Navigating the university tech landscape

One of the most important puzzles that first year students must solve, is to get a good understanding of the tech resources they will be using during their studies, because tech platforms are essential in navigating university life - from accessing content to communicating with fellow students and lecturers.

Photo by Tony Schnagl: https://www.pexels.com/photo/stylish-man-using-laptop-5588217/

Mastering these tech resources will at a minimum clear the road for a student to focus on their academics, but more importantly, will help them become more efficient, productive, and successful in their academic pursuits, according to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE), SA's leading private higher education provider.

"With South Africa's first year students now starting to settle into university life, many will still feel overwhelmed by the amount of information and resources available to them. With online learning platforms, anti-plagiarism detection software, information systems, and virtual labs, the sheer amount of technology can be overwhelming. However, getting to grips with these resources is crucial for academic success, and by investing some time to investigate and understand these resources and their functions, the years ahead will become much more productive," says Dr Gillian Mooney, Dean: Academic Development and Support at The IIE and member of the Accreditation Committee of the British Accreditation Council (BAC).

Vodacom calls for applicants furthering studies in STEM fields

24 Mar 2023

"As a student new to university, you are at the start of a wonderful part of your life. This is the time when you learn a lot about many new areas of knowledge, meet a great many new and interesting people, and, of course, get to know and grow yourself. However, the transition from school to university can seem daunting – particularly when there are a whole lot of technologies that you are expected to use."

“The key to navigating this plethora of new technology being introduced is that you must become an active user and ask for help as soon as you need it, to ensure you develop the skills required for successful tertiary study and the world of work. And try to really throw yourself into it – don’t be scared to play around, you won’t break the system!”

The advantages of tech

Dr Mooney says first year students may, because of the large role of technology, sometimes feel that they are just a number, or a username and password. However, with the kinds of technology employed by the country’s leading institutions also comes access to many different ways to learn and to ask for help.

“Such technologies encourage connectivity – between you and your lecturers, and between you and fellow students. You now have the opportunity to discuss and debate your course content with students that you may never sit next to in class. You will also have a more flexible learning experience as you can cover course material, ask a question, or search for information in your own time. These technologies also encourage personalisation, where you can select activities for content with which you are struggling.”

Becoming an active user of online resources helps students to foster connectivity because of the ability to engage in discussions with the wider student and academic body.

Shoprite Group opens bursary applications for the 2023 and 2024 academic years

6 Feb 2023

“This not only enhances your learning experience but also develops your communication skills and builds a network of connections that can be valuable throughout your university career and beyond,” says Dr Mooney.

“Getting a solid grasp on online resources also helps develop the essential skills required for the world of work, such as digital literacy, time management, and self-discipline. By taking responsibility for your own learning and utilising online resources to their full potential, you will develop the skills needed for academic success and beyond.”

Survival guide

Below is a quick survival guide for some common platforms used at good universities. It is important that new students know about these platforms and leverage them in their studies.
Remember to always use your institutional email address – the one that you are given on registration – this is often how you access all the platforms listed below and remember your student number – this is also often used for access to the platforms.

Student Information System

This platform, typically accessed via a portal, is where all your records are kept, including your results and timetable. Your institution will expect you to access it regularly so that you are aware of how you are doing. If you have any issues, reach out to the Faculty Office, or Student Support Team.

Learning Management System (LMS)

The LMS is where all the content for your courses is located. Depending on your lecturer, you can access activities, PowerPoint presentations, and load your assignments/essays. Each module lecturer can assist, and there is typically an EdTech or LMS team to assist with general inquiries.

Anti-plagiarism Detection Software

The system will check that the work you are submitting is your own and correctly referenced. Usually accessed through the LMS, you will need to send all your assignments/essays through this tool before submitting them. Your lecturer or tutor can assist you with your writing, but don't expect drafts to be read beforehand. Most information centres/libraries have a support team in place to assist you with your writing and referencing. There should also be an EdTech or student support team for general inquiries.

The Information/Library System

The library is where all the "knowledge" at university is located, including books, journal articles, and increasingly additional digital resources. It is essential to remember that you are expected to use more than a textbook in your essays. An information specialist/librarian can show you how to best use the system.

Technology can help to bridge South Africa's education divide

27 Mar 2023

Student Query System

Most universities have these systems, which typically save you time standing in long queues in faculty offices. Logging queries about an extension for an assessment or requesting your academic transcript, or any general queries can be done through this platform. The campus support team can help you with this.

Virtual Labs

This is a cloud-based repository of different software. You will be directed by your lecturer to the necessary applications. You need login details, then you can access the software that you need from anywhere. Your lecturer will guide you, and there should be a campus support team for general inquiries.