

Dear first-year students,

How have you been lately? I can only imagine how difficult it must have been for you to have had to miss out on many of the traditions that come with finishing high school and starting university. Nevertheless, you have all taken it so well and have truly been able to adapt to the new situation at hand. Through this letter, I would like to share some of my accounts of the transition from high school to university.

Like many other students, I started my experience of university life during the HOP week, the introduction week for new alumni. It is safe to say I have met some of best friends there, many of whom I am still in daily contact with. Throughout the week we got to know the university, The Hague, and possible student activities little by little. The HOP week offered a great way into university life, without the heftics of classes and new surrounding being as prevalent. Nevertheless, I made many more friends through shared workgroups, skills labs and courses. As the current HOP week planned for 2020 is not able to be the same, I hope you can all still enjoy it. Of course many of the regular activities of the HOP week, like a day to the beach, exploring The Hague, and visiting the Malieveld can still be done later in your academic year. I would highly recommend a day out with some friends to Scheveningen when the weather allows it. Just bring some towels and get to know each other!

There might also be those of you wondering if you made the right decision in joining Security Studies since you aren't able to fully experience the study yet. This is why I would like to share some of my experiences with the study, as well as why I am still studying it. Throughout the first year, there will be ups and downs. Every student might experience those at different times, as everyone has got their interests and preferences. For me, the first block was great. I got to know more about academics, I learned how to write academically, and the first two courses offered a stepping stone which formed the basis of my skills and knowledge. However, I know many students who thought they might have made a mistake in choosing security studies, as throughout the first block there was no direct focus on case studies. However, do not underestimate the importance of basic skills. Yes, the first block may be more theoretical for some, but it will give you the capability of performing better throughout the rest of the academic year. My struggle came in block 3, specifically during the Fukushima Case Study. Having focussed on Economics and History in high school, I felt out of my comfort zone in a topic relating more to the beta sciences. This is when I started thinking about why I choose this study and if it was all worth it. For me, it became clear by the end of the block that, despite not having a background in physics or other beta courses, the professors do start at the beginning and it is okay to start from a lower level than some of the other students. Even more so, there were a lot of other subjects touched upon in the case study which I did relate to Topics such as policy, international relations, and crisis decision making.

I hope you can all learn from my experiences and feel a bit more at peace when going into your first year. Everyone will be new to this and everyone is new to the current situation we are in. Do not shy away from asking questions or finding alternatives for the activities you wanted to do when you first started thinking about your transition into university.

I wish you well, and who knows, maybe we'll meet again sooner than you think.

Kind regards,
Helena Reinders
Student Mentor BSc Security Studies

Dear prospective Security Studies student,

After graduating from high school, I came to university at 18 years old and was feeling excited but quite nervous of taking a leap into the real world, meeting new people, starting a new course, not speaking the language and being far from home. My mind was full of worries even after having settled the administrative side of things, housing, banks etc. You might be relating to this feeling right now but this mix of stress and eagerness to start this new chapter of your life is what will bring you to meet new people. Once you understand that every first year is anxious about making friends, the pressure somehow starts to be released.

For me the HOP week (<http://www.hopweek.org/en/en/homepage/>) and living in Enthovenplein, a university student residence made me meet who I consider my 'university family' in The Hague. Throughout the first weeks and months many events, parties, drinks or evenings were organized by students and the university in which I had ample chance to make more friends, in and outside my course. Most of my friends are in other courses and are international so from that point of view I can confidently say that students come from many different countries and that internationals do fit-in the Dutch scenery.

The start of classes was exciting. I was studying a new subject, quite specific and was only half aware of what the course really entailed - I had thrown myself in a direction which I was unsure about. In September I will begin my 3rd year so it would be right for you to assume that I was positively surprised and loved the course. The professors and tutors are very supportive in the first year and make the efforts to guide you in the beginning. All staff knows that an important preoccupation for first years is making friends and learning to live independently, whilst still following classes - which is why they don't expect much more than 'just keep swimming'. Studying tip for first years: attending lectures was for me the main source of understanding of the course so try to show up even if you're hungover ;)

To meet people in the COVID-19 period can be hard and the university is aware of it and is setting up a student-mentor initiative. Luckily, the HOP-week is still on and registration is opened, I would suggest all of you to join especially as later lectures will be online. Once classes begin, keep in touch, explore with people you met, roommates or classmates - reach out to people to go out to the beach or the center for drinks, it only takes a couple texts!

Good luck and most importantly: have fun!
Chiara



Hello everyone!

First of all: Congratulations! You have experienced an... let's call it an extraordinary year, and succeeded in making a study choice. This is an achievement that you may be very proud of. Of course, starting a new study can make you quite nervous. At least I was, last year.

I can still remember vividly the first time I took the train to The Hague central station and set foot inside the Wijnhaven building. All first-year students got the schedules for the first week printed on paper and I was happy to see students everywhere to give me directions. I expected to be walking around like a lost duckling, but I can reassure you that the contrary came true.

Making friends was the most important thing that occupied my mind. I had missed the introduction week and this made me very nervous. What were the people going to be like? What if everyone already made friends while I wasn't around? As I was waiting in line at the registration desk, I noticed that on my schedule I could already see the workgroup I was in. After a quick glance around the room, I saw another girl leaning against the wall. She looked a little shy and I decided to walk up to her. She wasn't in the same group, but it was nice to have met somebody. I still consider her my first study-friend, and we still regularly meet up for cake and hot chocolate (even in summer!).

Then, of course, the first classes were just around the corner. As soon as everyone was present, we started with a short round of introductions. This, I learned later, the teachers do every time a new block starts with a new workgroup. This way, you can easily find people who have similar interests. Furthermore, there are lots and lots of group assignments that will help you get into contact with fellow students. An important note of advice: Making friends does not end after the first week! All year around, you will get opportunities to work with new people who have interesting stories to tell.

The first block was stuffed with introductory knowledge and basic skills, the building blocks for the rest of the school year. The most interesting part starts in block 2: the case studies! The case studies discuss topics in detail. You will come across the Syrian war and the Fukushima disaster. I will not spoil too much, but I can tell you that these courses are worth the effort. But if you are really curious already, I can recommend you to watch the movies 'for Sama (2019)' and 'Fukushima: A nuclear story (2015)' to get a feeling of the topics. Meanwhile, the skillslabs will continue, and you will get better and better at writing, speaking and presenting. Some assignments are harder than others, but you will always get the chance to ask your tutor for advice. Furthermore, every block, they will have a personal conversation with you, to check how you are dealing with the course material, and how you are doing personally.

One last recommendation of mine is to enjoy extracurricular activities, even if they are online these days. Leiden University will send you a newsletter every once in a while, with all the activities you can join. Furthermore, the study association Custodia also organises lots of educational, but also social, activities. This can help you to already get into contact with people who work for interesting companies, and help you bond with fellow students. And don't be shy to seek some extra challenges, for example in the honours program 'Tackling Global Challenges' from Leiden University.

The past year has been a wonderful, well-guided experience to me, and I am sure that you will enjoy the program, too. Looking forward to seeing you around!

Kind regards,
Rosalie