

Reflective Essay on First Year of University

I don't even know where to start because thinking of writing this post is making me both sad, happy, and confused. Sad, because I already finished my first year of university; happy, because I'm glad it's over; and confused because, really, where did the time go?

If I were to describe university in one word it would be: refreshing. It's like drinking a glass of cold water during a hot day, or like taking a breath of fresh air in earth's pure nature, away from the city. University is refreshing because it finally feels like you have taken a step away from high school and your childhood and a step towards maturity, growing, and finding yourself. You begin to learn things about yourself you never knew and you start to understand how things in the real-world work, even if sometimes your classes seem pointless. Some of the major things I learned had to do with my program and classes, my commute, the people I met, and the freedom I gained all within this first year.

Journalism School

I guess we'll start one year back. This time last year, I had been accepted to my current program, Journalism, but I was still waiting to hear from another program at Ryerson. I was excited knowing that regardless, I would be attending a school that already felt like a second home to me. By this point, I had had three campus tours and felt like I was part of the Ramily. The reality of university actually hit me a week before frosh week: I'd have to sit in boring lectures, write countless essays and articles and stress out about tests and exams. Until then, I'd forgotten this all came along with university and that it wasn't all just fun and games.

I originally wanted to go into Ryerson's Media Production program previously known as Radio and Television Arts. I wanted to be in this program so terribly bad it probably wasn't healthy. Journalism was my second choice and in high school, I hated writing and preferred the technical work. Regardless, I thought it would be a good second choice since both fields are connected and similar in some ways. I ended up getting accepted into the Journalism program late February; I was wait-listed, then rejected to RTA. This was hard on me especially because I was worried that I wouldn't love the Journalism program and that I would struggle with catching up to university level writing (of course, I was still incredibly grateful that I got accepted to a competitive program like Journalism).

Now that I officially completed an entire year in the program, I realized that I actually love to write and that I genuinely love the work. I was just too scared to break out of my comfort zone, try new things, and improve skills I thought I never even had. For instance, although I may not have been the strongest writer in the beginning, as the year progressed and with continuous practice, I noticed how much my writing started to improve.

The Classes

The amount of work you put in to each course is outstanding. It's not like high school where you can pull something together in the last minute, especially when it comes to exams. It's close to impossible to learn an entire semester worth of content in one day, let alone one all-nighter. This was something I had to learn to adjust to: not procrastinating.

I was pleasantly surprised with how simple each course was, however. In high school, they made it seem like university courses were complicated but really, for me it wasn't. For some courses, I only had a mid-term, essay and exam which I found very satisfying since it would allow me to focus on my continuous journalism work throughout, and not worry too much about those courses, until each part came up.

In terms of organizing your semester, if I were to give you one tip it would be to have a month-by-month calendar of your entire semester with all your due dates and test days written in. What I found most helpful was using my computer's calendar and recording all the due dates throughout the semester from the beginning of the semester in there. This was so helpful because I had everything in one place and could refer back to it at the end of each week to ensure that I wasn't missing anything.

The Commute

The majority of students on campus at Ryerson commute to school and I'm one of them. My commute was roughly an hour and 15 minutes each way and honestly, it's not as bad as it sounds. I did hate it in the beginning of the year because it was "such a waste of time," but you begin to realize that sometimes you're going to have to get used to doing things the "hard way." Take a look at it in a positive way: Sure, you save money, but it also makes you make the most of every second of your day. You'd be surprised what you could accomplish during your commute.

Things I did on my commute and that I recommend to pass the time:

Listen to podcasts: This is one of my favorite things to do during a commute. Funny podcasts brighten up your day and educational podcasts teach you things you never knew.

Read the Metro newspaper: Reading the news helped me stay on track with world events and also made the subway ride to Ryerson pass by a little faster.

Play Sudoku: The best part of reading the Metro paper is the sudoku. Seriously, it gets addictive.

Study: Print out your notes for a test and read over them on the subway. It keeps you busy and makes use of that time.

The Freedom

It's true, the freedom is real in university, even as a commuter. I no longer feel like my life revolves around school, but more like school is a (large) portion of my life, but I get to explore other things, too. In my first semester, I had two days off and even on those days I would commute downtown just to explore the city. By having a flexible schedule, I could also do more with my time like go to events or panels on campus, write more journalism stories, blog for RU Student Life, and in general, just do things I couldn't in high school because of its fixed schedule.

Speaking of schedules, I specifically enjoy having a schedule that is not fixed, meaning it's not the same hours each day. Some days I would start later, so I could make use of my mornings — like getting school work done or, let's be honest, sleeping in. Other days I would start early but end before noon, leaving me with the rest of the day off. There is so much more you can do!

The People

Going to a completely new school where you know no one is scary, but almost everyone is in the same boat as you. They are all looking to meet new people and make friends. Orientation week was where I met tons of people in my program, some whom I haven't seen afterwards and others whom I still keep in contact with today. During the semester, you continue to meet people as well, whether it be through a class or just sitting in the library building asking someone to watch over your stuff. You just need to break out of your shell and approach a new friendship.

I genuinely love and enjoy university, so far. People are accepting, there is so much to do (especially since we are in downtown Toronto) and the freedom is refreshing. I'm so sad to see my first-year fly by so quickly but I still am looking forward to the rest of my university career!