

Asking for help: Lakshani's story

Lakshani is a biological sciences student at Imperial from London and a South-East Asian working-class background. She went through a transformative journey throughout her degree with the support of college services and her friends, demonstrating the importance of asking for help. Initially she struggled with lower grades, perfectionism, and her mental health, but with university counselling and mentorship alongside a very support group of friends, she successfully negotiated university life.

Lakshani described her first year at university as “a little overwhelming” and that “being a perfectionist really harmed my progress”. She described realising the beginning of her degree:

“... that I was only one of a few brown people. It was just very odd to me. I'd never gone into a room and counted the amounts of brown people, but I immediately realised that I was one of a few or a handful of people. But also I think what was even weirder to me is that I come from a low social economic background ... I realised that I came from a kind of a poorer situation than a lot of people I was around and that definitely kind of hit hard because where I grew up, everyone was from that situation.”

Despite realising this difference, she “found that people almost find it interesting and kind of welcome it, that I'm from a very different background to theirs” which meant she did not feel side-lined by other students on her course. She described the importance of being able to empathise with each other across their different backgrounds, support each other in struggles with anxiety, and having similar career goals. During her first year she accessed **student counselling** and got a lot of **support from her friends**, describing how they sat in a park: “And we talked through the situation and that was the first time when I was like, ‘Oh my God, I can't believe I have friends like this.’” This friendship group remained a very supportive space through exam anxieties and **imposter syndrome** during the first year:

“I felt like I wasn't good enough to be there. And initially, everyone's struggling ... I was not getting as high grades as I was used to getting. And that was probably something that did kind of almost alarm me.”

Lakshani mentioned “that competitive environment, it can be isolating, but I found that Imperial has great support system” identifying student support services that she accessed to help her through difficult moments, including academic mentoring through the Disability Advisory Service. She described academic mentoring: it “full on changed the way I've seen myself and the people around me” particularly around not comparing herself to other people and avoiding burnout through maintaining hobbies and a work-life balance. Despite the availability of these student support services, Lakshani explained that sometimes students do not know about them and that there was still “a stigma around mental health and getting help. I think that really needs to kind of go”. She had found out about the counselling through the university website and from other students on her course who suggested she access mentoring.

Lakshani's positive experience of accessing student support services and being open with her friends demonstrates the importance of asking for help. [The SIDUS project](#) at Imperial and the University of Reading provides research and [student-facing resources](#), which highlight university support services and advice to encourage students to seek support.