

Dear E&Mers

I would like to congratulate all the new Equity and Merit students on this milestone.

I remember the day I received the email from David about both my provisional and final acceptance. To be honest, I was over the moon because I had forgotten about it and was not expecting the offer.

As you all know it is an extremely competitive process. And, when I look back, am grateful to God, the entire Equity and Merit department, fellow and former Alumni and the wonderful teachers that made the experience all worthwhile.

Below are some of the tips that have made my experience unforgettable.

1. Reach out:

If you have never done online learning, you might be having what we call the “fear of the unknown.” How about you reverse that by bringing the known into your currently unknown territory that way you will be operating from a space of strength rather than negatives.

To build on that, reach out to fellow Alumni about anything even if it is to laugh at yourself or the crazy going on (the world can be dark sometimes and we need that light) or the serious stuff about the approach to a question.

2. Accept the new family both the extended Manchester family and the Equity and Merit team

You now have another family to support you as you contribute to it. It is like a win-win relationship and sometimes an agape one. Take it in.

I have on a number of occasions emailed David Garcia about the scholarship and non-scholarship stuff. I am not suggesting you spam his email but as you respect his space and other members of this team, feel free to inquire from about any university-related thing that might be bothering you or pick for you an award or what you might gauge appropriate.

I prefer to look at the Equity and Merit team as friends who availed me a scholarship on behalf of the University, inform any good news that might be of interest to them and notify of the challenges.

And, for the general Manchester family, look out for WhatsApp groups such as those which contain the Alumni too (Uganda has one having MPH current students and Alumni) then, the wider UoM Alumni in Uganda group and if you also form your specific one (I guess that is okay-Manchester embraces innovation). These groups come in handy when you are preparing for an assignment, thesis or continuous professional development.

You will also get to know that there is the global Alumni space on LinkedIn and the rest (just utilize The University of Manchester website landing page and you will have an adventure). This landing page will also come in handy if you need any mental health support from workshops to one-one counselling all free of charge.

3. Don't let the imposter syndrome catch up with you. This imposter syndrome sometimes rolls in very quickly more so, after the introductions during the first year course units or after the midterm/final assessment results have come back.

Sometimes, this imposter syndrome arises as you reflect on your humble beginnings or when you cannot believe the marks you are getting. Remember, you were all selected, worthy of this place and there is a journey to hone the right academic writing style.

Throughout my learning, this was a reminder I kept in mind and it helped me to be honest with myself and others around me and conquer higher ground.

4. Take up all the opportunities that you can from competitions, conferences, designing courses to leadership but don't forget the main goal that you were there.

Some of you might have innovations or ideas that can better your communities and the world at large, don't fear to throw these in the competitions but make sure you write to the organizers if a postgraduate student living and working outside the UK will be eligible for the prize but for the courses, normally this does not apply.

5. Plan your studies

One thing that was shared with me at your stage was to try and have 4 reading hours per day divided equally between the two course units. Obviously, there will be days when this cannot apply but the investment you did before will come in handy such that you are not thrown into a panic mode when exams come up. And, if the 4-hour rule will not work out for you, probably, rely on the meal breaks or pull out that laptop as you are travelling (you will then learn to appreciate the beauty of traffic...haha).

For me, the idea of balancing was sometimes impossible but setting priorities, communicating my boundaries and delegation became very handy. I know from experience that getting to this realization for mothers and those running initiatives founded by them is extremely challenging.

But if I can copy and paste the words of Katie Reed (she is now an honorary lecturer thus you might never meet her). She always challenged us to look at a cup as half full, recognize the additional responsibilities on your shoulders which might be absent on others and then ask-what do I want from The University of Manchester-is it a paper from a well-recognized University in innovation and research as such no one will question these abilities or the highest grades. Whichever you choose even if it is in the middle will help you set your goals and navigate the space with ease.

I remember her sharing the statistics of those who chose either the first or latter and where the alumni are in their current journey and it was all inspiring.

This understanding will help you in difficult times to summon your inner courage, look within your value system such as prayer (it helps me) and to ideate how to navigate the challenges.

Also, if reading content before the semester will help you then try it. And, do not forget The University library section, it has guides to help you improve your academic writing.

Notably, your free time might greatly reduce with Saturday's and Sunday's being days you are trying to get the week's work done or contribute to that discussion group on blackboard or write the assignment. It gets easier with time.

6. When you fall sick or get in an accident, remember to use the mitigating circumstances form early enough. I did this late and learned a great deal. Though, the circumstances of its filing have changed so check it out

7. You will get through this. Remember to continue adventuring, reaching your higher goals. It is that holistic achievement that will count at the very end. Be daring, humble, resourceful, assertive, proactive and kind to yourself. Don't lose yourself.

Good luck!

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