

STUDENT NEWSLETTER



Scoil an Leighis Tréidliachta UCD | UCD School of Veterinary Medicine

ISSUE 9 END OF SPRING TRIMESTER 2021

WELCOME

Welcome to Issue 9 of our newsletter, our final issue for this trimester! Like yourselves, we can't believe how quickly the year has flown by, and here we are, about to start into the May exam session. This issue is - you got it - exam-focused!

What we did was ask a bunch of people in the School and around the University to tell us about their memories and experiences of exams - what worked, what didn't work, and what advice they might have for you with the all-important benefit of hindsight. There are some great stories and tips in there, and huge thanks to all of our contributors: our Dean, Michael; Eimear and Conor, Auditors of Vet Nursing Soc and Vet Soc respectively; Ruairí, your UCDSU Welfare Officer; Fr Eamonn, UCD Chaplain; Jason, Head of Service in UCD Student Services; Aisling, Head of the UCD Student Advisory Service; Dan from UCD Estate Services; Paul, Associate Professor of Psychology at UCD and Head of Psychology at SVUH; and Niamh, your Student Adviser. There are many nuggets of wisdom in there and lots of tips for surviving exams. Our hope is that you find something helpful for you!



School News

Year-end brings a flurry of activity on all sides - students are studying for exams, and staff are getting ready for the Grade Approvals Process (GAP), a time period during which all grades are reviewed in advance of the publication of results. As you can imagine, this means that things are pretty busy!

Recently, we celebrated our White Coat Ceremony for our veterinary and veterinary nursing students who are about to embark on their final year. Congratulations to all! We also hosted some great community events - a lovely wellness and mindfulness masterclass with Liz Costigan Fleury and an interesting webinar with Prof. Luke O'Neill and Dr Ebony Escalona who talked to us about their experiences over the last year and their hopes for the future. A group of us are currently planning to do Darkness Into Light in May. While we can't walk together, we're still planning to walk as a team. If you'd like to join, you can add yourself to our team ([#weareUCDVetsandVetNurses](#)) here. Finally, in June we'll celebrate Conferring, one of our favourite days of the year! Busy times ahead.

Over the next few weeks, remember that we are all here for support. Reach out if you have any questions or concerns - your module coordinators, the Programme Office, your Student Adviser. We are here to help. Just ask.

Interested in contributing to the Student Newsletter or getting involved? Drop an email to niamh.nestor@ucd.ie

Reflection on Final Exams

Professor Michael Doherty
Dean and Head of School, UCD School of Veterinary Medicine



A pre-laptop 1980s world in the city of Edinburgh; the hoppy aroma of the Caledonian brewery in the spring breeze; appreciating the company of vet school class colleagues but needing the distraction of flat mates studying arts and law; the support of close friends; the dubiously healthy diet of 'haggis, neeps and taties' freshly purchased from local stores.

Having to escape - for early morning walks and jogs around the beautiful Arthur's Seat with glorious views of the city, Duddingston Loch, the county of Fife, the Firth of Forth. Playing summer cup football and occasional visits to see Hibernian FC at Easter Road; the collective and very serious listening to music - vinyl of course - perusing album covers, Irish and Scottish traditional sounds of the Bothy Band and Capercaillie; Neil Young, Van the Man; Dylan and Springsteen (punk had passed us by)!

Distractions, distractions...needing to get the mind away from the study; avoiding the smug classmate who insisted on telling everyone in the vet school restaurant that he had revised all his notes twice already; sticking to a system that works for you; final-year clinical material interesting and stirring memories of cases you saw in the vet hospital and when in practice....a steady, slow pace, reading, reflecting - making short notes on learning; the use of quiet spaces the main university library; the surgical stitching in the living room with pieces of fabric remnants in the days long before clinical skills labs.

The intensity of the exams themselves but feeling prepared; the occasional bout of anxiety; memories of the 4th year re-sit in pharmacology (too many long weekends in the highlands and reading outside the course); the noisy, partying science students who finished their exams early; cups of instant coffee - (americano and cappuccino not part of the lexicon) ... more early morning walks on Arthur's Seat; the relief and exhaustion at the exams' conclusion; the list of results dramatically posted in a glass cabinet by the Dean - the corridor rush to see if your name is there; the queue at phone public phone box beside the Summerhall Building - 'there's a vet in the family!' the delighted parents...the Southern Bar celebration...the long sleep...



Top Tips for Exam Season from UCD Student Health!

1. Pick a study space
2. Pre-plan your day
3. Take regular breaks
4. Stay hydrated and eat well
5. You need sleep
6. Always ask for help (one we're big on here at the Student Newsletter!)

Head over to their [Insta](#) for more on this!

Surviving Exam Season

Eimear Bruton, Auditor of UCD Vet Nursing Soc
and Final-year Vet Nursing Student



So exam season is near... the final obstacle towards closure on another academic year. As someone who naturally stresses out about exams, even writing this piece is bringing back some RDS PTSD!! But, over the years, I like to think that I have picked up a few tips and tricks for surviving the dreaded "Finals" so here we go...

1. For first years, you got this!!!! You survived the Leaving Cert or whatever other 'big' exams you've done in the past. Trust me - no university exam will compare to that!! From experience, I would say adapt your study to understanding the concept rather than rote learning as these exams are designed to apply what you know rather than regurgitate large chunks of info.
2. Little and often was key for me. A chapter here and there while still giving myself down time to focus on something other than books and lectures. Go for a walk, listen to some music, watch some TV; your sanity will thank you in the long run.
3. Sometimes it can be hard to pull yourself away from the desk so remember to be kind to yourself and your mind!! Studying is intense and takes a toll on the body, despite you being convinced that working on minimal sleep will stand to you... GO TO BED and thank me later!!!
4. Celebrate the small wins!! It might only be a definition or one lecture but it's more than you knew yesterday!! I found that I became really hard on myself during exam times. I had a habit of focusing on the 1% of what I didn't know rather than the 99% I had worked hard to learn, so: "Be smart. Don't be like Eimear here." 😊
5. Usually Imposter Syndrome sets in around exam season, but remember that we all have moments of uncertainty. There's not one person who hasn't felt that way so try and bear that in mind next time you think you're the only one struggling to learn something. Chances are I struggled with it, too, and yet here I am a few weeks away from graduation... you will get through it, I promise!!
6. Everyone wants you to succeed!! If there are times where you feel overwhelmed, reach out to Niamh Nestor or another member of staff you trust. They are all there to help you through this!!
7. For those feeling unmotivated or worried that it's too late to start, don't give up!! There is still plenty of time left, and you would be surprised with what you can achieve when you put your mind to it! God knows there's been the odd time I've pulled off a study miracle close to exam time!



Eimear during her summer research project...and soon to graduate!

To sum up... you've got this guys. Remember we've all been through it and survived and remember the basics (sleep and food). Like Snickers say, "You're not you when you're hungry!"



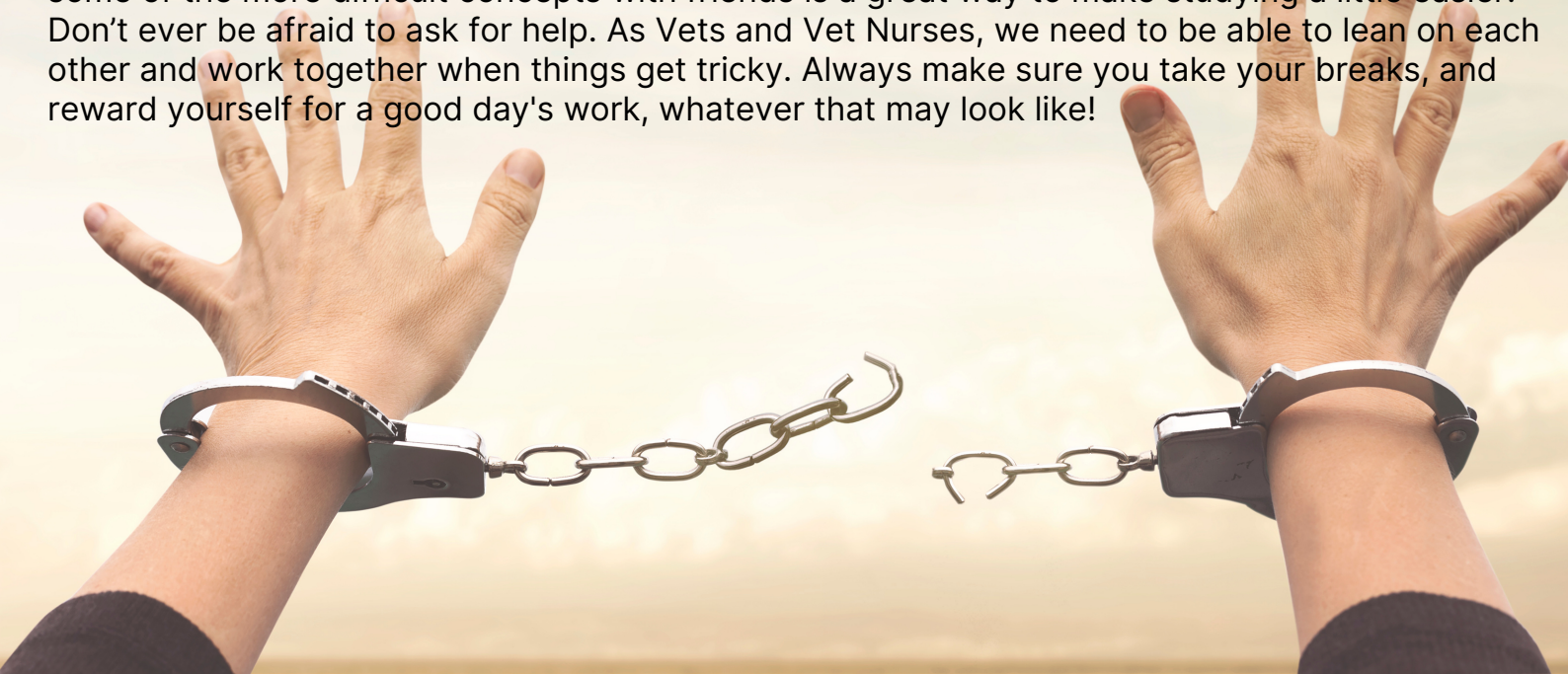
Letting Go of the Notion of "Perfect"

Conor Wallace, Auditor of UCD Vet Soc and Stage 4 MVB Student

What is the perfect way to study? Coming to the end of my 4th year in Veterinary Medicine, I still couldn't tell you. In fact, I think the secret to studying well is to let go of the notion of "perfect" altogether. The real challenge is finding a system that works for you, and sticking with it.

There's a tendency for all of us to compare ourselves to others and think "Maybe I should be doing things more like them". This is the biggest mistake you can make, and, more often than not, that person could be feeling the same way. Trust yourself - you've made it this far so just keep doing what you're doing!

If I had to give any tips on how to work through the content, I would say pace yourself - little and often is the best way to go, and taking notes on the slides during lectures can really help in simplifying the material. YouTube is a brilliant resource with tons of great videos explaining everything from physiology to ECGs with creative visual aids and voice-overs. Chatting through some of the more difficult concepts with friends is a great way to make studying a little easier. Don't ever be afraid to ask for help. As Vets and Vet Nurses, we need to be able to lean on each other and work together when things get tricky. Always make sure you take your breaks, and reward yourself for a good day's work, whatever that may look like!



Tackling Your Critical Inner Voice

Our Critical Inner Voice (CIV) - we all have it and we all recognise that it rears its ugly head when we least need it, especially around exam time. Being aware of it can be the first step in managing it so that it impacts less on your performance and causes you less stress.

This [article](#) in [mindandbodyworks.com](#) is a good read about this topic. It deals with:

1. What the CIV is (basically that ongoing, harsh commentary in your head);
2. How to change the impact of your CIV on you (including working on recognising triggers, the role criticism plays, and how journaling can help); and
3. How to silence your CIV.





Your SU is Here For You!

Ruairí Power, UCDSU Welfare Rep

Hi everyone, Ruairí here from the Students' Union. Firstly, very best of luck with exams and assignments for the next few weeks. Exams are stressful at the best of times, and this has been a fairly unusual year for everyone. Make sure to look after yourselves.

I'm a bit of a crammer, and usually the run up to exams for me is synonymous with pot noodles for dinner, excessive Red Bull consumption and my hairline receding at twice the normal rate. If you're feeling a bit overwhelmed, the chances are that a lot of other people in your programme are, too. It's difficult to keep yourself motivated while working at home, so try to organise regular check-ins with your friends.

I find it helpful to organise something nice for directly after exams to give myself something to look forward to. That's difficult in a Covid scenario, but even something small like ordering your favourite takeaway, meeting a friend for a coffee or going for a swim in the sea.

If you think an exam went badly, don't panic. Your student advisers, SU reps or module coordinators will be able to give you some assistance on how to proceed. I have a... colourful assessment history and they haven't de-registered me just yet!

The SU offices are open until the end of exams, so please feel free to call in to reception for advice, a chat and to pick up some bits to eat or a refill pad. Exams are important but they're not the be all and end all. Look after yourselves and give us a shout whenever if there's anything your SU team can help with.

<https://www.ucdsu.ie/>



Being Honest With Myself

Fr Eamonn Bourke, UCD Chaplain

Exams always filled me with a certain trepidation. No matter how much work I did, I would often think I hadn't done enough or that I had studied the wrong thing!!! I was also a bit of a crammer. I used to tend to put things off until the long finger and then start to panic when exams got closer!! As I progressed, I began to realise that it was a lot easier if I just worked steadily throughout the year instead of rushing things at the end!!

What I felt helped me when I was doing exams and indeed I find it helpful generally in my life is to simply be honest with myself and to check in with myself as to how I am really feeling. So when exam time was coming up and I was getting anxious, I would simply say to myself, 'Ok, I'm feeling anxious now', or 'I feel stressed today'. Even acknowledging it for myself was enough to calm me down. Feelings are neither good or bad; it's what you do with them that's important. So, if I acknowledged to myself that I was feeling stressed or anxious, I also reminded myself that it's ok to feel this way. It is normal during exam times to feel this way. There is nothing wrong with this. In other words, welcome to the real world.

I've always been blessed with deep faith in God and this, too, has helped me at exam times. God can't doctor the marks if I haven't put the work in. I had to do the work. But I prayed that I might have a clear head and be able to recall the information when I needed it. I had the sense that I wasn't alone doing the exams. I had support and encouragement!

<https://www.ucd.ie/chaplaincy/>

You Are Not Alone

Jason Masterson, Head of Service, UCD Student Services

As I think about students taking exams during the pandemic, I'm reminded of my own time (procrastinating) studying in the James Joyce Library. What strikes me as I look back was the camaraderie at the time - the sense among my friends that we are all in this together. While it's harder to get that sense at the moment, it remains true.



I was a great man for 2-3 hours' good study in the morning, absolutely useless for the middle of the day, and then a good long stint in the evening. But the bit in the middle was key. I distracted myself with walks, friends, ice cream and generally anything that I shouldn't be doing. If I was to advise the current students, I'd say make time for the "bit in the middle" – ice creams are key during the May exams, and it's warm enough to justify at least one per day! Also, change your location - study in the park, in the back garden, on the balcony if you can.

The monotony slows you down. Procrastination loves company, so if you're taking a break, WhatsApp someone. I can guarantee there's someone in your class who wants to procrastinate with you. And that's fine - just remember to put in the evening shift or the morning shift with the books!

On a more serious note, if you do need support or a virtual gym class, check out the virtual support services here that might help: <https://www.ucd.ie/studentcentre/services/virtualsupports/>. Best of luck with the exams. You are not alone.



Looking For a 5-Minute Meditation?

Need a quick, mindful break during study and exams? Check out the [UK National Gallery's 5-minute meditations](#) on YouTube.

You'll be able to look at some beautiful art all while meditating - a true feast for the eyes and soul.

Olfactory Memories!

Aisling O'Grady, Head of UCD Student Advisory Service

The smell of freshly-mown grass, the sight of cherry blossoms, the sound of mowers may indicate spring, but for me, like a Pavlovian response, all that is in my mind is that exam season is here again.

I was never the most dedicated of students and back in the olden days (1980s) all assessment was exam-based, and there was only one exam period in May. A relaxed attitude to work throughout the term and a very healthy social life led to a petri-dish of stress and anxiety every April and May. The changing of the clock did not mean longer daylight hours; rather it was a reminder to get into the library to catch up on all the reading I had put on the long finger for the past academic year.

Exams were held in the RDS Simmonscourt, just after the annual Spring Show* when agricultural Ireland came to Dublin for a week. It meant that there was a particular smell in the exam hall that accompanied exams, a smell that will always remind me of that time!

Exams were all three hours long, with possibly two a day, a mental marathon. Great plans were made for celebrating the end of this ordeal. Inevitably, however, I could be found slumbering in the corner of some pub, fast sleep, totally wiped out by the experience. Looking back, I wish I had recognised that actually I had done much more throughout the year than I gave myself credit for and had more faith in myself.

*For anyone who doesn't know or doesn't remember what the Spring Show was in the RDS, RTÉ has some lovely archives on what used to be a huge annual event.



Aisling loves to spend time out hiking with friends



Languishing, anyone?

Important not to forget that we're currently in the middle of a pandemic.. Cue collective groan. How could we forget? Who could have ever imagined it would go on this long?

We've heard a lot, particularly since January, about feelings of demotivation, exhaustion and just general greyness or *malaise*. Whatever word you want to use, it's not been a good time for people. The NY Times has a good article on this called: "[There's a Name for the Blah You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing](#)". They go on to explain that what many of us are feeling can't exactly be categorised as burnout or depression: 'We just felt somewhat joyless and aimless. It turns out there's a name for that: languishing.' It's a good read and definitely helps to put context on those shades of grey that you might be feeling right now.

Remember that there is support for you as a [UCD staff member](#) and a [UCD student](#). There are also [many national supports](#) to draw on, should you need them.

To Coffee or Not To Coffee?!

Daniel Earls, Centre Manager, UCD Estate Services

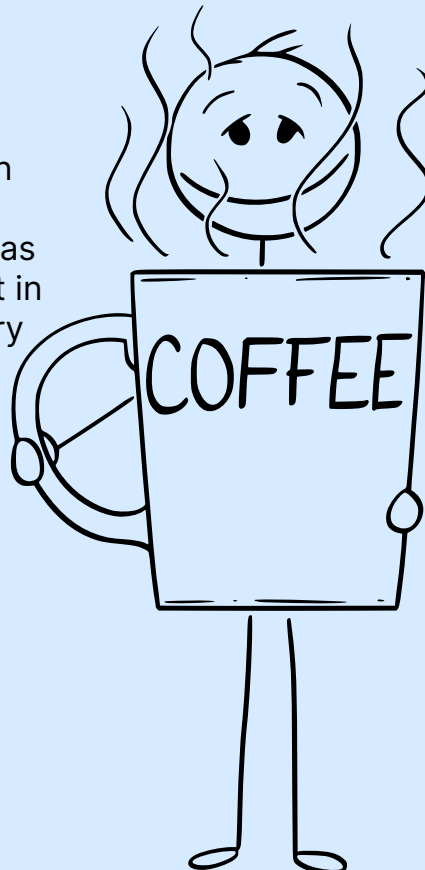
Being an Arts graduate and Library and Information Studies postgrad (muffle your chortles, please) I think it's fair to say there was little "experiential overlap" with my exam and final-coursework prep compared to that of the frequently-gruelling schedules of the vet med and vet nursing students.

However, as I'm writing this wee piece, trying to find some common ground and possible "advice" from student experience and even from my professional work experience, for those in the Vet School, my mind keeps coming back to one thing: **Less coffee and more tea (preferably herbal)**. To qualify that, I absolutely love coffee, and generally even now drink far, far too much of it. But I've noticed through painful experience that the allure of coffee, particularly at stressful or pressure moments, like exam or assignment submissions, or even interview prep, is like a mirage in the desert and can actually amplify my anxiety or stress around these things.

Initially, sated with coffee, I'd let the warm deliciousness flood my system and I feel like "Yes, this is a state of being far superior to the non-coffee one". However, when I proceed on whatever course of actions I'm prompted to, I notice I'm far quicker to agitation with unexpected actions/questions or outcomes; I get weighed way down by any choice; and it quickly becomes a burden as I hop from one topic to another, becoming quickly knackered in the process. Overall, coffee, or maybe more aptly too much caffeine, greatly impacts my own inner resilience and definitely increases mental fatigue.

In the past, my fix for this was of course...more coffee. When I'm able to summon the discipline to have a cup of tea, 1 cuppa of builder's tea to kick things off in the morning, followed by cups of Rooibos or other herbal variants, I would still notice the anxiety and possible stress around actions/questions and hoped-for outcomes, but it tends to evaporate much quicker after a decision has been made.

As a side note, I had my first Redbull in years the other day while working in the office, and before I'd even finished the can, I was pretty much waiving a fist in air - due to inner imaginary spat (straw-man-style) - with another colleague work who wasn't in the room. I guess it's easier here for me to blame the caffeine!



Dan, a familiar face around the Vet Building and UCD, after his morning ration of caffeine (and definitely before 2pm!)

Important footnote: I'm now 40-plus, and it's likely that coffee is just another nice thing you have to give up to continue to function in vaguely predictable biological fashion, but no one warns you or tells you that when you're in your 20s as it's just too depressing! I'm probably only a short hop away from not being able to sleep that night if I have cuppa after 2pm!!

Knowing Why...

Paul Dalton, Associate Professor, UCD School of Psychology and Head of Psychology at SVUH

The research keeps coming back to one really important thing; when it comes to coping in difficult situations: Know Your Why.

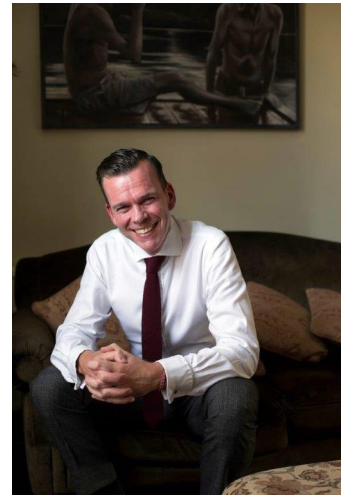
The philosopher Nietzsche said a person who has a 'why' to live for can bear almost any 'how'. Whilst Nietzsche may not have had exams in mind when he said this, he was pointing to something very important when it comes to coping with challenges and stress: when we know why we are doing something (even if it's difficult) we will cope better.

The Why is the big-picture motivation - these exams are stepping stones to the Why: Who I want to be in the world, what I want to contribute, how I want to live; and in the words of Mary Oliver, what you plan to do with "your one wild and precious life".

When we connect with our Why it does two things: Firstly, it connects us to what we really value, what really matters most to us; and, secondly, we then gain perspective.

Exams are a stressor - they are unpredictable and largely uncontrollable. In the face of the unpredictable and uncontrollable, we lose perspective, we become focused on the immediate and and forget what matters most to us. In short bursts, this is fine, but not for prolonged periods of time.

Remembering your Why restores perspective and can help to regulate the nervous system. So, write your Why down and stick it on the fridge; find an image of your Why and use it as your screensaver; keep prompting yourself to Know Your Why.



Paul is a regular contributor on mental health and wellbeing to RTÉ Radio One's Drivetime programme

If you want, you could use this space to write down what your Why is...

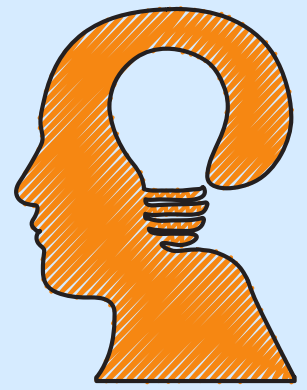
What is your why?



Wisdom Is Better Than Gold

Niamh Nestor, Student Adviser

It hasn't been that long since I've done exams, which is funny, because with every exam I do, I promise it'll be my last! What can I say? Doing exams is necessary in our line of business, but as each exam goes by, I tell myself: 'There has to be a better way than this'. Despite best intentions, I still haven't cracked this conundrum!



I've pulled a good few all-nighters in my time, and I definitely wouldn't recommend them, even though they were sometimes a necessary evil during my undergrad, mainly because I'd been having a good ole time during the semester and not doing as much work as I should have been (ahem). When I think about college, I remember sunny days, loads of socialising, and the joy and energy of youth, but this is a very good example of misremembering with heavily rose-tinted glasses, because, in reality, there were unsurprisingly some dark days, with too much work, loads of pressure, and too little sleep. The stress was sometimes awful, but I can't remember it now. I mainly just remember the friends, the love and the fun.

One memory does stick out though of my worst exam experience ever which was a Latin exam during my undergrad (little-known fact: I have a degree in Latin of all things). I adored Latin but really struggled with it in college. I didn't like the way it was taught, and I'm a desperate one for throwing in the towel when something isn't floating my boat. I had very firmly 'taken agin it' well before my exams, and the stress-related procrastination I was feeling was like nothing ever before or since. That's the problem with deciding to give up on this kind of thing - it's still coming at you like a train. At some point, you have to figure out how to deal with it.



I put the head down about a week before the exam. I worked out that it was possible to pass by doing a certain number of very basic things. I wasn't proud of myself but I was desperate at that stage. The day of the exam, I was a frazzled shadow of my former self (see above note about all-nighters!). My friend Elaine felt really sorry for me stuck in the library and brought me a Mars bar and bottle of Lucozade to try and pep me up. Sugar was a logical 'nutrition' choice in those days lol. I didn't fully realise that I had a bit of an intolerance to Lucozade until I'd downed the bottle and was racing,

last minute, over to the exam hall. Well. Doing a Latin exam as sick as a dog is as bad as it sounds. My poor lecturer came to visit during the exam. He took one look at me, nodded sympathetically, and moved on. I laugh now but I wasn't laughing then!

I passed the exam in the end (barely). Looking back now, I can see how afraid I was - afraid of failing and having to face my own feelings of crippling shame and disappointment. My sense of self-worth was so wrapped up in my academic ability that I lost sight of the fact that acknowledging I was out of my depth and drowning with the pressure would have been...simply ok. The world wouldn't have split open. I wish I'd been wiser and I wish I'd been braver, but I guess to become wiser and braver, you have to first feel, know and acknowledge fear. And so it is with life.

If you need it, reach out for help. We are all here for you. You are not alone in this. Fear is normal. Fear of failure is normal. Don't let it stop you from getting the help you need. *Sapientia melior auro*. Wisdom is better than gold.

** For supports at UCD, go to: <https://www.ucd.ie/studentcentre/services/studentssupport/>