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On track ... a bridging program helped Keira Galbraith adapt to university life. Photo: Domino Postiglione

Learning curve has its rewards

As the first in her family to attend university, Keira Galbraith is doing her parents proud as she takes her studies in her stride. writes **Sue White.**

LIKE almost half the students at the University of Western Sydney, Keira Galbraith is the first in her family to go to university. But study has always been on her mind.

"I always wanted to go to university and UWS was my first choice as it was really close to my house," says Galbraith, who is in her second year of a bachelor of design (visual communication).

"I did art from year seven to 12 and ... I'm very interested in computer stuff, like magazine layouts and typography."

Galbraith says getting to know the campus was easy, thanks to her participation in Fast Forward, a UWS program targeting students from

greater western Sydney who have the academic potential, but not necessarily the opportunity, to study at university.

Through campus visits and discussions with academic staff, students start to bridge the gap between high school and tertiary education.

"In high school, you're spoon-fed," Galbraith says. "In university, it's continual assessment. You work hard but it's really worth it."

Adapting to a new social scene was easier than she imagined.

"The first day I thought, 'I won't make any friends' but I quickly made a few and it's grown from there," she says.

Galbraith's knowledge has also grown. "They showed us how to use digital SLR cameras and which software people are using now," she says.

"I didn't think I'd learn this much in the first year."

With only about 25 per cent of her year 12 class studying at university, Galbraith has made sure she keeps in contact with her old teachers, returning each week to help with a craft group.

The exchange has paid off in more ways than one.

"I needed someone to look over an essay so I went and asked my old English teacher," she says.

And her parents? "They are pretty proud," she says.

"They try to help me as much as they can and if I can't make it to a family event because I have study commitments, they are understanding," she says.