Independent learning

For many students, university coincides with the beginning of adult life, which is exciting and fun, and brings new responsibilities. For others, university may have to fit around an already busy adult life.

University is different to school. You may be in very **large classes** where it's possible that nobody will notice if you don't show up, or follow up with you if you don't submit your coursework on time. Depending on your course, you may find yourself with quite a bit of time outside of classes, with long gaps between some classes. You will soon find that you need this '**free time**' to keep up with your reading, note-making and coursework.

Many students enjoy the freedoms that come with studying in higher education, but for some, it takes a while to realise that **you are responsible for your own learning**. This is known as independent or self-directed learning. Here are some **top tips** for developing the skills needed for such learning:

Go to all of your lectures. The number one thing you can do to ensure success is to go to your lectures. Yes, your lecturers may upload lecture slides to Blackboard, but what they say in the lecture hall will add immense value to those slides. By going to lectures you will learn far more than by trying to catch up on your own afterwards. You will also get to understand your lecturers (who are also usually your examiners) that little bit more. There is lots of evidence that shows a strong link between attendance at lectures and academic performance.

Go to all of your tutorials. When lecture groups are very large, you will often be directed to attend tutorials as well. Tutorials are much smaller class groups (usually a maximum of 20 students) where you apply the learning introduced in lectures. You may review assignments, work out problems, or

discuss core readings or ideas. Make it your business to know when and where tutorials are scheduled, to sign up for a tutorial that suits your timetable, and to attend all of your tutorials.

Establish a study routine. Lectures (and, to a lesser extent, tutorials) will offer you an introduction to core topics on your course. For every topic, you will need to follow up with independent study. This might involve reading, note-making, or applying what you have learned to real-life situations. You will also have to complete and submit assignments or other coursework. Set time aside for your learning, coursework and revision from the beginning of the semester. Start as you mean to go on and put a realistic study routine in place as early as you can.

Treat university like a full-time job. Start thinking about your time at university as time spent investing in your future – including your future career and earning power – and give your studies the time and attention that they deserve. Of course you will have other commitments (such as paid, caring or voluntary work and activities), but do try to prioritise your studies during term-time.

Ask for, and act on, feedback. Some lecturers and tutors will give you feedback as a matter of course, whereas you may need to ask others for feedback. Pay attention to the feedback that they provide, even if it seems a bit harsh or unfair. If you do not understand a piece of feedback, ask for clarification. It is very difficult to improve academically if you don't have a good understanding of what is expected of you and where you might be going wrong.

Ask for help. You can't expect others to notice or guess that you are experiencing difficulties. Learn to ask for help as and when you need it. There are many sources of support and assistance at NUI Galway, and many ways of accessing those supports. Admitting that you are experiencing difficulties, and asking for help, are not signs of weakness, but rather of strength and independence.