

First Year at CZU: Settling Into University (and Into Yourself)

Counselling Services Centre, CZU (CPS)

In a nutshell

Dear first-year students, the first weeks at university bring a lot of new things at once: a different rhythm, new people, new expectations, and often a new home, sometimes even a new country. It is completely normal that some things fall into place easily while others take time. Settling in is not a test you pass or fail. It is a process that takes weeks, sometimes months. At the Counselling Services Centre (CPS), we look at it through five areas: your studies, the people around you, your wellbeing, your sense of belonging, and where you are heading.

Most importantly, you are not alone. Throughout the semester we run workshops and offer individual consultations with psychologists, career advisers or, if you have specific needs, with our special education specialists. And one small request: look around you. If you notice someone who is always on their own, invite them along. You never know how much it might mean to them.

The full article is worth an honest read. You can also download it as a file and upload it to NotebookLM or another AI tool, then ask it about whatever you are dealing with right now.

Why five areas

Psychologists who study how students adapt to university describe four areas: studies, relationships, personal wellbeing, and attachment to the institution. At CPS we add a fifth one, your direction for the future, because even in your first year it helps to have a sense of what your studies are for.

The areas are more connected than you might think. Poor sleep makes studying harder. Having people around you makes stress easier to handle. And knowing why you are studying helps you get through the courses you don't enjoy.

Don't expect all five to be sorted by October. It is enough to notice where things feel difficult and to know where to turn.

Each section below includes a few **questions to ask yourself**. Take a moment with them. You can write down your answers, talk them through with a friend, or bring them to a consultation with us.

1. I'm managing my studies

University works differently from secondary school, and if you studied in another country before, it may also work differently from what you are used to. Nobody checks on you much, the workload tends to pile up towards the end of the semester, and a lot depends on you.

What's normal: Feeling unsure how to study "the university way". Feeling that everyone else has it under control. Most of them don't, it just doesn't show.

Questions to ask yourself: - How did I learn best in the past, and does it still work here? - Which course worries me most right now, and why? - When during the day do I actually concentrate well?

Things to try: - For each course, find out early how you will be assessed and what you need to complete. - Plan your week, even roughly. - Try the library as a place to study. - Study with someone. Explaining things to each other works.

2. I have people here

The people around you are one of the strongest reasons to feel good at university and to get through harder moments. Friendships rarely just happen, though. They take a little courage and a few attempts, and even more so when you are far from home.

What's normal: Feeling lonely in the first weeks, even surrounded by hundreds of people. Missing friends and family back home. Feeling that everyone already knows each other. They don't, they are nervous too.

Questions to ask yourself: - Who could I talk to if I had a bad day here? - What kind of people do I feel comfortable with? - What did I enjoy doing with others back home that I could look for here?

Things to try: - Talk to the person next to you in class, in your dorm, or in the cafeteria queue. - Pick one student club, sport or event that might interest you, and go, even on your own. ESN CZU Prague is a good starting point for international students. You can find the full list of student clubs on the CZU website. - Mix with Czech students as well as internationals. It opens doors in both directions.

Look out for others. If you notice someone who is always alone, invite them for coffee, lunch or to study together. It doesn't have to become a lifelong friendship. But it might make someone's semester.

3. I'm doing OK

Starting university is demanding for body and mind, and moving to a new country adds another layer. Routines, sleep, food, climate and the people close to you all change.

What's normal: Homesickness, tiredness, poor sleep, ups and downs in mood, and so-called culture shock, when things that seemed exciting at first start to feel tiring or frustrating. It doesn't mean you are weak or made the wrong choice.

Questions to ask yourself: - What helps me recharge, and do I have it here? - How am I sleeping compared to before? - Who do I talk to about how I really feel?

Things to try: - Protect your sleep. It is the cheapest and most effective support for learning and mood. - Eat regularly and move. Sport is available at CZU too. - Keep some time each week for something you enjoy that has nothing to do with school. - Stay in touch with people at home, but also build something here.

When to ask for help: When what you are going through lasts a long time, gets in the way of sleep or studies, or when you simply don't know what to do next. You don't have to wait until it is "serious enough". You are welcome to come with "I'm not sure if this is something I can come with". You can.

How we can help: - [Brain Health](#) – Wed 25 Nov, 17:30, online, in English

Individual consultations with a psychologist . You can find contacts on the CPS website, including where to turn if the situation is urgent.

If you speak Ukrainian or Russian, you are welcome at [Adaptation of International Students in the Czech Republic](#) (Mon 5 Oct, 17:00, in person) and [Health Coaching](#) (Thu 5 Nov, 17:00, in person), both held in Ukrainian/Russian.

4. I know my way around and I belong here

A university is a big institution with its own rules, systems and abbreviations, and many of them are in Czech. Beyond finding your way around, it matters to feel that you belong here and that your choice makes sense.

What's normal: Getting lost on campus and in the information systems. Not knowing whom to ask. Occasionally doubting your choice of programme or even of the country. Doubts in the first semester are very common and for most students they fade with time.

Questions to ask yourself: - What made me choose this programme, and CZU, and Prague? - Where on campus do I feel most at ease? - What do I still not understand about how things work here, and who could I ask?

Things to try: - Find practical information (study office, academic calendar, systems) on your faculty website. Don't hesitate to contact your study office, that's what they are there for. - Find "your spot" on campus to sit, study or relax. - Visit your teachers during office hours. It is not bothering them, it is a normal part of studying. - Don't deal with doubts about your programme alone, and don't make rushed decisions.

How we can help: - [Consultations about doubts and direction](#) with a career adviser or psychologist.

5. I know where I'm heading

You don't need to know in your first year what you will do after graduation. But it helps to have at least a rough idea of why you are studying and where it could lead, in the Czech Republic, back home, or somewhere else entirely. It also gives meaning to courses you don't enjoy right now.

What's normal: Not knowing. Having several ideas at once. Or having a clear plan and changing it along the way.

Questions to ask yourself: - What am I good at, and what do other people come to me for? - Which activities make me lose track of time? - Where do I imagine myself living and working in five years, and how sure am I about it? - What would I like my studies to give me beyond a diploma?

Things to try: - Find two or three graduates of your programme (for example on LinkedIn) and see what they do today. It is often surprising. - Notice which subjects, topics and activities you enjoy. Those are your first clues. - Keep a short note of your answers to the questions above and come back to it at the end of the semester.

How we can help: - **Career Development Month** – in November we run a month of career workshops, several of them in English.

For first-year students we especially recommend **Discover Your Talent** – Mon 9 Nov, 17:30, online, in English. A good start for exploring your strengths.

LinkedIn workshop – Tue 3 Nov, online, in English

Career consultations. You can come in your first year too, even just with “what do I do with all this?”

A map of your first semester

You don't have to do everything. Take it as a hint of what tends to help at each stage.

Late September and early October: find your bearings - find out how each of your courses works - say hello to a few people around you - find your spot on campus

October: settle in - set a routine for studying and sleeping - try one club, sport or event - form a study group - notice whether anyone around you is always alone - expect the first wave of homesickness or culture shock, and be kind to yourself

November: look up - check how your studies are going and adjust your approach if needed - join something from Career Development Month - if something has felt hard for a while, book a consultation

December: prepare for exams - plan your exam preparation - don't forget sleep and rest - support your classmates and let them support you

You are not alone

The Counselling Services Centre is home to psychologists and career advisers who meet first-year students every year and know well what the beginning looks like. You don't need a big problem to come and see us. It is enough to want to move something forward or simply sort out your thoughts.

On the CPS website you will find an overview of workshops, registration, consultation booking and contacts for urgent situations.

We are keeping our fingers crossed for you. And once your first semester is behind you, lend a hand to those who come after you.

Your CPS team