies have shown that decreased sleep and increased screen time have a negative effect on student outcomes, while increased study time and on-task interaction with peers has a positive influence. Other activities such as part time work during semester and engaging in physical activity are still unclear as to the extent of their influence. It is common for students’ use of time to be assessed broadly by asking about 'usual days' or 'typical weeks' due to the relative ease in which these questions can be administered. However, these types of questions have drawbacks such as overestimation of socially desirable activities (e.g. study time) and inaccuracy recalling activities more than a few days past; i.e. a typical week from last semester. Of the studies using a more detailed approach, often only one or two activities are focussed on at only a single point in time, leaving a large proportion of students’ daily activities unaddressed. Better understanding how students engage in the university environment, in a more holistic sense, is crucial in order to properly support students transitioning into new university spaces, and to help them balance the many new and competing demands on their time.