Let's talk about what it takes to be a good student again.

This is now about asking questions, getting advice. As I said earlier getting information about how it is you need to study is really, really important.

University can be a very alienating place. You can be really easily intimidated especially in your first year.

You won't know too many people it'll seem a very impersonal environment, especially when you compare that to your year twelve experiences where you've been at the school for so many years, you know the place, you know the teachers so well. It really needs to you to be more proactive. You need to start asking questions pretty early about the assignments, about the essays, about your reading, about what it is you’re studying.

Your first port of call always is your tutor. Your tutor is your, if you like, your first person who you see who's going to answer questions about the assessment. He or she is going to be looking at how you're going, he's going to be marking, he or she's going to be marking your work. You should ask the tutor questions.

Some students feel intimidated by doing this. You shouldn't. You need to do this because it's their job to help you as much as they possibly can. Next up the chain, if you like, is the lecturer.

The lecturer, and there might be a number of lecturers, there might be a convenor or a coordinator who basically looks after the subject. But you need to understand that when you're at Swinburne, the way the hierarchy basically works from that first level up is your tutor, the lecturer, the senior lecturers, the convenors, the coordinators, the deans, and of course the executive deans.

Now you mightn't ever have to go across the most senior levels, but to be able to ask questions and the ability to ask these questions is very important for you to gather very early on.

You shouldn't feel you’re isolated. It's not you verses the world. You can actually get some help in more and more ways and the way you become a good university student. Now let's go beyond just the teachers.
The librarians offer a tremendous service and the Library at this university and most universities has got some amazing kinds of resources. Knowing how to use the resources knowing what those resources are becomes really important from day one. So what I'm saying is ask the questions, go to the Library, go to their own help desk. Ask the questions to the Library about the ways in which you can basically access information as readily and as speedily as possible. A lot of this stuff can be done online. A lot of this stuff you need to understand from a very early stage of your career. The librarians are really important.

Next if you like comes people such as myself, the Academic Development Offices. Now we're the advisers who work with Student Advancement. Now we are faculty based, we work for Student Advancement, but we are academics, and we can help you one-on-one, we can help you in study groups, we can help you by answering questions about your course. We can give you lots and lots of information, so seek us out whenever there's a question about your course, about particular issues, even some of the academic issues about the ways you do your assignments.

Another very important area within Swinburne is the Learning and Academic Skills Unit. The Centre for Learning and Academic Skills. LAS as it's known is there to help you with your written work and often with maths and with, if you like, stats and IT issues as well. They can offer small groups or workshops they can give you information, advice, ideas on how to in fact present better work.

So whether it comes to the most basic things about writing essays, lab reports, making a presentation, doing things like that, preparing for exams, LAS becomes a really important port of call and they offer really important, professional services. Again, this sort of stuff like everything else is free. You basically make an appointment, you go there, you speak to these people. Then we have the Centre for Career Development.

Now the Centre for Career Development is another really important part - of the services that Swinburne provide. For a lot of you doing first year you may not immediately think about what you want to do for your career, your job but it's really important to have some idea and to know what the possibilities are. These people, again, fully professional, who know their job, give you, again, free advice on the sorts of areas the sorts of possibilities the pathways you might want to look for as you're going into second year, as you're going into third year. It's a really important resource. You've got to ask them questions. You've got to go there. They're not going to come to you. Like all of these services they don't come to you, you have to go to them, you have to be proactive from the outset.

Then we have the Centre, the Unit for Disability and Equity, the Equity Unit. Let's take that first is for students who have financial hardships. The Equity Unit is funded by the Commonwealth Government and basic philosophy here is that we want you to stay and study as much as you can, without having to work an inordinate number of hours at McDonald's and Coles and all of those other places where you get jobs.

The idea is that you're here to study and if we can reduce the amount of time that you have to work and keep you studying, there are funds available which will allow this to occur. The Equity Unit is means tested. That means your family and your circumstances have to meet the criteria, but if they do, they have rent assistance they have grants up to a thousand dollars they have book vouchers, they have lots of, if you like, capital that's available that you apply for, you are interviewed and on
the basis of that and the means test you can be given grants. The whole idea is that you stay at university, you don't drop out. That's what it's been based on. The Disability Unit, as the name suggests, is for those who are under any disability and who need extra support. It may be a whole range of things including counselling, including, if you like, support with their studies, people coming in to help people take notes in their lectures. It can be a whole range of issues, but you register with the Disability Unit and you go there and you basically make yourself known and throughout your three years at Swinburne, the Disability Unit is there to help you in every way through every unit that you're studying with all the support that they can offer. All these units are giving you lots of information on the Swinburne website and there's lots and lots of things that I probably haven't even covered that are there, but make sure that you know that they exist and that they are there for you from day one.

The Disability Unit, the Equity Unit. I've mentioned now the Counselling Unit. These are qualified counsellors, qualified counsellors who are working at Swinburne but like any counsellor have the whole privacy issue, basically understood. This is something that you can see a counsellor for a personal issue, an issue that's affected you because of your family, personal circumstances, whatever, a lot of students need to see counsellors. They are all professionals and they specialise obviously in helping students who are studying at university. Again, it's very, very subsidised, in other words it's very cheap, being paid for by the university to a very large extent, and these are services that you should know about and ask questions to.

The last group as I mentioned previously is the students themselves, the students that you can ask questions to in the study groups. Form study groups in whatever unit you are enrolled in because it can be a very lonely place if just go to a class and go home. You go to a class and you don't speak anyone. Speak to other students, ask questions to other students about the lecture, about the reading, about the notes that you've been having to go through about the next assignment! Don't be frightened, form study groups, three or four people, four heads are better than one. It's the oldest slogan in the book. Do that and then you'll feel more a part of the system, you'll be more engaged. To be more engaged you have to ask more questions.

So again wrapping up, it's the idea of asking your tutors, asking your lecturers, asking your convenors, basically getting to people such as myself in the Academic Development Unit. Basically going to Student Advancement and asking for help from LAS, from the Careers Unit, from all the units we've been talking about, Disability, Equity and Counselling.

Another unit that really needs to be understood from day one is HQ. That's Student Headquarters. HQ is where you basically do your administration. They help you with your enrolment they help you with lots of day to day issue with exemptions, with a whole host of issues, even the special consideration later on in the semester that you're maybe having to apply for. HQ becomes a really important port of call for lot of students in the administration side of things. They operate for the whole university and they're available on two sites within this campus, and you'll find them pretty soon when you've enrolled.

That's the way to be proactive, that's the way to get as much information as you possibly can.