

## Persona #1: Amara



Photo by [Igor Ovsyannykov](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Amira is a 28 year old Nepalese woman currently studying online at the University of Edinburgh for a postgraduate degree in education. She is on a meager scholarship from the Nepalese government that covers her basic tuition. Although she lives in Kathmandu, she routinely connects with her communities from her hometown through her mobile technology: her former classmates, her extended family, her immediate family. She works 20 hours a week, the maximum allowed under the scholarship restrictions, to support herself. When she has the capacity, she remits money home to her family using her mobile phone. Amira has a note on her mobile phone with all her important information, an insecure but accessible tether to all these communities: passwords, telephone numbers, bus routes, wire transfer information, and rent payments. She often listens to music to drown out the hustle of the busy Kathmandu streets.

Amira, at times, feels distant from the University of Edinburgh. She often wonders about what the campus might look like, and occasionally searches online to see images or videos about the university. She sometimes looks at Street View on Google Maps to see the buildings where her programme is based. She interacts with her classmates as often as the course requires on discussion boards, but only a few connections have been made on social media and only one through Whatsapp, which she uses for her more personal communication. English is her second language and she feels frustrated at times trying to communicate solely through text. She will finish her degree but at times it can be a lonely experience. She speaks proudly of being a student there to her friends in Nepal, but in truth she feels disconnected from the university.



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## Persona #2: Su Ah



Photo by [Manki Kim](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Su Ah is a 23 year old postgraduate student studying data science online at the University of Edinburgh. She lives in and is originally from Seoul, Korea. Su Ah interacts with her communities, her friends, her classmates, almost always through her beloved MacBook Pro. She works part-time at a local school tutoring secondary school students in Maths which helps her pay the tuition for the University of Edinburgh. The school is far away from her home however so Su Ah regularly commutes about 2 hours a day. While on the subway, she does some of her university work: checks the assignments, schedules her calendar around tests, has formal discussions with a few classmates on the prescribed discussion board for the course. She likes lecture recordings as she can just listen to them on her commutes and close her eyes a bit.

Her friends don't fully understand why she would want to study online: why not just go there, they say repeatedly. Su Ah can't, however. She has family responsibilities and must be there to help when she can. But she feels sometimes like it is a lesser experience, this online study. At times, she feels alone and disconnected. She has been to Edinburgh once before but only briefly. She wonders sometimes how busy King's Buildings gets during exam time, and what the students chatting sounds like. She misses the experience of chatting with classmates in the corridor between classes, or social interaction at the local cafe at lunchtime. Su Ah misses the possibility of running into new people from different schools, or who study different courses, at social events; she used to be an active member of her student union during her undergraduate study. She interacts with her classmates often formally online, but she is not entirely confident in her ability to communicate naturally in English. She speaks proudly of being a student at the University of Edinburgh to her friends in Seoul, but in truth she feels that she doesn't know her fellow classmates very well at all.



## Persona #3: James



Photo by [James Connolly](#) on [Unsplash](#)

James is an on-campus graduate student in Biological Sciences at the University of Edinburgh, hailing from Leith. He is studying a course where the majority of his classmates are studying from a distance and are located in other countries. When talking to fellow classmates in the discussion forum, he sometimes gets a sense of their homes or study spaces: comments on the weather, on family, on their aspirations post-graduation. Nowhere in the course does it say anything about exactly where his classmates live or work, and James finds it difficult to get a sense of his class as a whole. Participants post at different times due to their respective time zones, so he never feels like they are working at the same time, and he often feels he is missing out on conversations. He sees this as an international group, but feels disconnected from his classmates.

James' interactions with all these students in far off places makes him think he might want to do some research abroad, to visit some of these places, but he doesn't have the money to do so. Maybe someday. James is social and interacts with cohorts on campus, faculty, and friends often. He gets angry at himself sometimes for forgetting things, sometimes small details, sometimes scheduled events. He has yet to forget a due date for an assignment but worries that will happen soon.

## Persona #4: Gossy



Photo by [Zachary Staines](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Gossy is a 28 year old student hailing originally from Lagos, Nigeria studying for a MSc in Architectural & Urban Design on campus. Gossy is fascinated with cities, how they are built, rebuilt,

and torn down. He remarks how different cities can be and is reminded of that everyday looking at the relative calm of Edinburgh compared to the infectious bustle of Lagos. Night and day.

Gossy routinely connects with his communities from Lagos through Whatsapp: former classmates, extended family, and immediate family. Gossy has a large social circle, and his family is really important to him. He relies on these connections often as he has struggled to make the transition to studying at the University of Edinburgh. It is beautiful, but dark and cold, he tells his friends and family back home. Gossy is on scholarship and works 20 hours a week, the maximum allowed under the scholarship restrictions, to support himself. When he has the capacity, he remits money home to his brother, who is also studying.

Gossy feels connected to the university, feels a part of his department, and interacts often with his classmates and faculty, but he struggles to communicate this all to his family. His family often ask questions about the campus, what it looks like, what it sounds like, but Gossy is at a bit of a loss to describe it. He posts photos like everyone else to social media, sometimes a video or two, but it doesn't quite capture it. Something is missing. If only his family could see Edinburgh, Gossy is sure that they would be more supportive of his studies, and not always encourage him to come home. He is set to graduate next year but is hoping to stay on in the UK either with a job or further study, but the future is very uncertain.

