Entering university marks the beginning of a new developmental milestone. In this particular phase, you would probably relish all the new and exciting experiences, but at the same time feel disoriented and unsettled. It is many students’ dream to get into university. Now that your goal is reached, ‘how to spend the next few years in the university’ would be another question that is worth considering.

What do you expect from the coming years of university life? It is not surprising to find a wide diversity of goals among students: some may want to broaden their horizons by taking part in extra-curricular activities; some may want to learn as much as possible by diving into their studies; others may want to foster their personal growth as well as interpersonal relationships; still others may want to equip themselves for future career advancement. Whatever you may wish to accomplish, an important key to success is effective goal-setting.

Research has shown that when people have clear and realistic goals, they can
1. stay focused and work persistently towards personal goals
2. show stronger self-confidence and experience less anxiety
3. have stronger motivation and achieve better performance
4. assess own achievements more objectively and positively
An effective goal is one that is concrete and well-defined. Avoid obscurity. The clearer it is, the easier it is to evaluate your progress towards goal-attainment. For example, a career goal of 'serving the community' is not specific enough. To refine it, try asking questions like: 'Who are the persons I want to serve and in what ways?' A more precise goal would then be: 'I want to become a medical doctor and serve in the Medecins Sans Frontieres.'

Concrete and observable indicators will also help you assess your progress. For example, progress in pursuing a goal such as 'I will exercise three times a week, and each for half an hour' will be much easier to measure than a vague goal like 'I must exercise more.'

When you set your goal, consider whether it is for your own sake, or for the fulfillment of someone else's expectation. You are the one who knows best about your own dream, personal strengths and limitations. Committing yourself to your own aspirations will help to strengthen your motivation and enhance your personal growth and performance.

Any goal you set must be feasible as well as within your capabilities. Unrealistically high demands and expectations will only lead to disappointment and frustration. It would be better to start out with some basic expectations to ensure initial success, and then gradually raise your demands according to your progress. An example would be like this: 'I want to improve my GPA from 2.8 to 3.0.'