
Make the most of an Open Day

**Understanding University, the
Ultimate Uni Podcast - Episode 13**

Katie

Welcome to Understanding University, the Ultimate Uni Podcast. My name is Katie and I work for the University of Essex Outreach Team helping to deliver activities and events to support students and guide them on their higher education journeys. The Outreach Team believe that all students, regardless of their background, education or where they come from, should have an equal opportunity to discover whether Higher Education could be part of their future. Our podcast is designed to give listeners an insight into university life, including the journey before, during and after, dispel some of the myths out there and also motivate and excite you to achieve your potential. If you'd like to know more or have any questions please contact us by emailing outreach@essex.ac.uk

Universities put on events throughout the year called Open Days so that interested students who are thinking about going to university can spend the day finding out more about their course, accommodation and the campus itself. Attending an open day can be one of the best ways to help you make your university decisions and our guests today will be sharing with you how you can make the most of an opportunity like this. We'll find out more about the amazing things that happen during our University of Essex Open Days, why they're important, how you can make the most of the day and, ultimately, how you can get yourself booked on to one. So today we have with us Rosanna who is one of our Recruitment Events Officers and is heavily involved and works very hard to set up our Open Days. And we also have Diego, who is a current student and Student Ambassador of the University. So, not only has Diego attended an open day himself, but he has also had the experience of working events to provide support and answer student questions. So Rosanna, if we could start with you, please, introduce yourself tell me a little bit more about your role and your experience of them.

Rosanna

So, hello everybody, my name is Rosanna, as Katie said I work in the Events team and I predominantly run the Colchester and Southend events at the University of Essex. I also look after postgraduate events so anybody who's looking to study masters or PhD events. I previously worked for a couple of universities and have worked and visited lots of different universities around the world as well, so I have lots of experience, about meeting different students from all over.

Katie

Oh, that's amazing and also will be obviously very helpful for today's episode, thanks Rosanna. And Diego, please introduce yourself, what course you're studying and what year you're studying in as well.

Diego

Yeah, so hi everyone, my name is Diego I'm a final year student, I'm currently doing my year abroad of my Bachelor which is International Relations and I'm originally from Barcelona.

Katie

Lovely thanks Diego, welcome to the podcast. So, Rosanna, in a nutshell, please could you share with our listeners what an Open Day involves.

Rosanna

Of course, so an Open Day for lots of different universities can be very different. Here Essex we do things on a big scale so in terms of Open Days generally you get a chance to see the campus, so to get a real feeling for the University life, and you get a chance to meet our lovely student ambassadors and chat with them about how they enjoy the University. You can speak to departments, you can sometimes do specific department tours of their facilities and also have a look at the accommodation, so you get to see different accommodations that are available on the campus and where you might like to be living.

Katie

So overall it's a really good opportunity so that when you're doing that university research you can really see what that university is like, thank you for that, and why do you think Open Days are such an important part of the application process?

Rosanna

So for me when I was a student I fully found that actually going to the university you either get a kind of relaxed vibe, that you can see yourself at that university or you just sort of feel like this one, maybe this one isn't for me, and I went to quite a lot of different university open days and got a feel for not just the university campus or the city campus, however it was, but also the actual city in the town that the university was in. So I really feel that going to an Open Day just from personal experience means that you will see yourself at one of those universities and kind of reassure that that's the one that's the best one for you, you feel most comfortable there, you have a really nice rapport with the departments and the student ambassadors and you can really feel like the three or four years of your life will be you know, enjoyable and also helpful as well, that'd be good for your course so yeah definitely, definitely, definitely worth going to see where you might be studying.

Katie

You said that you had been to quite a few, and I know that when I was applying for university, I went to about four or five, but is there, like a set amount that students should be aiming to attend, or what would you sort of recommend?

Rosanna

So, I would recommend going to probably the same as you, four or five I would say. I definitely recommend going to one that's a campus university and one that's a city university and for me again, personally, I went to a city university campus Open Day but didn't really enjoy it myself, I found that actually for me, I wanted something that was all in one place, and I wanted to be able to kind of roll out of my accommodation and straight into my lectures so definitely worth having a bit of variety, having a look at city campuses and then

ones where they're all in one place. And also, some of the courses are slightly different so I studied psychology and some psychology courses at one university would have completely different modules and they'd be taught completely different than another one. So, by going to the Open Days you can actually go and speak to the department, hear talks about the course and that's when you suddenly realise the differences and the things you might enjoy more start leading you into which university might be the better one for you.

Katie

Thanks Rosanna that's really helpful because I often talk to students and sort of say to them that well, university is a very important decision to make and Open Days are there to help you, you wouldn't buy a house or a car, without test driving it or going to see it so, in a way going to the Open Day is very similar to that you actually get to experience what it potentially could be like. So good yeah, thank you. Okay, so our listeners should be aiming for maybe four or five visits to weigh out their options. I know that some universities host events and they provide alternative names, I know that we have Applicant Days as well, would you mind explaining the differences of those Rosanna?

Rosanna

Of course, so we have Open Days, which are the general events, they are normally good for students that are wanting to have a look around, so they're wanting to get a feel for the university as I've mentioned before they might have an idea of what they want to study, but they also might be potentially choosing between two courses or two courses that are quite similar so they're sort of wanting to get a bit more of an in depth overview into those courses, have a look at a range of different accommodations and you know see if they feel comfortable being at that university. And then there are different events that universities will put on like Applicant or Interview days, those are normally for courses that have interviews so kind of Health Care course might have an interview, and that might be called an "Interview Day" or an "Applicant Day" so for people that have already applied. And then you might have subject specific Open Days, so those you would be invited to if you are thinking about studying certain subjects and that is actually what I went to and I picked my university, it was just a Psychology Open Day and all of the talks and the tasters were very specific, so we got to see lots of labs and we got to see more of an in depth insight into Psychology, so some universities hold those and they are again a great opportunity, just to really focus in on your course and figure out if that's the right one for you and if that's the right place, as well.

Katie

Thank you. Diego I would love to know a bit more, a bit about your experience of the Essex Open Day So what can you remember what did they include, how did it make you feel, was there anything distinctive about the day?

Diego

So, the one thing that I really appreciated about the Open Day I attended was the chance to actually sit in on some lectures and presentations, obviously this wasn't part of the normal school year, they were put on,

especially for the applicants, but I think nonetheless, it was a good way to get an impression of how university lecturers look and how that's different from what you might see in high school. So, I guess that's something that stood out to me. I got to meet the admissions team, some of its members I had already spoken to over email, so I did get to put some faces to the names. I remember one incident in particular; this was very embarrassing, I was speaking to, I think, the Head of the Department that I wanted to attend and we had a conversation, I don't know, 5 or 10 minutes and then later during the day I saw him around campus and when I wanted to say like hey how's it going, to greet him and I'd flown in from Spain to the UK, so I wasn't very used to talking in English, at the time, and so I said that in Spanish, and it was the most mortifying thing ever. I think he didn't really hear me and so I guess in retrospect that's the only thing that allowed me to sort of mentally keep my dignity but that's the one thing that I do remember about the Open Day most vividly.

Katie

You were clearly very excited, and I think that's lovely, though, because it just shows that you felt comfortable to do that and, hopefully, you did then get a chance to speak to him, later on, perhaps, maybe in English instead. But did you attend the Open Day with any friends or family members or anyone?

Diego

No, I came alone, unaccompanied.

Katie

Okay, because obviously it's up to you who you attend an Open Day with, but you can attend them independently. Rosanna what's common amongst most of our visitors?

Rosanna

So it really depends on the kind of campus, so specifically for the University of Essex, we have three campuses and we run two big open days and for our Southend campus a lot of the people tend to be local or the courses involve a kind of placement, so they tend to be slightly older students that have perhaps had a career first and they're looking to change their career so those Open Days, they tend to go on their own or they bring their children with them and then the Colchester Open Day because it's so much bigger and there's a big variety of courses and lots of people come with their families actually, so lots of sons and daughters bring their parents along and a few people go along with say their mum and they also bring their best friend along and that's kind of what I did actually I went with my friends and sometimes we would bring one of the parents along as well, so it's completely up to you who you want to bring who you feel comfortable with and it's quite nice to bring the same person to lots of them, so if you're bringing your mum along it'd be quite nice for her to then have a good comparison of all the places you went to see as well. And it also helps because they can take notes of all the important things that you might need to know, whilst you're busy enjoying the Open Day speaking to people, so bear that one in mind as well.

Katie

That's a great tip, thank you Rosanna. Yeah, definitely if you can take someone you trust, along with you, they can help you with questions or things that you don't think of so that might be part of helping you make your decision as well, as if someone you trust likes the place and you do too then that's a pretty good sign, and who will our visitors expect to see on an Open Day, who will they be greeted by?

Rosanna

So, they'll be greeted by a variety of people so, as I said, we have our amazing student ambassadors and they really help run the entire day so if you're ever lost on the day, or you just want to speak to somebody just to get an insight into where they might have studied or lived on the campus you can speak to our student ambassadors and they will be around doing a variety of different roles, whether that be checking you in, could be providing you with drinks and cake, could be, you know, guiding you to the departments or guiding you on a campus or accommodation tour, so they make up a big part of our Open Days and are great people for you to speak to. But we also have staff members there as well, so we have staff members, like the team that I work in and we're there to ensure that there are lots of different activities for everybody to get involved with. And then there are the academic staff members, so they are the heads of department or the lecturers and they will give you more of an insight into your course, allow you to have kind of one-on-one conversations or deliver presentations or tasters, and tours of the department as well, so a real variety of different people, whether it's students or staff.

Katie

Thank you, and then obviously there'll be amongst lots of other visitors as well, so students who are interested in going with their family and friends and they could be from your college or school or they could be from like Diego obviously he travelled from Spain, so you'll expect to see lots a lot of people from a variety of backgrounds and lots of staff to welcome and greet you, thank you. So, from a University side of things, obviously there's a lot of preparation and organisation and hard work from everybody, putting these big events together, but for our visitors who are students who want to go to an open day, is there anything that they should be doing in advance of going to an open day and maybe you want to mention, as well Rosanna, how you would actually book-on to an Open Day as well, please.

Rosanna

Sure, so most Open Days or all Open Days actually, will be advertised on their website so it makes it accessible for anybody wherever you are. So, the first thing I would say is go on to Google type in University of, ideally Essex, but wherever you'd like to go and have a look at the next upcoming dates and they also give you a bit of a rundown of a program on there as well, so they will tell you what's happening on the day, what time to arrive and what things to bring with you, if you do need to bring anything that you normally don't, where to park, how to get there, all sorts of different information so they will provide you with that, you'll then be sent a confirmation email, so you can normally book online as well, book your place. It is obviously all free as well, we do get asked questions, does it cost anything to book on? It is absolutely free, bring on as

many guests, as you like, as well, and so you can bring whoever you feel most comfortable with and yeah then we generally keep you updated with emails, so we will tell you of any changes to the programme, anything added, all by email as well. And Katie was the first question you asked me as well?

Katie

I just wondered if there was any preparation that needed to be done, whether it was thinking about questions they might want to ask at the Open Day or anything they need to think about before coming, anything like that really?

Rosanna

Oh, of course, yeah so preparation, I would say, I'm trying to do this based on questions that other students have asked me in the past. So, make sure that you look at how far the university is before you book your open day, so some people will have booked an open day and then they realise that, actually, the one that they picked is a seven hour drive away and they start thinking: oh, I have a part time job at the weekends, it actually makes it very difficult for me to come back or they maybe don't want to be so far away from their parents or partner or something like that. So, first of all, have a look about where, how far in distance and have a look for sort of trains, have a look at the kind of accessibility around there, so can you get home easily for holidays or the weekend, if you wanted to, are there regular buses? Have a look at the town that it's located in, so do you want to be kind of in a little campus or do you want to be in a big campus that has you know, shops and restaurants and cinemas things like that or would you like to be in the middle of a city where you have kind of access to all the other shops but your lectures might be on one side of the city and your accommodation might be on the other, so lots of things to plan before you attend the University. Make sure that the five or four, however many you'd like to go visit, ten if you want to go visit ten open days, are suitable for your needs and what you want, and in terms of the course, obviously make sure that it's the exact course that you want to go for or something that you also might be interested in, so if it's got, you know, a few extra modules that you think sounds interesting go and check that out for the Open Day, but if the university doesn't do the course that you want to do, then it's probably not a good idea to go there and then be disappointed that they don't do your course. So, make sure that you have a look on the UCAS website or on their website specifically. And then I just say just look forward to it, Open Days are really, really fun and our one is the most fun, and I know I'm biased, but I have worked in lots of Open Days before and we have a really good time, really nice atmosphere so just enjoy it and look forward to it and book the day off because of it being a Saturday.

Katie

Thanks Rosanna, yeah that's fantastic and, ultimately, it is going to be down to research so it's just part of that process when you are thinking about going to University you do all your research beforehand and then also attending the Open Day is part of that research, but you get to have a really fun day whilst doing that, so yes, thank you for that. Diego was there any specific research, you did previously to attending the Open Day?

Diego

I would say that the research that I had done was mainly regarding the academics. So basically, what was taught at Essex, how it was taught the different classes I was able to take as compared to other universities, so I guess the main consideration in my case was in that direction. Obviously, the campus was a nice bonus, and I think a lot of people when they first come to Essex do notice that they do point it out, that is also something I've seen a lot as student ambassador, people come in and it's the first thing they notice, but for me, like I said, it was more of a bonus than a primary consideration.

Katie

Yeah, it seems like you were already sort of sold and then coming onto campus here was really positive. That's great, thank you. Rosanna, you were talking about location and travel and things like that, and when someone wants to book on to one of our Open Days, what happens with travel and/or parking considerations and things like that, or accessibility requirements and what would someone need to do in those situations?

Rosanna

Yes, so travel information is all on the website and again it depends on the University and so I'll talk specifically about Essex, obviously that's where I know best. And so, for Colchester we have lots of different car parks, there are free parking available across the entire campus for that open day, so you just turn up we tell you the postcode as well, so pretty easy to get to, and if you arrived by train, we run a shuttle service as well, so you can just hop on with one of our student ambassadors and we'll take you directly to the campus. And for something like Southend, we are right in the middle of the town, so we have the benefit of having a couple of train stations there. There are lots of car parks as well because we're on the high street, also we are right next to the airport, so if you are flying somewhere, you can easily also get to the University. And all the information will be on there with all the different modes of transport, and if you do have accessibility issues and you want to discuss that we have a dedicated email address that's travel@essex.ac.uk and they can email them and talk about any requirements that they might need and whether it's for parking or for the Open Day in general there'll be email addresses to talk about that too.

Katie

Great thank you, and this might not be relevant for all of our listeners but I'm definitely someone who likes to plan their outfits when they're going out for an event, so do either of you have any tips on what to wear when going to an open day or anything that you might need to bring with you?

Rosanna

We have a variety of obviously thousands of people that come onto the campus. I would definitely recommend sensible footwear, whether it's trainers or flat shoes, we have had a few mothers turn up in stilettos, and that is quite a walk if you're walking around the University and especially if you want to go and see sort of the further away accommodation type or you're going back and forth to speak to an academic so I definitely would leave the stilettos for another day and put on something else, and a lot of the tours are outside so you might want to check the weather forecast and bring an umbrella or bring a light jacket, if you

might be sort of touring the grounds of the University. But apart from that, just normal clothes that you feel comfortable in, I think, is the best option, but you don't have to turn up in a suit or a really smart dress or anything, we're not judging you whilst you're there, and most of the time we don't know your name, we're just there to help you and make you feel comfortable so whatever you feel like you want to wear.

Katie

Lovely, thank you, those are some really great tips, thank you and, hopefully, our listeners will know now what sort of to expect on an Open Day, how they can book on, how to prepare for one but perhaps we could provide a little bit about what they could do following an Open Day as well, so what should our listeners think about once they've visited the day and what are the next steps?

Rosanna

Yes so, the kind of thing that I did, I think I just then booked in some other University Open Days, so that I could then sit and compare them all and then you will have to decide and which, out of your say five choices, are your top one or two choices, so you might want to visit the universities that you've put on your UCAS application if you're going through that route. And you might want to get those five down to your top choice and your backup choice your insurance choice, so I think that's what I did I sort of picked in order of priority, and the ones that I liked the most and the course that I like the best and then I would just start thinking about what stuff you might need to bring with you to university, obviously, if you're going to be living on accommodation you might want to have a look at which accommodation types suit you and what things you might need. And some places, allow you to bring a bike so you can look if they've got bike sheds there or anything that you might need to live the life that you are already living, so if you're like a gym goer you might want to check that they've got a gym, just like the extra things that you might not get the chance to see on the Open Day, do a little bit more research into that top university and we also have things like live chat and we have lots of email addresses so, if you have any questions you can email the staff members, and we have Unibuddy as well, which is the system where you can speak to student ambassadors or staff from different departments, so again, you can jump on there if you've got a question, a burning question on your way home, you think oh I forgot to ask that or I didn't see where I needed to go for this so you can just ask them that at any time as well.

Katie

Definitely and also, if you've really, really enjoyed yourself and you notice that the University has got more events coming up, why not book on to another event and find out a bit more and as Rosanna mentioned earlier about Unibuddy, you can go to essex.ac.uk/life/chat where you will find our students and staff profiles, so you can pop your questions there and they'll get back to you when they can. But we also have live chat as well, so you can instantly get your questions answered. And so yeah, those are the sorts of things that you might want to do following an Open Day and it might have helped you to make your decision about where you want to go, so yeah, you could start making your plans for September or October that year and yeah I'd just like to finish up with a final piece of advice from you guys, you've provided some really great

tips and guidance today about Open Days and so let's start with Diego and it could be something you've already mentioned, but just as a final finisher let's hear your final piece of advice in preparation for university.

Diego

When you're meeting people at an Open Day don't forget to speak English.

Katie

Yes, that's a great one for our bilingual students there, if you're getting very excited just remember who you're speaking to and Rosanna then.

Rosanna

Let me have a think about some top advice, I feel like I've mentioned all my top advice during this podcast, all your research and getting to speak to somebody. My top advice would be just thought of something, a challenge: find a student Ambassador that is studying your course, so then, you can have a really nice chat with them about exactly what modules they do, how often you're in class and what are the other courses that they considered, what other universities they considered and really make a good contact whilst you are at the open day and so that would be my advice something to do whilst you are at the open day.

Katie

Yeah I really like that one, that's a very good piece of advice, thank you Rosanna and yeah, of course, if you can't find one on the day you can then use the Live Chat or Unibuddy service. Thank you both so much for joining us in today's episode, we hope that our listeners now understand a little bit more about what an Open Day is and perhaps you'll have the confidence to book and attend one yourself, we have all of our University of Essex Open Day dates and online booking forms on our website you just need to go to essex.ac.uk/visit-us, we would love to see you on campus. Thank you.

Thank you for listening to today's episode. If you want to listen to more, our previous episodes are available on the playlist and you can keep an eye out for new releases by making sure you're a registered listener. Please email us on outreach@essex.ac.uk to find out more.

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Thanks again and don't forget to share the episode with your family, friends and colleagues.