

FRESHER PRESSURE

So you're about to head off to university or college for the first time? **Annie Porthouse** helps you to prepare for your first term

Robbie Williams' biographer Mark McCrum observes that sometimes, just before a gig, Robbie admits to feeling 'nervous and really empty, like he's forgotten how to entertain the audience for an hour and a half.'

If you're off to the big wide world of university or college this September, you might be feeling a bit like Robbie yourself. After all, this isn't just an hour and a half we're talking about – it's three or more years. It's a big step – all those people, all that study, all those nights out!

There are so many 'what ifs': what if I make no friends? What if there aren't any other Christians? What if I'm forced to drink round the clock and flirt with anything that moves?

Well, what if you just sit back in a comfy beanbag somewhere, with your mug of coffee and relax, while I prove to you that there's really no need to panic. Really.

Change is a stressful thing and going to college can mean change by the satchel-full: changes in location, friends, church and CU, style of study, financial independence – often your whole lifestyle.

My first tip is simply **chill out**. Don't panic, because God doesn't change, ever. Whatever college throws at you, your relationship with him has the potential to deepen, as you learn to rely on him to an even greater extent, during the 'down' as well as the 'up' times.

Think I'm making it up? OK, then



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lend your ear to what second-year student Esther has to say on the matter: 'Knowing how much God loves me and is in control of my life has made the difficulties I've come across whilst at university easier to cope with.'

God's love is vast enough to follow you to uni. It'll surround you in halls, in lectures, in the pub, and in every nook and cranny on campus, and then some.

Right, so what about your current mates, and all those thousands of potential friends – Christian and not – you've got coming your way in September?

Bring on the circus clowns then, because it's time to juggle! My next tip is **balance your mates**.

Listen to Rach, president of the CU at the University of Gloucestershire:

'Make good Christians friends who can support and uplift you. Get involved with a church and the Christian Union, or other Christian societies. Spend personal time with God reading the Bible and praying, even when you don't feel like it. It's important to not to be in a 'Christian bubble', as God calls us to be in this world and not of it. So spend time with non-Christians, but be wise and don't compromise your beliefs.'

(You can ask your CU to get in touch with you through UCCE. Their website is www.thecumovement.org/newstudents.)

As if that isn't enough, now I'm going to tell you to prepare for another balancing act. **Balance the old and the new** – learn to be content in both home and college worlds.



Ex-student and full-time youth-worker Pete comments, 'It's vital to have a healthy balance of old and new. It's very easy to get completely immersed in your new student life, and lose links with the support you have received from home for most of your life.'

'This can result in negative relationships at home and a feeling of isolation if problems arise at uni, especially when you need to see a familiar face or hear the voice of a supportive friend.'

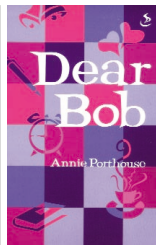
'On the other hand, it's also important not to rely too heavily on your friends and family at home, as it can lead to you feeling lonely at uni. This balance is not as hard to get as it might sound, and it is well worth the effort.'

So finally, you ask, what about all that *Sex-in-the-City*-style bed-hopping I've been hearing about? And how should I deal with the pressure to take drugs or drink excessively?

Glad you asked. My final tip is to **make the tough decisions about these things before you go**. How will I react to being out among other people? How do I get when someone flirts with me? What's a sensible place to stop? What's God's view on all these things?

Pray for wisdom and get others to pray for you when you go to college, especially during the first few weeks.

Keep all these things in mind and hopefully when you begin student life, you can be just like Robbie when his gig finally starts... having a blast!



Annie Porthouse is a mum of two and a learning support assistant. Her novel about life at university, Dear Bob, is available now priced £6.99. Buy at your local Christian retailer or using the order form on the inside back page.

For a Bible study that explores the issues raised in this article, visit Annie's Dear Bob website at www.dearbob.com.

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