

Chapter 3: Navigating Semester One: A Roadmap for First Year Undergraduate Students



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Introduction

Like most students entering Higher Education for the first time, students entering the UCD School of Agriculture & Food Science are required to quickly negotiate the transition to University life. The School's Semester One Roadmap – referred to as The Roadmap – was developed as a simple visual representation of this transition period, thereby providing an integrated view of the complex academic, social and personal landscape encountered by new students.

In short, The Roadmap aims to support students to build on their commitment to their degree programme by highlighting points of identification and information that assist them to become familiar with the myriad educational, emotional and environmental adaptations needed to settle into university life and begin progression through their programme. The Roadmap highlights the key academic, administrative and engagement milestones within the university context and anchors them within the School calendar, thereby providing a foundation roadmap to guide students towards negotiating the transition through semester one towards a formation of their personal learner identity.

Project Name	Semester One Roadmap
Universal Design Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A community of learners - Equitable use - Flexibility in use - Simple and intuitive use - Low physical effort
Discipline	Agriculture & Food Science
Level	UCD level 1
College	Health & Agricultural Sciences
Learning Outcomes	<p>At the end of the first semester, incoming students should be cognisant of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - transition to university life as a period of personal discovery which differs for everyone - participation in group activities, both academic and social, as a means to build a sense of identification with and belonging to their programme over time - managing their own time and prioritising activities - achieving a balance between academic and social activities - availing of a range of experienced advice and support should academic, social and/or personal issues arise

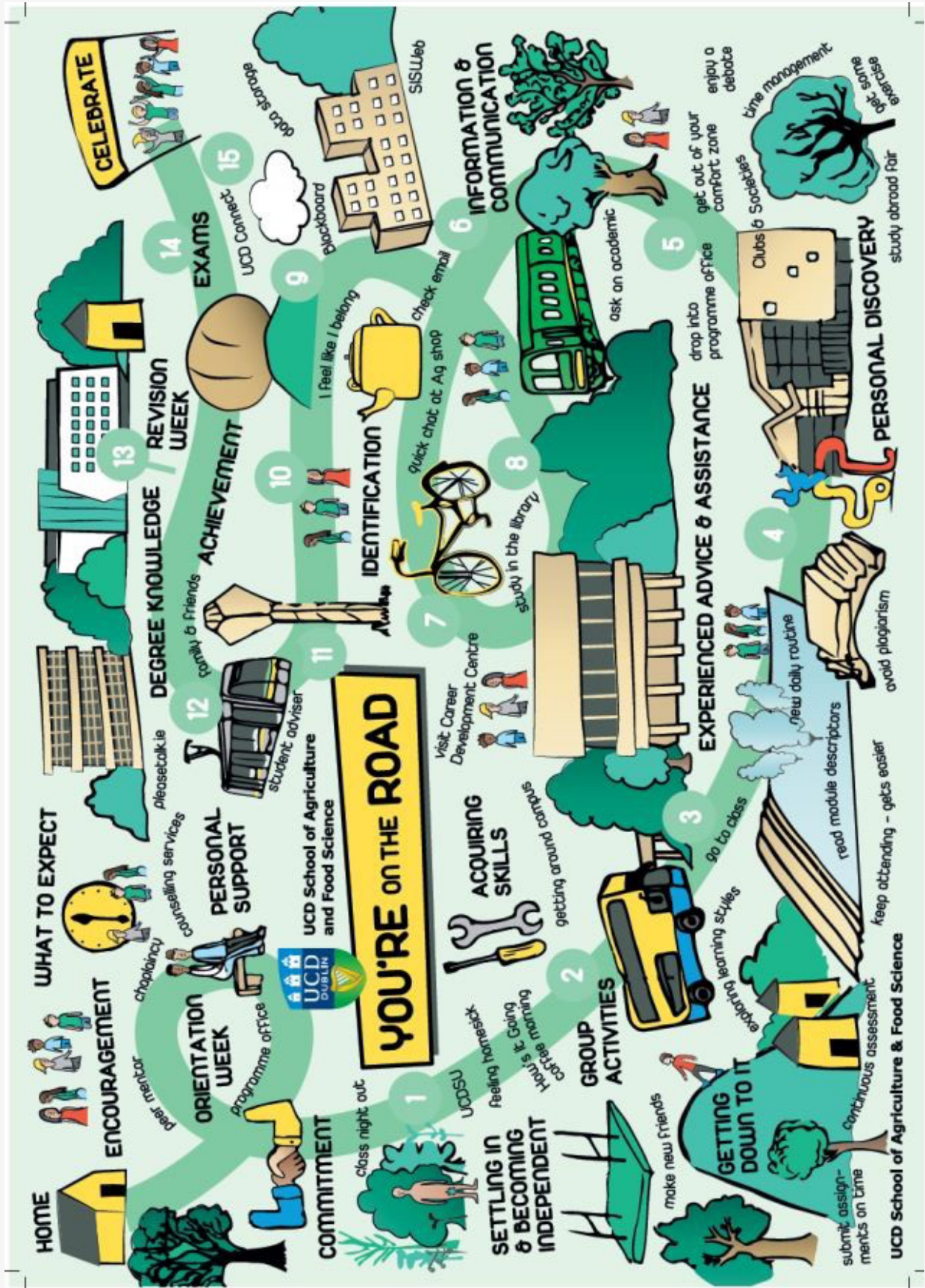


Figure 1: Front of Roadmap postcard

UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science YOU'RE ON THE ROAD

ACADEMIC CONTACTS

PROGRAMME OPTION COORDINATORS

Programme Option Coordinators can provide academic information and advice on your programme. Contact details are listed in the Staff Directory.

DN250 Agricultural Science Omnibus
Associate Professor Alan Hunter

DN250 Animal & Crop Production
Professor John O'Doherty

DN250 Animal Science
Professor Pat Lonergan

DN250 Agricultural Systems Technology
Professor Nick Holden

DN250 Food & Agribusiness Management
Dr. David Stead

DN251 Animal Science - Equine
Dr. Barbara Murphy

DN252 Dairy Business
Dr. Karina Pierce

DN253 Agri-Environmental Sciences
Associate Professor Gordon Purvis

DN261 Food Science
Professor Jim Lyng

DN262 Human Nutrition
Dr. Breige McKulity

DN271 Forestry
Professor Maarten Nieuwenhuis

DN272 Horticulture, Landscape & Sportsturf Management
Dr. Owen Doyle

MODULE COORDINATORS

Module information including module coordinators is available at www.ucd.ie/students/course_search.htm

PROGRAMME OFFICE

www.ucd.ie/agfood/staff/programmeoffice
Agriculture & Food Science Programme Office
Room G.10 UCD Agriculture & Food Science Centre
01 716 7194
agandfoodprogrammes@ucd.ie

The Programme Office is the first point of contact for students seeking academic advice and support. They are here to help you with any concern or query relating to your degree programme. Some of the key areas they can help you with are:

- Registration queries
- Academic programme advice
- Extenuating circumstances / medical certificates
- Withdrawal / re-admission
- Referral to student advisers, academic staff, Access Centre and Disability Support
- Study abroad

If they can't help you they'll point you in the direction of someone who can.

STUDENT ADVISERS

www.ucd.ie/studentadvisers
Naolmh O'Regan
Room 2.48
UCD Agriculture & Food Science Centre 01 716 6085
naolmh.oregan@ucd.ie
Student advisers provide support for all students but particularly first year. They are here to help you make your time at UCD as fulfilling as possible. You can call to see them in relation to personal, social or practical issues. From simple requests for information to more confidential and serious matter, Student Advisers will give you the time and space to talk things through.

STUDENT DESK

www.ucd.ie/studentdesk
Ground Floor Tierney Building 01 716 1555
www.ucd.ie/studentdesk/contact
SISWEB access, fees and form stamping are just some of the services provided. You can also get official documents such as Certificates of Attendance, Statements, and Official Transcripts online via your SISWEB account, under the Registration, Fees & Assessment tab.

ACCESS CENTRE – DISABILITY SUPPORT

www.ucd.ie/openingworlds/disability
Level One James Joyce Library Building 01 716 7565
accesscentre@ucd.ie
The UCD Access Centre provides a range of support for students with disabilities.

STUDENTS' UNION

www.ucdsu.ie
As a UCD student you automatically become a member of the Students' Union

UCD STUDENT CHARTER

www.ucd.ie/studentcharter
The Student Charter sets out the roles and responsibilities of the various groups within the University and outlines what you can expect from the University and what the University can expect from its student members.

UCD STUDENT CODE

The Student Code establishes the University's expectations in respect of student behaviour and conduct.

UCD STUDENT EMAIL PROTOCOL

Remember to check your UCD email account frequently so that you don't miss out on important information from the University. We use your UCD email address for all official communication with you.

UCD ACADEMIC REGULATIONS

Your studies in UCD are governed by a set of overarching rules called Academic Regulations. These regulations are supported by academic policy, procedures and guidelines. For ease of use, there is also a quick reference user's guide to the regulations available which allow you to search for topics in an FAQ format.

UCD EXAM REGULATIONS

UCD has examination procedures and regulations in place so make sure that you are aware of the rules.

UCD SMOKE-FREE CAMPUS POLICY

A smoke-free campus policy is being implemented in UCD. Phase 1 started in September 2015 with the introduction of smoke-free zones within 10 metres of all entrances to building and in prescribed areas. You will find a copy of these regulations in the Student Services Directory on the Current Students area of the website, under University Regulations www.ucd.ie/students

Figure 2: Back of Roadmap postcard

Design & implementation

The Roadmap Project was initiated by the School's Orientation, Support & Retention Committee with the support of a Teaching & Learning Support Grant from the School. Long before the project got off the ground I'd made a draft sketch of a Roadmap - my vision was similar to the landscape of a Ordnance Survey Discovery map with high and low ground and other physical features representing the opportunities and challenges around student transition. Around the time of the School's call for T&L grant applications, I also noticed that AIB had installed a colourful animated campus map in a light-box along one wall of their Belfield branch. My ideas and observations - the landscape and its topography, the milestones along the transition road and the animation - all came together when designing The Roadmap. The grant proposal included the identification of Briggs as a suitable theoretical model. Overall, the project comprised the following steps:

1. Identification of theoretical model
2. Scope out content and customise
3. Artwork design
4. Implementation

Collaboration of staff and students was required for development, implementation, promotion and active engagement with The Roadmap.

STEP 1: Identification of theoretical model

The starting point of The Roadmap was to recognise that first-year orientation is a semester-long activity and that student influences extend well beyond the limits of the School and university campus. This extended concept of a transition to university life that includes non-organisational influences is represented by Briggs' "Model of organisational influence on the development of learner identity" (Figure 1) and formed the basis for development of the design.

STEP 2: Scope out content & customise

The development team led by the Programme Manager (Irene Rose) comprised current and postgraduate students as well of School and Programme Office support staff including Naoimh O'Regan (student adviser), Tara Walsh (Marketing & Student Recruitment Officer) and Dr Eileen Gibney (Associate Dean – Teaching & Learning). The collaborative online tool Mindmeister enabled real-time sharing and development of the map across a dispersed project team (Fig 2).

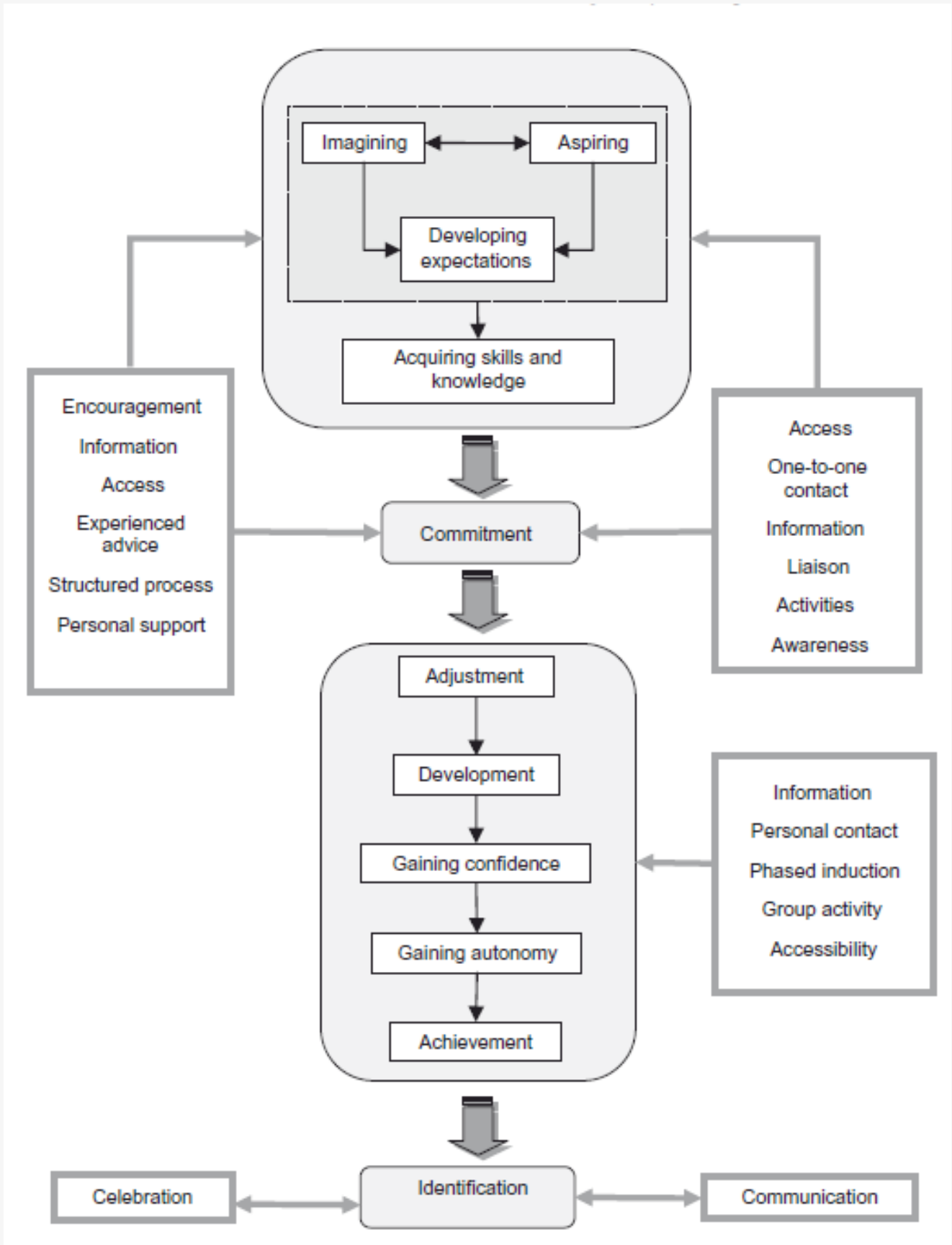


Figure 3: Brigg's Model of organisational influence on the development of learner identity

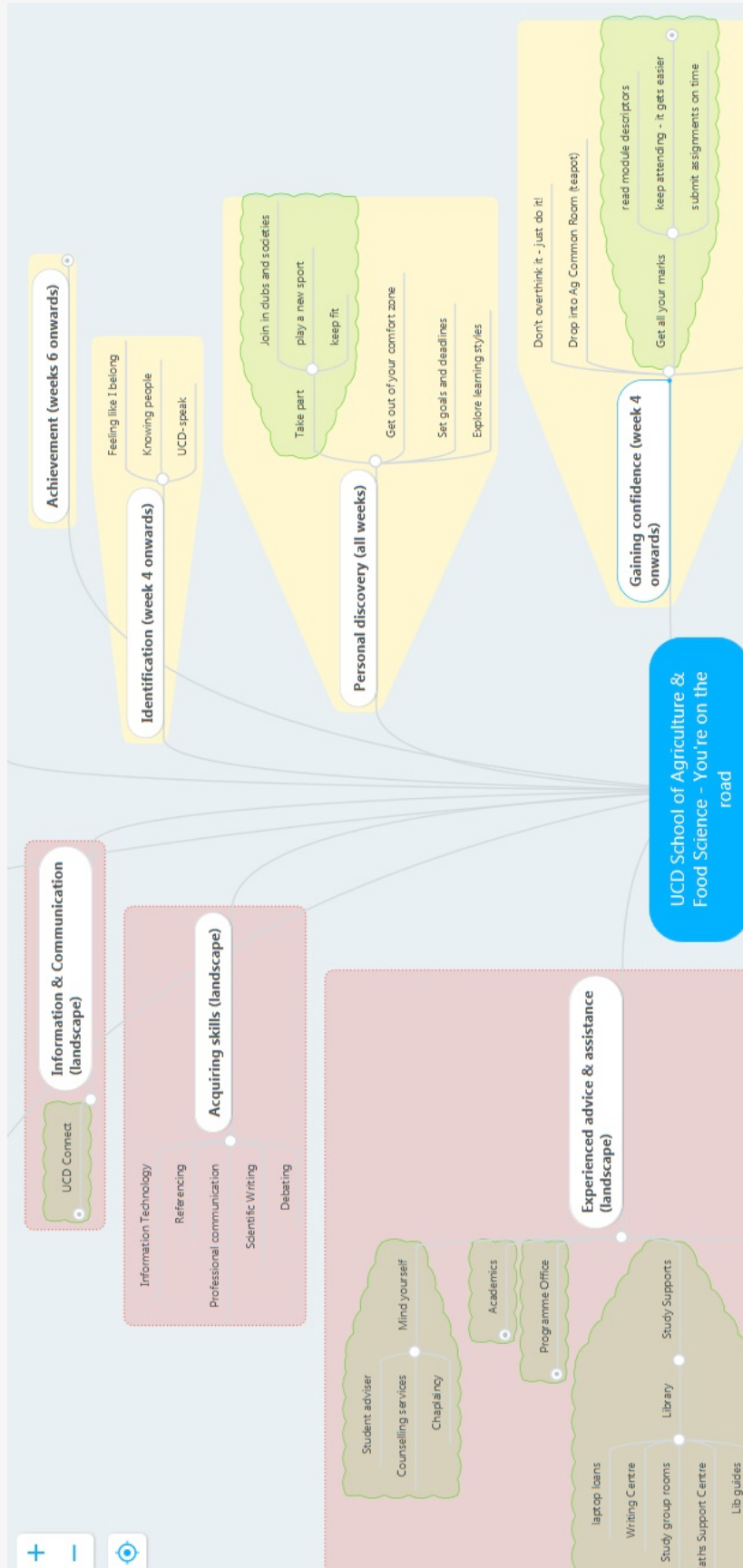


Figure 4: Development of Roadmap content using Mindmeister

One student member of the development team noted, “I hadn’t used a mindmap in a collaborative way before. It helped me to see how I could use mindmaps this way in future”.

The group worked to identify words, phrases and images commonly associated with each step in Brigg’s model. Insights gained provided student-centred content, which was arranged along a ‘Road’ of a draft Roadmap. Through this approach, it became clear that while many of Brigg’s terms were easily recognised by students, others were less well understood. e.g., while ‘commitment’ was a well understood and accepted term, ‘development’, ‘gaining confidence’ and ‘gaining autonomy’ steps were less familiar and the term ‘Personal Discovery’ was settled upon as a way of framing the process of change experienced by students.

STEP 3: Artwork design

The services of a graphic designer were engaged to develop the artwork along Universal Design principles. This step was undertaken using a phased approach that allowed the designer and development team time to:

- understand project requirements and seek clarification where necessary
- create ideas for the School’s consideration

- deliver drafts for the School’s feedback,
- make subsequent revisions as required

Aspects of Universal Design

The Universal Design aspects of The Roadmap allow it to be quickly grasped by a broad and diverse cohort. From the outset, The Roadmap was envisaged as a visual interface incorporating the use of colourful imagery interspersed with key words and phrases to depict a landscape packed with recognisable features as well as unfamiliar ones encountered by students during transition in a **Simple and intuitive** way. The tangible weight of the card and the colourful imagery make it both durable and attractive. The visual appeal engages students who can easily recognise aspects of the complex academic, social and personal landscape they are entering.

A ‘Road’, which begins at ‘Home’ and ends at ‘Celebrate’, twists and turns through the landscape and allows students to locate the various features and reflect on their personal progress with **Low physical effort**. The logo You’re on the Road emphasises the often indirect yet progressive nature of transition to third-level learning.

While the topography is localised to the School and aimed primarily at transitioning students, it can be also accessed by other students as well as staff, making for **Equitable use** across the School and the wider university.

The scalable layout accommodates **Flexibility in use**, which include A5 postcards, populated on the reverse with academic and support contact information. Other versions were created for multi-sized posters and slides and a pop-up stand. In addition to the visual form, a weekly email is sent from the School's Associate Dean of Teaching & Learning to all first-year students plus staff, thus recognising a **Community of learners** within the School.

STEP 4: Implementation

The Roadmap launch began in Orientation week 2016/17 with A5 postcards distributed to all incoming undergraduates at the Academic Advisory sessions on the first day of Orientation. This includes CAO, international and mature entrants to all the School's programmes regardless of their entry-path and duration of their stay.

During Orientation week, posters, slides and a pop-up stand of The Roadmap of displayed throughout the UCD Agriculture & Food Science Centre, creating a familiar backdrop

within their new programme 'home'. These initiatives are supported by posts on social media.

Throughout the semester an encouraging email is sent out weekly, bringing attention to the features on The Roadmap that are of a timely and relevant nature and bringing students' attention to opportunities and their achievements and progression throughout the semester, while simultaneously sending out reassurances of available experienced advice and support.



Figure 5: Students at the How's It Going Coffee Morning

Communications continue throughout the semester with on-going posts on social media, emails, poster and plasma displays as well as further copies of the A5 postcard circulated at featured School events such as the 'How's It Going Coffee Morning' - a first-year gathering held in the student common room, aimed to aid students growing in confidence and autonomy to mix

with students in later stages, as well as staff from service and support units such as the Programme Office, Library, Maths Support Centre, Writing Centre and Student Advisors. A total of 750 A5 postcards were distributed. Half of these were given directly to students during Orientation week with the remaining half disseminated to staff and students either at on-going Orientation events such as the How's It Going Coffee Morning or by collection from the Programme Office.

Results & findings

The Roadmap is a long-term project that aims to build student awareness from the outset of their degree and ultimately transform this awareness into positive action that leads to rewarding and fulfilling experiences during their programme. Such a holistic vision for student's expectations of university life and the potential for engagement across many aspects of the academic, social and personal landscape makes quantitative evidence of impact hard to quantify.

What can be said of The Roadmap is that it highlights the potential aspects of the student experience which expand and complement curricula learning outcomes. One example of this is student debating within the School, brought to the attention of incoming students in week five.

Debating

Debating meets many of the learning outcomes in the personal development and transferable skills arenas, as outlined in a flyer distributed to promote debating in the School. It is also an opportunity for students and staff to join in a learning activity beyond the classroom that is both enjoyable and educational for students, while being insightful and entertaining for staff. The collaboration of students and School has the effect of attracting students who may have experience of debating at second-level and wish to build on their experience, as well as those who recognise the benefits of debating to their future aspirations. This combination of experience and enthusiasm contributed to:

- the establishment of a new 'AgSoc Debate Series'
- the inclusion of a debate into AgSoc's AgWeek calendar of activities
- the School team win of the 2017 Great Agri-Food Debate trophy against Waterford Institute of Technology
- a stage one student taking the Great Agri-Food Debate 'Best speaker' award

In this example, The Roadmap aided contextualisation of a collaborative staff-student initiative within the broader student experience and contributed to a **Community of learners**.



WHY GO TO A DEBATE?

Debating is verbal sport worthy of the Olympics, an activity full of high speed action where a single second cannot be wasted. Debaters develop analytical, critical and quick thinking, persuasive speaking, note-taking, speed reading, and in-depth research skills, which look fantastic on any application form or CV. They also learn essential life skills, like winning arguments. It's also great craic!

By debating you develop qualities that help you at work and at play, such as:

- **Persuasive communication.** Be shy no more! Debaters learn to stand up in front of any audience, thereby increasing speaking abilities and leading to more persuasive and relaxed communication.
- **Teamwork.** Cooperation is a golden rule in debate. Not a single tournament is won without the help of the team. Everyone must play their part in order for the team to win.
- **Focus.** A noisy heckling debate can get stressful. Debaters learn to filter and focus on what is being said.
- **Quick and critical thinking.** Put under time pressure, debaters learn to think of good arguments and loop holes in evidence in an abnormally short amount of time.
- **Organization skills.** Debaters learn to prepare and get organized so they don't get hassled.
- **Research.** Debaters have to find facts, figures and other information to support their arguments. With the pressure under time, a debater must skim or read quickly to get through potential evidence for or against an argument
- **Fast and accurate note-taking.** Rapid speaking in debates requires rapid note-taking.
- **Knowledge of the real world.** Current international, national, & local events, politics, new foreign policies, government, economy, science, health & other exciting topics are constantly researched for evidence to support their arguments. Debaters learn to see and understand the world both subjectively and objectively.

Finally, joining in a debate involves meeting people with many interests, opening up understanding and leading to potential opportunities in unfamiliar walks of life. So, join in the craic. What's not a good reason to go to a debate?

Figure 6: Debating Flyer

Feedback

Social media

Communications on social media reached almost three thousand Twitter users and over one thousand Facebook users. Comments, likes, shares and retweets showed a positive response to The Roadmap as detailed below.

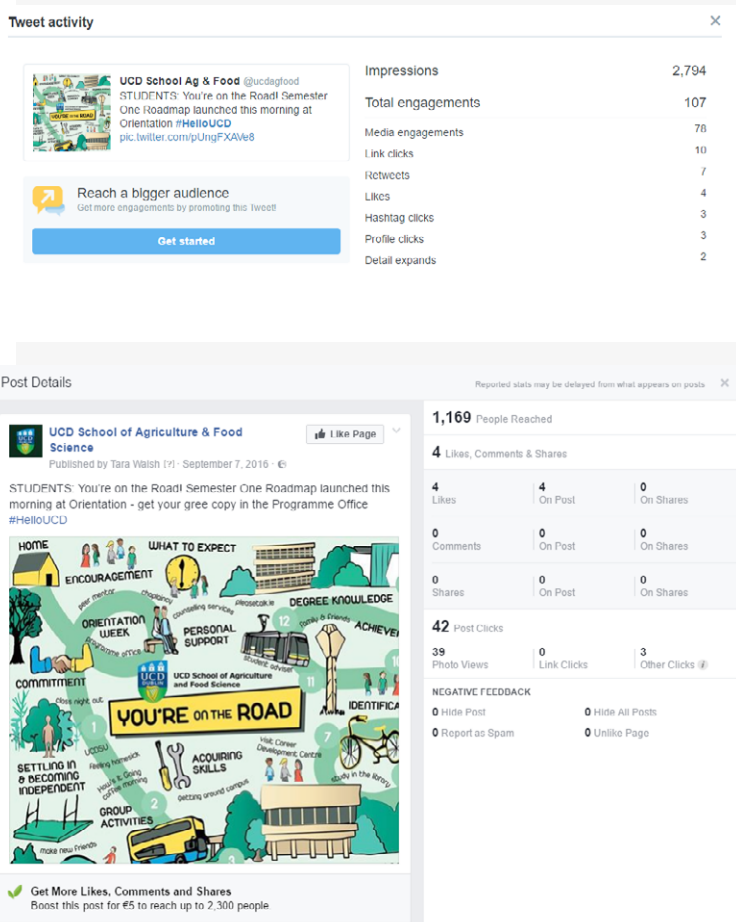


Figure 7: Twitter and Facebook activity following launch of The Roadmap

Student responses

- The number of weekly Roadmap emails opened by stage one students ranged from 81.5% to 90.6%. On average 85.5% of students opened The Roadmap emails.
- Participants at a focus group of later stage students (predominantly stage four) held by the School's Student Engagement Committee at the start of semester two indicated strong identification with The Roadmap. Participants indicated that it brought attention to opportunities they had not been aware of at earlier stages in their programme, such as study abroad, the Career Development Centre and debating. Similarly, time management and exploring learning styles were regarded as skills with a cumulative effect, most benefiting students who adopted them early and continued to practise them throughout their degree. Comments included: "The Roadmap shows exactly what it's like being an Agriculture student" – 4th year Agriculture student.

“A request has been made by to include The Roadmap as a case study in this Universal Design in Education Handbook, as it was thought it, “would make a great addition... which all students would benefit from.”

– Dr Lisa Padden, Academic Skills Coordinator, UCD Access & Lifelong Learning.

“The Roadmap was brought to the UCD Widening Participation Committee, where it was met with interest as an example of fostering participation and engagement that, “supports student learning at University, whether it be personal development, formal classroom learning or [wider] learning in societies.”

- Associate Professor Mary Forrest, UCD School of Agriculture & Food Science

STAFF RESPONSES

**“The Roadmap is a great idea well executed.
Well done.”**

– Assistant Professor Nigel Brunton, UCD School of Agriculture & Food
Science

**“a great initiative and one that could be easily
adopted to great benefit by other parts of the
University.”**

– Professor Grace Mulcahy, UCD School of Veterinary Medicine

“well done on the map, it looks fantastic!”

– Tara Walsh, Marketing & Student Recruitment Officer

STAFF RESPONSES

Implementation advice

Ensuring The Roadmap speaks to students in both a visual and verbal way required the participation of programme-specific students, academics and support staff. Implementing Universal Design did not mean having to compromise on localised content. The time required to capture and reflect on relevant content took several drafts; as we initially had more content than space available on the A5 postcard, choices had to be made between words and images that students could recognise at the start of the semester such as 'peer mentor' and those that were local to UCD or their programme such as 'How's It Going Coffee Morning', which students would come to learn during the semester.

It was important for us to have some continuity between the School's marketing and promotional materials and The Roadmap. Providing the designer with a clear picture of our vision of the landscape (e.g. colour, topography, mood) saved time and money. To stop the project over-running, a number of design steps and working contract were agreed with the graphic designer at the outset of the design step. These included agreeing the allocation and placement of space for each of Brigg's localised models, a specific number of drafts, artwork deliverables and sign-off criteria.

Further development

Consideration to developing The Roadmap for stage two in 2017/18 would allow the School to focus on the links between early and later stages of the degree, and set out how degree knowledge develops over the programme duration.

References

Briggs, A.R.J., Clark, J., & Hall, I. (2012). 'Building bridges: understanding student transition to university'. *Quality in Higher Education*, 04/2012, 18(1), 3-21.