

Kerrigan/Harvey (JBPA 2021 - Undergraduate student messengers: Reinforcing young people's higher education ambitions?):

Supplemental materials

**Supplement 1: Email from University of X intern and recent graduate
(Experiment 1 – October 2017)**

Dear [First name]

As my time at University of X comes to an end, I thought I would take the time to share with you my university experience.

I can imagine how you are feeling about this year- a mixture of nerves, excitement and maybe a little stressed. I was in the exact same position only a few years ago but I hope you are feeling excited over anything else. I'm not here to tell you how to budget or how to cook for yourself because you'll probably get that lecture from your parents! But I can help you by sharing my experiences and how to get the most out of university life.

I didn't get the best of grades at A-level, but having a place at university meant that I wanted to push myself to achieve the best that I could whilst I was there. I'm now in my final year having had the best time and enjoying the balance of work and social life. I have made so many friends from so many different cultures, whom I hope I will stay in contact with for a long time.

Having grown up in a relatively small town I always knew that moving away from home would be a big step for me. City X isn't a massive city by any stretch of imagination but with so many students in the city, there's such a great buzz both day and night.

The city was an important factor to me when choosing which university I was going to apply to. At the end of the day, you are going to be living in a new city for four or more years of your life, so it's pretty important to choose one you feel comfortable in. When going to open days, make sure you take a look around the city because you really can get a feel for whether you can envisage living there.

Whilst living in City X there have been plenty of opportunities I have taken, mainly to help pay for my nights out! One example is that I applied to become a student ambassador at University of X, not only was it a great way to earn a bit of extra cash but the skills and confidence I have gained from it have been invaluable.

I've been very proud to be part of a university with amazing teaching, which has been recognised with the university gaining a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) gold award. Although a recent award, I have experienced high quality teaching and a multitude of opportunities whilst being here for the past 4 years.

So don't lose sight of the excitement that is to come and make sure you try your hardest this year. Most importantly, if you do decide that university is the choice for you then make sure you make the most of every opportunity you get whilst you are there! I won't sugar coat it- it is hard work at times but as I reflect on my journey through Higher Education, I am excited that you are about to embark on yours.

I wish you every success for your exams and beyond.

Chris Harris [pseudonym – graduate's real name used in actual email]

**Supplement 2a: Introductory letter from second year undergraduate student
(Experiment 2, letter one – May 2018)**

[First Name] [Last Name]

Lucy Hope [pseudonym]

[First Line of Address]

[University address]

[City]

[Post Code]

A message from Lucy, existing student currently studying at University of X

Hi [First Name],

My name is Lucy and I am a first year student at University of X. I would like to let you know about my transition to University and to help you discover what might be on offer. I have found learning at University quite different to what I was used to, but also very rewarding. Choosing the right course for you is important – completing your work is much easier when you're motivated by enjoyment of the subject rather than because "you have to".

In Year 12, I was only interested in one of my subjects, Computer Science, which is what I study now! As a result, I am more engaged in learning and I believe this is an important factor when evaluating your pathway after you leave sixth form or college. Although I live close to University, I still chose to live in student accommodation on-campus. This helped me to settle in to the learning and social environment at University and form some of my greatest friendships. However, wherever you live, there are lots of ways that you can feel settled in such an environment.

Whatever friendships you make at university, there will be plenty of social activities which you can take part in. I enjoy going out with my course-mates, flatmates and friends from my old sixth form. Societies are a massive influence in making new students feel part of the University. You can find societies linked to art, business, travelling, religion, sport and many others.

Whether you choose to go to University, begin an apprenticeship, enter employment or take a gap year, make sure that it is the right choice for YOU. Take a proactive approach in researching your options and investigate the benefits of university schemes. I participated in a scheme called University of X Progression, which gave me the chance to stay in halls of residence and have a real student experience before making up my mind about University. You could take part too! Finally, do your research, listen to advice but make sure that what you decide to do next is your own choice.

Good luck with whatever you choose to do,

Lucy

[University of X logo]

**Supplement 2b: Supplementary letter from second year undergraduate student
(Experiment 2 – letter two, September 2018)**

[First Name] [Last Name]

Matt Harris [pseudonym]

[First Line of Address]

[University address]

[City]

[Post Code]

A message from Matt, currently studying at University of X

Hi [First Name],

I work with Lucy as a Student Ambassador and I know she sent you a letter earlier this year. I wanted to do the same to tell you about my journey to University. Where do I even begin? University was never at the front of my mind. If anything, I thought I wanted to work full time. However, having people from University come to talk to us at college opened my eyes. It made me realise all the benefits and opportunities you can gain from going. I was never the smartest at school, I often struggled and got put down by peers and teachers. I wanted to prove a point to others that I could go far and get a degree.

Looking at where I am now, going to University was the best decision and I wouldn't change it for the world. University for me is about making the most out of the experience. I study Criminology and have had the chance to volunteer in prisons alongside my studies. I'm also a Student Ambassador and at times it's challenging working and studying, however it's about getting the balance right. University has opened doors for me, but opportunities weren't just handed to me on a plate. You have to do the correct research and put the effort in. You do need to work hard at university, but you also have plenty of time to have a social life and make the most of other opportunities.

Overall I don't regret coming to university and would happily do it all over again because of how it will set me up in the future. I encourage you to do your research and find the right course and university for you. University can be hard work, but the friends I've made and the experience I've had so far make it the best decision I've ever made.

Good luck with whatever you choose to do,

Matt

[University of X logo]