

Student Voices transcripts: Sophia Interview 2020

Sophia 0:00

My name is Sophia, and I'm studying costume design in the second-year undergraduate course, at Wimbledon College of Arts. And I come from Germany. And I started doing costume design after already studying at a different university. And I decided to go to UAL because the university where I have been before had a very strict aesthetic and they were not really keen on creating your own aesthetic and they always kind of fixed on the aesthetic that they wanted you to have. So, I did a lot of research and the costume design course at UAL makes it possible to actually figure out what you really want to do. If you rather go into a very technical area or if you'd rather go into a very artistic area, you kind of have both choices. And I was very interested in getting more into fashion history, also the technical part in fashion history and decided then to go to UAL. And so far, this has definitely been the right decision.

Academic Support 1:15

Cool. So, talk a little bit about your first few days what it was like coming to London and starting at UAL.

Sophia 1:30

When I arrived in London, of course, it has been a little bit difficult. It's a new city, a new country, new surroundings, but I got into the city very, very quickly. And the university makes it very easy to get new connections, especially at the beginning. It's all about getting to know other people so you can get to know as many people as possible. And so it was quite easy. I mean, my life besides University, it has been a little bit stressful, finding a new flat. But at the end, even though in the first month, I was kind of moving around from couch to couch, trying to find a new flat... that was hard but it was also definitely worth it because at the end, I live together with people that I knew then and that I already knew that I would get along with. And it was hard for a month but like I said, it was worth it because I had now two years of having a very beautiful flat share with people that I really liked.

Academic Support 2:30

Why didn't you go for Halls of Residence when you came?

Sophia 2:37

I was thinking about going into the student halls. And I think it's definitely a very nice opportunity when you just start at UAL, because you get to know people that are in the exact same position like you are. But I decided for myself that because I already knew ...know a couple of people here, that for me, it's gonna be better to create my own little flat share.

(2:59)

I would say the first month when I arrived, I concentrated on getting to know as much as I can. And when University hasn't started yet, I was basically every day, I took the tube to a station I didn't know and just got off and experienced the area that was kind of like my first month was a thing that I did every single day, which was very helpful. I got to know the city very, very well. At the beginning, it was a little bit lonely before University started. But after a month, I actually started and then you get to know so many people that it's almost impossible to even be lonely or feel weird about it because you just get into the habit of going to university every single day, seeing all those people that you slowly get to know. And everything feels very natural in a very short amount of time.

The first year was mainly about finding your own aesthetic, figuring out what you actually like. It was very experimental. And then the second year is more realistic in terms of the industry you get to know much more about okay, how would it work when we actually finished? And you concentrate on your own work and what you would like to do after you graduated.

Academic Support 4:30

Okay, let's come to lockdown. Tell us about it. How was the experiences for you both before it happened, the initial few days and then since then.

Sophia

When the lockdown started, it was right before our holidays began. And then, in the holidays, we got to know that we will have to stay at home for a longer time, which made me go back to Germany, just to be for a little while with my family and have a little bit more space and also think and reflect about this entire situation. And was able to also put myself into a very strict time schedule, which helped me with working because normally I'm a person, I'm constantly at university I love to use the university spaces. And now that was not possible anymore. So I try to create something similar in my own home. Of course, it was not even slightly the same thing. But I think that everyone was handling the situation quite well.

(05.34)

We had a lot of opportunities to always talk to mentors, to have one on one drop in sessions online, where we can just ask questions. And there... they definitely try to make the best possible. But I guess when you look at the positive sides of it... I also got to know some different skills that otherwise I would never have. We concentrated more on pattern cutting, on hand sewing, little natural dyes sessions, and otherwise I would never really gotten into it. And I think that was very useful and also a lot of fun. Then two weeks before we actually finished the second year, I came back to London and started working here which was definitely different because at home, I had all the space and I had spaces to calm down and to be alone. And here in England or in London, my flat is definitely very, very small.

So I had to get used to that. But I had a better artistic surrounding and better discussions because with my flat, it was definitely better to talk about my work and to talk about my process then it was with my family who actually don't really have anything to do with any kinds of arts.

Yeah. I mean, another thing that I am definitely missing is the social life. I like to just chat with people that sit next to me. I love to talk about my work. That is now gone, which gave me a bit of insecurity so that I kind of tried to manage by having very big group sessions. Our entire year, created like a little group session every Friday, so we could just chat to each other, like we also did at University and it was not always about our work, but also about how we handling the situation. So just a bit of social life and which was very enjoyable.

Academic Support 7:40

How do you think it's been for students who are in different time zones across the world? Do you feel you're still part of the whole course? Or have they been taught at different times?

Sophia 7:55

Students that are in completely different time zones, we try to manage that by different time slots. So, we always had, normally when we had the class, we had two options: so, either we have a session in the morning, or we have a session in the afternoon. And always the times where everyone was together was at a time that made it possible for everyone to listen to the session. I talked to, for example, one person that was in a completely different time zone and it was definitely difficult for him. Because you don't really have that normal schedule anymore. Even when you look on the timetable, it doesn't really suit your daily life at all.

Academic Support 8:44

And if somebody was thinking of coming to the university, post COVID, where there might be some online sessions, and there might be face to face sessions, what would you say to them, thinking about the advantages of UAL? And doing a degree here with this new environment?

Sophia 9:03

I think starting a course at the moment definitely depends on the situation everybody is in. For me personally, it's, it's a very positive thing, because I'm very glad that I have something to do. Even now in the holidays, I wanted to get a job it's very difficult to find anything and I tend to go a little bit insane when I don't have anything to do. So being at university and actually concentrating on my work on also work that I like, was very enjoyable also, because now I had the time to concentrate so much on these things. And I never really had that before because there was so much more going on, on the side. But yeah, I guess it really depends, I got used to working from home. I also heard from other people that had major difficulties working from home. And that definitely depends on your own character. To now find a job, find an internship, find anything else to do, it's going to be so hard that at least studying is gonna give you some motivation and it's gonna give you a purpose in your daily life, which I think is very important, especially at the moment when you have to stay at home all the time.

Academic Support

Okay, assuming some of the sessions were online and with a more face to face, what sorts of qualities do you need to adapt to the change?

Sophia 10:50

I think they are trying to work on a system where you can sometimes go into university and use the facilities, which is very important, especially for a course like mine. But then, also for yourself, you definitely need to have a very good daily structure, a very good organisation, you need to make timetables for yourself, you need to make plans and to do lists so you can see okay, I have so many hours today to go actually into university, what is there that I really need to do in the facilities that I have? I think when you don't do this organisation, you can get lost quite quite quickly and you need to learn how to use your time as much as you can.

Academic Support 11:34

And is there anything else that you think would be great for a student to know? Or to be aware of? Either way,

Sophia 11:44

When you start a course, at UAL, what was always very helpful and you shouldn't be shy about, which I definitely was at the beginning, is that you can always ask people. People here at UAL are so helpful, you have help in every kind of area. So, if you have financial problems, or personal problems, there will always be a person that you can talk to and that can ... can help you in every kind of situation. And I wish that at the beginning, I wouldn't have been so shy about it because I don't really like asking for help or telling someone that I actually have a problem. But in some situations, especially when you are an international student, you don't really know how the system works in England, and how you would deal with your council tax student discount... whatever. There's so many people to talk about it. And it's very important that you actually do because they are all happy to help.

Academic Support 12:40

And what's it like doing a course in London?

Sophia 12:49

Having a course in London is, especially when you're student at an art school, very, very beautiful thing. You have so many cultural options, you have so many museums. For me, I really enjoy going to the theatre, going to the opera. And as a student, you're going to have major discounts as well, which is, which is very nice. You can sign up for every opera house, for every theatre, as a student, and you're just going to get £10 tickets, which otherwise it's so hard to get, especially for these very, very big places. So, studying in London is perfect. You're gonna get so many connections you have so many options of actually figuring out what exactly it is you want to do, because you have everything in the city.

Academic Support 13:38

One thing that someone said to me I don't know if it's right or not is that students won't believe to begin with people saying it's going to be okay. And it's almost like they have to trust people before they start thinking that. But I wonder what you think about that.

Sophia 13:58

I think being scared and being worried about going into this huge city is definitely scary. And I'm not saying that it's going to be easy because it won't be. There are definitely a lot of struggles that you will have. But I also think you're gonna have that anywhere you go to, you're gonna have a lot of a lot of struggles also. London itself can be very tiring it can be very hard and stressful. And for myself, I definitely got lost quite a couple of times.

But also then I took so many advantages out of it as well. And I think that the advantages that I got are definitely more than the disadvantages that I got over the last two years. So yeah, this is...it is scary also to trust people that are now here and that actually already build up their lives, build up a circle of friends, and already feel comfortable in their surroundings. But I think if you just go here, you kind of have to, you kind of have to get along, you kind of have to make friends. There's no other way. So I think, yeah, it's hard to it's hard to tell a person to to trust what I'm saying. But I think it's quite natural that you're going to get used to the kind of life that you're going to have here.

Academic Support

You've mentioned getting lost a couple of times. I'm not prying into your personal life, but is there anything there that that you can generalise or learn from?

Sophia 15:37

A very important part about living in London is to find a general balance. It's something that I am struggling with quite often. I tend to work a lot, I tend to be on the run 24 seven, I sometimes don't sleep enough, I'm just having struggles to take care of my personal health. And I think a lot of students at UAL actually have that. Which is also caused I think by the city itself. It's a city that is based on people working a lot, that is based on always being outside and on the run. But you need to find a way of getting a balance doing something for yourself. Maybe have a look ...okay, do I want to do some sports on the side? What is there other than my, my work at university that I actually enjoy? And I think I kind of lost that because before I started sewing and doing my drawings was something that I did as in my free time as more as a hobby. And now, these ...these things are what I actually do what I do. It's my work and it's, it's gonna be my job. So it's not a hobby anymore and I think it's also important to get something new that you can come down with otherwise, like I said, you can get lost quite easy. And you have to take care of your own mental health.

Academic Support 17:47

Fantastic, thank you so much. Anything else that you think I really admitted to talk about which would be really important for somebody coming here?

Sophia 17:23

Yeah, already made a couple of notes but um I think so far this is all I got. Yes.

Academic Support 17:29

Fantastic. Thank you for all your contribution. It's really really good, very clear and very honest. Thank you so much.