

## THE FRESHMAN YEAR

## ‘Everything I do from this point on can change my life’

BY GUY QUENNEVILLE

Imagine being pushed down a steep driveway on a bike for the first time — without the training wheels. Now multiply that feeling by a hundred. Welcome to your first year at university.

No matter what high school prepares you for, it demands nothing close to the degree of responsibility, self-restraint and bravery that university life requires.

In the beginning, it's all adrenaline. New surroundings, new people, new life. But you settle in, start to make friends with fellow “frosh” (who are just as terrified as you are) and relax a little.

Then, as the first classes approach, a thought hits harder than your first heartbreak: “This is it. Everything I do from this point on can change my life. The ship has sailed and I'm the one behind the wheel.”

Problem is, you have no idea whether it will be smooth sailing or the next Titanic. I'm here to tell you: It will be a little of both.

Whether you survive your first year — the classes, the bills and the parties — depends entirely on how well you adapt. The best way to deal is with a combination of wide-eyed eagerness and opened-eye caution. The goal is to do good work and have fun too.

You'll find out quickly that there's no manual for steering the ship. But here's a list of things I wish someone had told me.

**Don't just sit there**

Get out and mingle. As Will — one of the friends I made those first few weeks — puts it: “View everyone as a potential friend. Everyone is looking for a buddy.”

And drop that high-school clique mentality. It generally doesn't apply on campus. Sometimes it's the strangest-looking people who have the straightest head on their shoulders, or the most laidback people who get the best marks. Don't let opportunities pass you by. There are tons of clubs and societies — everything from campus newspapers to ‘Philosophy and Baking.’ Try something new every week. After all, half the fun of university is expanding your horizons.

**Cell block blues**

At some point during the year, residence will feel like prison. If getting locked out of your room while your roommate is entertaining a guest doesn't do it, the strict house rules will.

That's not all. After two or three months, tensions bubble up, alliances give way to rivalries and proceedings may take a decidedly Survivor-like turn. Break the tension with activities fuelled by common interests — like marathon viewings of favourite TV shows.

There will always be people who don't get along, toilets that don't flush properly and shower curtains that disappear. But there's fun to be had in it all. Just stay humble. And don't take any of it too seriously.

**Till death do us part?**

As a freshman in residence, chances are you'll have a roommate — which, it turns out, is a lot like marriage: You must quickly learn to accept each other's quirks.

For example, I made peace with the fact that my roommate Spence (now one of my best friends) enjoys listening to Soviet national anthems and has absolutely no



BRIAN GABLE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

qualms about being seen in his underwear. And he got used to me yawning with startling frequency and singing in the shower, incredibly off-key.

But sometimes a glitch in the system results in disastrous pairings that can turn nasty. If you're mismatched, don't suffer in silence or declare war. Instead, request a room change. While there's almost always a waiting period, it's easier to reach a truce when you both know it'll be over soon.

**Dropping a class**

If you find that a course just isn't for you, don't hesitate to drop it. However, avoid dropping too late in the game. For one thing, you'll have that much more catching up to do in your alternative course. Or you may not be able to get into another course. Or, if you've really procrastinated, you may end up having to pay for the hated course, whether

you finish it or not. So find out early what the rules are and act as soon as you can.

**Timing is everything**

The penalty for getting to class late in university is worse than detention: you don't get punished. Sounds great, but it can cost you big time. Professors make important announcements — like where to go to write your exam or what books you don't need to buy — at the start of class. And they don't repeat them for stragglers. So sleep in — if you don't mind missing your exam grade or buying a useless book.

The best alarm clock on the market — and by far the cheapest — is a trusty fellow classmate. Set up a buddy system (phone calls, knock on the door, whatever) to make sure you're each ready for class.

**Making to-do**

Once your classes are well under

way and your social life has kicked into high gear, time will start slipping away. Unless you take control early, the essays and labs and tests will become overwhelming. Try this: Type a weekly list of things you have to do — writing an essay, meeting with an academic adviser, doing your laundry — and hang it above your work station. That way, when you're chatting with your friends on MSN or watching the umpteenth episode of *Trailer Park Boys*, a simple glance will remind you of what you should be doing.

It also helps to write self-motivation notes: “If you're reading this, you're not writing your essay. Why is that? Think of what your parents would say. Now get to work!” There's nothing like guilt to give you a jump-start.

**The art of studying**

There are two ways to prepare for exams: alone or in study groups.

The easiest way to find out which works for you is to attend a study group. If you can contribute easily, you've found the right place. If it seems the others are speaking an alien language, get away quickly, find a quiet space (the library is ideal) and plunge headfirst into the material.

**Professors are people, too**

While they are often rushed and carry a heavy workload, most professors love to discuss common interests or class topics with enthusiastic students. Indeed, some of the most interesting people you'll meet are professors. You just have to be willing to knock on their doors. If a professor appears annoyed when you approach him or her, don't take it personally. Chances are, it has nothing to do with you. Believe it or not, teachers do live off campus. They're raising families, writing books and struggling to make do financially (yeah, you're not the only one.)

**Budget, budget, budget**

Just because the money's there doesn't mean you have to spend it all at once. Figure out your monthly costs, add tuition and books, leave room for emergencies and stick like glue to your budget. Why miss great activities in the second semester because you absolutely had to have some silly gadget in October? Use on-line banking to keep an eye on your balance.

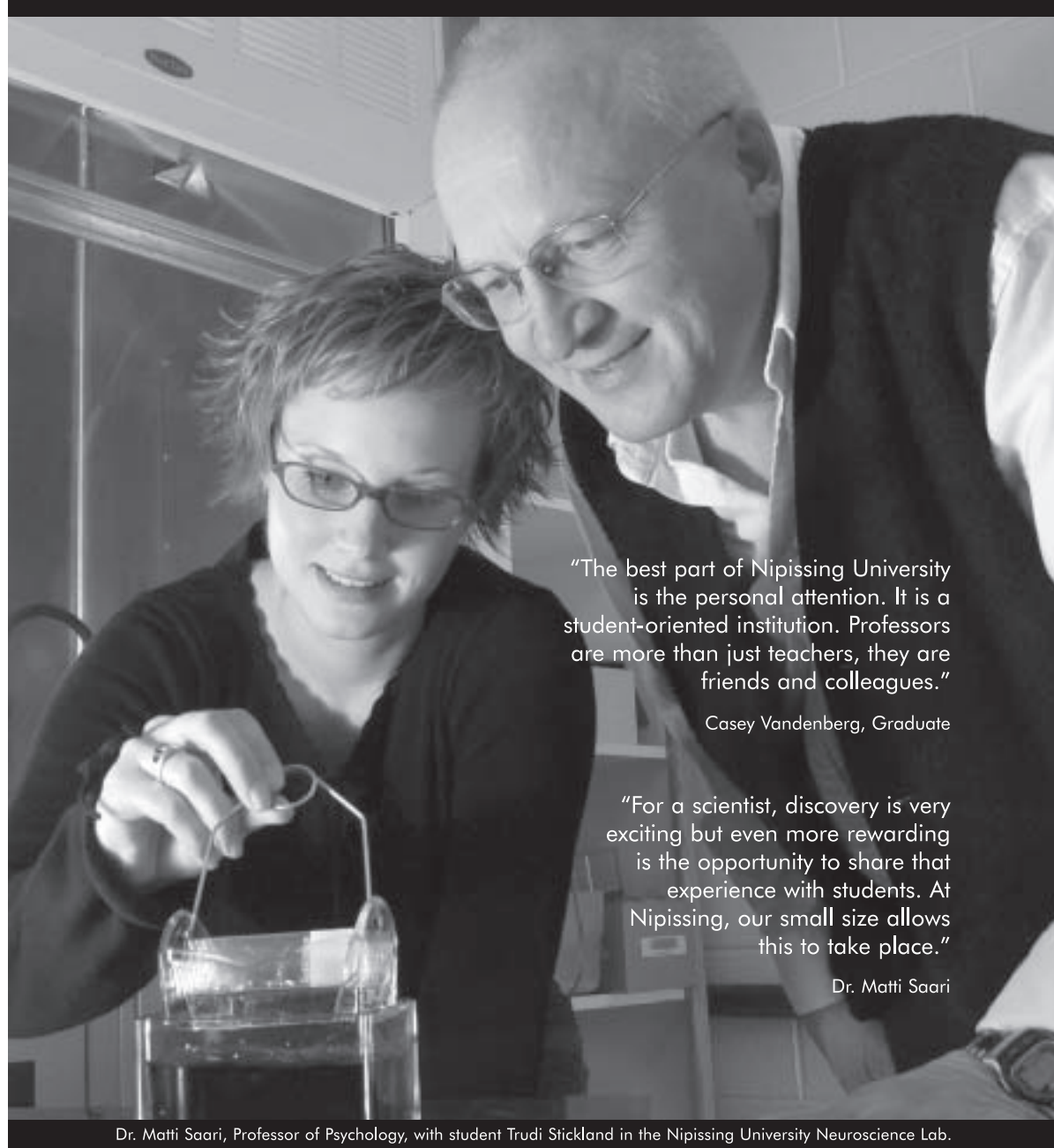
**On the town**

Remember how your kindergarten teacher used to make you hold hands with a partner and never lose sight of them? Except for holding hands, use the same system when going clubbing or pubbing with friends. Make sure at least one of you is sober-minded. This can prevent you from wandering off God knows where or ordering unnecessarily large amounts of food.

You'll make your own list as the year goes on, but the bottom line is: Embrace this as a time of opportunity and, as my friend Rohit advises, “be comforted by the words of Shrek: ‘Change is good, donkey.’”

Guy Quenneville is a sophomore at the University of King's College in Halifax.

## Imagine a classroom where every student has a voice.



Dr. Matti Saari, Professor of Psychology, with student Trudi Stickland in the Nipissing University Neuroscience Lab.

“The best part of Nipissing University is the personal attention. It is a student-oriented institution. Professors are more than just teachers, they are friends and colleagues.”

Casey Vandenberg, Graduate

“For a scientist, discovery is very exciting but even more rewarding is the opportunity to share that experience with students. At Nipissing, our small size allows this to take place.”

Dr. Matti Saari

Being a small university provides students some very distinct educational advantages. To learn, students need to ask questions and at Nipissing every student has the opportunity to do just that. With an average class size of 34, our students get the one-on-one attention from faculty that is a necessary part of a quality education. We offer a variety of degrees in Arts and Science as well as Education.

Nipissing University's picturesque campus, in North Bay, Ontario, is set on an escarpment overlooking Lake Nipissing and is home to approximately 3000 full-time students. North Bay is about 3.5 hours from Toronto and 4 hours from Ottawa.



&gt; providing direction

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## CAREER CENTRES

## Want a good job? Take care of future business early

BY WALLACE IMMEN

Now, more than ever, university students need to establish a plan as early as their freshman year to get the academic and life skills they'll need to launch a career, counsellors and employers advise.

But according to the University Report Card, many students are less than satisfied with the help being offered to them. While students give high marks to the overall quality of their university's ability to prepare them for a career, the grades their school's career counselling and placement services earn are less than stellar.

Officials of university counselling centres respond that students should take a closer look at what is offered, because the centres are changing to meet the growing needs of students as well as shifting expectations of employers.

In addition to academic credentials, employers now want to see work experience and interest in the community and the world, explains Jan Basso, director of Co-operative Education and Career Service at Wilfrid Laurier University.

“The degree itself will not get a student a career any more,” she says. “We focus more these days on helping students identify the particular skills they have that will make them valuable to an employer and how they can make an impact within the organization.”

But many students don't take advantage of the services the university offers until they start looking for a part-time or summer job. And that may be too late, Ms. Basso warns.

“It really is critical is to get them thinking during their first year of studies,” she says, adding that many universities have started outreach programs to make sure high-school counsellors, students and parents are aware of the services.

Indeed, she says, most career centres now advise students to do volunteer work and extracurricular activities to gain skills and show community involvement.

That's a good start, notes Thomas d'Aquino, president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives in Ottawa, which includes managers of 150 large companies.

Mr. d'Aquino says universities do an admirable job of teaching academic skills but, in many cases, don't prepare students to work in an increasingly global world, where public policy and social issues are important to success.

“Education is just one milepost along the way,” Mr. d'Aquino says. “Employers now consider it a dis-

## Career preparation

## Overall career preparation

## Large

- B Université Laval
- B- University of Alberta
- B- University of Montreal
- B- University of Ottawa
- B- University of Quebec at Montreal
- B- University of Toronto
- C+ University of British Columbia
- C+ Concordia University
- C+ York University

## Medium

- A- University of Waterloo
- B+ Brock University
- B+ University of Guelph
- B+ McMaster University
- B+ Memorial U. of Newfoundland
- B+ U. of Quebec at Trois Rivières
- B+ Queen's University
- B+ Ryerson University
- B+ University of Western Ontario
- B Dalhousie University
- B University of Manitoba
- B- Carleton University
- B- McGill University
- B- University of Saskatchewan
- B- Simon Fraser University
- B- University of Victoria
- C+ University of Calgary

## Small

- A- Nipissing University
- A- Sherbrooke University
- A- St. Francis Xavier University
- B+ Wilfrid Laurier University
- B Laurentian University
- B University of Lethbridge
- B University of Moncton
- B U. of New Brunswick at Fredericton
- B Trent University
- B- University of Regina
- B- Saint Mary's University
- B- University of Windsor

BERNARD BENNELL/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

advantage if a person is only an expert in a specialty and is not well informed about what is going on politically and economically.”

To get all the necessary academic courses and experience requires career planning that students all too often put off until it's too late, says Wendy Coffin, director of Career and Placement Services, at the University of Alberta.

If possible, she says, students should make a choice by the end of their first year after they have tested some possibilities because by the end of second year there may not

be enough time to take all the courses needed for some careers, Ms. Coffin says. However, “it always depends on a student being ready to think about a career. Some are keen in the first year, but too many others graduate and come back and ask: ‘Where were you when I had to make a decision?’”

The university encourages students to get work experience related to their career goal either during the academic year or in summer, Ms. Coffin says. It also organizes workshops and counselling in career paths from graduates who are in the field.

To help make the process of getting advice and finding jobs easier, Alberta and other universities are turning to technology.

The Internet is helping to solve one of the biggest challenges for the counselling services: the limited staff available for in-person counselling. For example, York University in Toronto, with 50,000 students and only 12 people in its career centre, has added on-line counselling to its website.

The Career Cyberguide, www.yorku.ca/careers/cyberguide, uses streaming video workshops on topics ranging from academic choices to résumé preparation and interview skills. Each segment has a video presentation accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation that can be downloaded along with enrichment and background materials.

Open less than a year, the site has already won two major awards from education associations. While it originally was part of a password-protected site for access only by students, its advice on résumés, and interviewing proved so useful in any job search that it has been opened to the general public, says Donna Robbins, director of York University's Career Centre.

A recently added link on the University of Alberta's main Web page has also made it easier for students to find jobs and potential careers they may not have known existed.

There are only about 100 companies in Canada large enough to need more than a dozen students each year. But there are thousands of small employers who look to career centres for help in hiring — they provide a career description and ask the centre post it, Ms. Coffin explains. The site receives 1,000 hits a day, she adds.

And while an early decision on a career is virtuous, Ms. Coffin says students should stay flexible enough to change direction. “The one piece of advice I always give students is that it is important not to close doors.”