

Oxford History Review

OPEN DAY SPECIAL EDITION

WHAT
STUDYING
HISTORY IS
REALLY LIKE

BUSTING
MYTHS ABOUT
THE
ADMISSIONS
PROCESS

A DAY IN
THE LIFE OF
A HISTORY
UNDERGRAD



WELCOME TO OXFORD HISTORY REVIEW!

Welcome to Oxford History Review, a magazine that aims to provide students with a platform to express their opinions and thoughts about all things historical.

This is a special issue of the magazine for the Undergraduate Open Day in July 2020. We are delighted to be working with the History Faculty for this issues to provide an insight into real student experiences and what it is like studying history at Oxford.

To read our first issue and keep up to date on everything that we're doing, check out our Facebook page [@OxfordHistoryReview](#)



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Student Experiences

Four History Undergraduates provide accounts of their experiences of the admissions process.

Ellie Hall



"I wasn't expecting to enjoy my interviews, or even Oxford at all, but I surprised myself and actually did – which ultimately convinced me to accept my offer! It is definitely worth giving it a go, and interviews can give you a little insight into what student life at Oxford could be like. At Merton, we were told in advance that we would have one interview based on our personal statements, and one based on our written work. I came to interviews treating it as a bit of a free holiday from the stresses of year 13 – so in between I wandered around Oxford, went shopping and ate ice-cream (as well as making use of the college library to revise for the mocks waiting for me back at home)!! In total I only had 2 interviews across 3 days, one around 15 minutes and the other nearer 20, so I had a lot of free time. The student helpers organised lots of activities for the evenings, where I met some of the people that have ended up being my best friends! Going into the whole experience with this mindset, not putting too much pressure or expectation on myself or the whole concept of 'An Oxford Interview', made the actual interviews so much more relaxing.

The interviews themselves were interesting, and the interviewers incredibly encouraging. I got things wrong or mixed up in mine, but it doesn't matter! I enjoyed having a chat with someone different to my usual teacher about some stuff I was interested in and had worked on, and I think that's all you can really hope for. They want to see that you are engaged with and curious about your subject, so don't be nervous about getting things wrong – you will hopefully be coming to Oxford to learn, so this is just a taster!"

Iram Farooqui

I found the idea of the admissions process daunting, but in actuality it was quite straightforward, thanks to the help of my teachers and online resources. I tailored my personal statement around my historical interests (the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Partition of India), which formed the basis of an exciting discussion with tutors in one interview. Before this, I prepared for the History Aptitude Test by practising past papers available online and analysing the marking schemes to assess which skills were required, namely historical imagination. The format of your interviews will depend on your college, but at Merton one revolved around my personal statement and the other around my written work. It is hard to believe, but talking with experts in your interviews can be more enjoyable than you think!



Jess Hinks

“I remember being quite utterly terrified by the thought of my interviews but honestly, I ended up really enjoying them! Do try to relax and remember that the tutors are not trying to catch you out and are genuinely interested in what you have to say. Most importantly, regardless of whether you get in or not, having an interview it is a truly amazing experience and a real personal achievement, so be proud and make the most of the chance of being able to have a discussion with someone who has dedicated their life to the subject you both love! My first interview was effectively solely based around my historical interests I’d discussed in my personal statement while my second was focused entirely on the written essay I had submitted. Therefore, I was very familiar with the history being discussed and felt confident in discussing ideas and making arguments. The tutors are not interested in how much you know but how you think so you’ll never be expected to have extensive knowledge on a period that you have never studied before”

My three days in Oxford for interviews in December 2017 were far more enjoyable than I had expected them to be. I was understandably very nervous when I arrived at Merton but my mind was soon put at ease by the wonderful helpers and the other lovely applicants I met. Nobody was trying to show off and I’d say the best part of interviews was meeting new people, some of whom I’m still friends with today!

My first interview was on my personal statement. The tutor put me at ease straight away by asking questions about how my journey to Oxford had been and we even spent a couple of minutes remarking on how we’d grown up in the same area! I was asked about the books I had written about on my personal statement but he did not expect me to know them back to front, just to know the general arguments and what my thoughts on them were. The same can be said for my second interview which was on my written work on Henry VIII’s foreign policy. I was asked questions about Henry VIII’s navy and Lutheran



Protestantism, neither of which I knew anything about, but the tutor helped me through by giving me pieces of information that I could apply to my existing knowledge to formulate my arguments further. I even got quite mixed up on quite an important part of Henry’s reign but the tutor didn’t mind so there’s really no need to worry about getting things wrong.

The most important thing to remember about interviews is that they are an opportunity to talk to experts in a subject that you love. The discussions I had at interviews (because, at the end of the day, the interviews are discussions rather than interrogations) were intellectually stimulating and thoroughly enjoyable. Each interview went by in the blink of an eye, partly thanks to the tutors who know you will be nervous and try to make you feel as comfortable as possible. To anyone thinking of applying who is worried about the interview stage I would definitely say you should still give it a go as you will probably enjoy them far more than you originally think.

Oxford Lingo Explained

MATRICULATION

A traditional ceremony that admits new students into the university that takes place during 1st week. You wear subfusc and it is generally a fun day of celebration.



TUTORIALS

A contact hour that you generally have once a week where you discuss the content you learnt that week with a tutor and another student. It is a great opportunity to reflect on your essay and discuss ideas.

SUBFUSC

Formal clothing that is worn at matriculation, formal meals, exams, etc. It consists of a black suit/skirt/trousers, a white shirt, gown, mortar-board, and a black bow tie/tie/ribbon. The gown, mortar-board and ribbon can be purchased during Freshers Week for about £25.

BOD/BOD CARD

An abbreviation for Bodleian, the main university library. A Bod Card is a student ID card that also gives you access to the library.

COLLECTION

Informal exam at the start of each term on the content that you learnt in the previous term. The marks don't count towards your final grade, they are just an indication of the grade you are working at.

PRELIMS/MODS

Formal exams at the end of the first year that do not count towards your final grade. They are sat in exam conditions and you are examined on the content from the whole year.

FORMAL

An optional traditional meal that takes place within college. You generally wear smarter clothing and the meal is fancier. Some colleges have them 6 times a week, some once a month, every college is different!



MICHAELMAS, HILARY, AND TRINITY

We have three terms at Oxford; each is 8 weeks long. Michaelmas is from the start of the year until Christmas, Hilary is from January to Easter, and Trinity is the final term of the year.

Am I Good Enough for Oxford?

JAMES MORRISON revisits his own apprehensions in deciding to apply to Oxford.

A lot of people talk about how they dreamed of studying at Oxford for years before applying. Frankly, I cannot relate. When asked whether I wanted to attend Oxford's Open Day, I declined, deeming it a waste of time. I simply didn't think I had any chance of getting in. Sure, I was doing well enough in my History A Level, but History at *Oxford* seemed like something else altogether. Outside of what I had studied at school, my knowledge of the past felt very limited – I doubted that I could even secure an interview, let alone an actual offer. It didn't help my confidence knowing that, out of the few people who applied to Oxbridge from my school each year, success was largely unheard of.

The rigorous application process wasn't the only thing putting me off. In environments where Oxbridge is not the norm, even the act of applying can feel like a statement in itself, as if you're proclaiming to the world: *Look at me, I think I'm smart enough to study at Oxford*. I was called "Oxford boy" in comically posh accents by countless friends and even teachers, who seemed to take some sort of offence in me applying, as if it suggested that I thought of myself as above them. I have even heard of some teachers actively discouraging high-achieving students from applying, on the grounds that they "aren't Oxford material" or "wouldn't fit in". Of course, having doubts about whether you would feel comfortable at Oxford is a whole other issue to be addressed, but it is a decision to be made by yourself and nobody else. In an environment where even teachers stigmatise Oxford, it is no wonder that good students will have doubts about whether applying for the slim chance of an offer is really worth the hassle.

However, I eventually decided to give Oxford a shot. There were five spaces on my UCAS form, and even if Oxford didn't work out, I still had other four universities with better odds of getting into. I was also lucky enough to have several teachers who supported me in my application, despite lacking the level of insight into the



The Radcliffe Camera: a one-stop shop for historians and Instagrammers alike.

process that schools with more frequent Oxbridge success possessed. Indeed, the most useful and encouraging advice I received was through online resources available to everyone – check out page 16 to see some of them for yourself. Resources like this are especially valuable for those who lack supportive or knowledgeable voices in their school and home lives.

After scouring university websites, student forums, and YouTube for advice, I began to build my application. Importantly, I focused my personal statement around what I knew I felt confident talking about in an interview: my A Levels. It is true that tutors like to see evidence of research beyond the school curriculum (and I accordingly read a bit about the French Revolution to demonstrate this), but most of my application focused on showing how my A Level subjects gave me the skills to be a good historian.



I applied to Merton mainly because it was a college I had heard of. Despite my very uninformed decision, Merton quickly came to feel like my second home.

As a result, my interview questions were largely about topics that I knew well and could discuss deeply. There were plenty of questions which I didn't know how to answer, but I had enough knowledge to at least make educated guesses, which the interviewers clearly appreciated. Although I remained certain that I would never get an offer, I came out of my interviews feeling pleasantly surprised with how manageable and normal they were. This was a positive contrast to the experience offered by my school's well-intentioned but unrealistic mock interview, where I was asked a series of broad questions on the deeper meaning of history which had little bearing on anything that I had learned in my 13 years of education.

For most of my school career, I didn't see Oxford as something attainable. While the prospect of an Oxford degree may seem ideal in theory, imposter syndrome - the unjustified feeling that you're not good enough - nearly deterred me from ever applying. Personally, I would never have made the leap if it wasn't for the virtual encouragement of people who had been in a similar situation to myself. I hope that this magazine can provide part of that encouragement for those of you out there who are currently unsure as to whether Oxford is the place for you.



View from my first-year accommodation.

varies depending on other commitments and my own inconsistent time management skills! Moreover, everybody develops their own approaches to getting the work done, and nobody expects you to have figured out your own before arriving.

Schedules

With fewer contact hours than most degrees, us history students have a lot of freedom to manage our time however we want to. As a result, very few weeks will look identical, and everyone's schedules will be different. Whatever your sleeping habits or extra-curricular commitments, most people find ways to work their degree around the rest of their life in Oxford.

Mixing it up

With each week's work consisting largely of independent study, historians can be found working in every corner of Oxford, from its buzzing café scene to its many libraries. Visiting a new spot with a friend can often make a tough article that bit more readable, and places like the Covered Market are great for lunch breaks!

Merton College Library



The Covered Market



From school tie to slightly wonky black tie.

Managing the Workload

Essays

In my first two years of single honours History, I have tended to have around two essays per fortnight during term, although in Trinity Term (summer) there are often fewer assignments to give us time to focus on exam revision. Personally, I aim to spend 3-4 days on reading and one day on writing per essay, but this inevitably

The History interview: making sense of the myths

OLIVER SHAW deconstructs some of the rumours and misconceptions that still exist about being interviewed for a place to study History at Oxford.

Digging through the Internet, I wouldn't blame you for feeling quietly terrified at the prospect of being interviewed for a place to study History at Oxford. There is an abundance of unhelpful myths and misconceptions about the Oxford interview still doing the rounds, which means potential applicants can easily feel deterred from applying altogether. In Oxford, access and outreach work is underway to break down those perceptions and demystify the application process for all subjects.

In any History interview, the likelihood is that you will discuss the things you have been studying at school, your wider reading, and your personal statement. The important thing to remember is that tutors aren't trying to 'score' you, but to see how you operate (and hopefully thrive) in a tutorial-style discussion and give you the chance to demonstrate all the things you know.

How colleges conduct their History interviews can vary, which is why – if you progress to the interview stage of admissions – it is important to consult the information provided on the university website, as well that of the college(s) you'll be interviewed at. With that in mind, let's take a look at some common misunderstandings about the interview process, and set about correcting them.

Ignore the scary stories

Buried in the internet are horror stories of tutors setting fire to objects, hurling cricket balls at interviewees and asking random, daunting questions that reduce applicants to tears. Tales abound of tutors favouring applicants from elite schools and judging candidates based on their achievements on the rugby pitch.

Remember: when it comes to History, academics are serious about their subject and they want to

almost certainly just that: stories, ones that support dated, sensationalist and misleading perceptions of what Oxford is really like.



It's a History interview

Tutors aren't there to pose impossible or vague philosophical questions that are unrelated to what you've been studying, reading and writing. It's a History interview, at the end of the day. Thought-provoking debates will emerge from the discussion, but tutors would gain little from trying to blindside you with big, out-of-context questions.

Chances are, you'll be asked about the content of your personal statement at some point: the books you've read, topics you've studied at school and beyond, and the conclusions you've managed to draw. If you've had to submit an essay as part of your application, you may be asked to talk about that and the topic for which you wrote it at school. In preparing for your interview, think about all the possible questions they could ask about your individual application.

You may be presented with a question that you hadn't considered before, one that really gets you thinking. If you've been studying the causes



of the Russian Revolution, perhaps tutors could ask you to make a comparison to another revolution you know about. Maybe they could ask you whether it really constituted a 'revolution' at all.

It's not a test...

Tutors are not interested in tripping you up, nor are they seeing how many things you get 'right'. Interviews should be a mutually beneficial experience, giving you a taster of History teaching at Oxford, and allowing your potential future tutors to see how you think and operate in a tutorial-style environment. It should be a conversation, not an interrogation – much like tutorials themselves.

...and being wrong can be good

If you say something that you aren't quite happy with, going back and rethinking what you said shows a dexterity and flexibility of thought that tutors are looking out for. Remember to pause, breathe and structure your answers but also think out loud – it will let your tutors see into your thought process and understand how you come to conclusions, even if you don't necessarily have the 'right' answer. A 'wrong' answer with a detailed, comprehensive thought process can be far more

interesting and open up new avenues for discussion. It's also okay to say 'I don't know', or to ask the interviewer for clarification and guidance (for example: 'what exactly do you mean by that?').

You can guide the conversation

It's a conversation, not an interrogation - detail your answers with things you've read or come across to shape the kind of things tutors might ask you!

They probably won't ask about your hobbies

Or perhaps they will, as a conversation starter and if it's on your personal statement. Alternatively, if you spend your spare time, say, working in a museum or visiting historical sites, tutors might be interested to know how your experiences have furthered your understanding of certain time periods or topics.

But the number of trophies you've won or school societies you've chaired probably won't help tutors learn about who you are as a historian. It's good to know your personal statement like the back of your hand, but most of your preparation and thinking should be about the things you've been reading and topics you've studied at school.

Who knows how 'pooling' works?

Sometimes, applicants are 'pooled' to another college in Oxford to have an interview there – whether before arriving for interview, or after having been interviewed at your college of choice. But it's impossible to fully know how the system works, to work out why tutors have decided to pool you or calculate your chances of success based on whether or not you've been pooled.

If you can, simply treat it as another chance to talk about all things historical with people who really know their stuff, and avoid hunting for statistics online.

You don't have to flatter tutors

If you know where you will be interviewed, or who will be interviewing you, a quick Google search can always be enlightening. It's unlikely, however, that tutors will ask you to explain why you picked their college – indeed, you might have been pooled there and your answer will say little about how you operate as a historian. Nor do you need to talk about your interviewers' careers or specialisms, unless they happen to have written something that is relevant to the topics you have studied, or mentioned in your personal statement.

Tutors can be very different

Tutors all have different personalities and one of the benefits of the the tutorial system is that it allows you to experience being taught by a huge variety of people. Some tutors will seem 'friendlier', while others will seem more formal.

Don't read too much into it – what you do need to know is that the people interviewing you will be passionate about history and want to teach people with whom they can have an engaging discussion.

The interview isn't everything

Most advice about interviews will remind you that the interview is just one component of a lengthy and thorough application process.

How you perform will be compared to your grades, History Aptitude Test (HAT) result, personal

statement and teacher's reference. Don't assume that the interview will 'swing' it and, if you can, try and put it all out of your head over the Christmas holidays: you will have done your very best and you'll deserve a serious break!



What you wear doesn't matter

Your interview will be assessed by the discussion you had, not whether you chose a white or blue shirt.

As interviews loom, many applicants worry about what they should wear and what impression their choice will make. The best thing you can do is to wear what makes you feel comfortable and ready for an interview.

You don't need to wear a suit or what you'd wear for a job interview; a shirt or top with smart trousers/skirt/dress looks great. Of course, you should still remember that you are in an interview situation so try to avoid clothing that you wouldn't wear to school or any other formal environment!



Many come back from their interviews for History and Joint Schools and reflect on the experience as a positive one.

Your History interview will be far more straightforward and enjoyable than the horror stories of the internet suggest: if you're enthusiastic about your subject and you know your stuff, you will be well set up to have a great interview experience at Oxford.

My Interview Experience

MOLLY ARCHER-ZEFF shares her experience of the interview process at Merton College.



With the nerves and anticipation of looming interviews I was glad that when I arrived at Merton I was immediately met by smiles, a welcome pack, and a friendly helper to show me to my room. The Interview Helpers made sure that I did not have the added stress of trying to navigate a new and unfamiliar environment. The room I was shown to was in Holywell Street, a 5-minute walk from Merton's main college site. I was surprised at how big the room was (and also at how quickly I managed to make it feel at home by making it as messy as my own room). The only problem I experienced was that the heating didn't work when I arrived and on a snowy November day this meant the room was quite cold. However, I told an Interview Helper and within an hour it had been fixed.

Soon after all the historians arrived there was an introductory meeting where we were introduced to the tutors, it was explained how the interviews would work, and we were given an opportunity to meet other interviewees. The JCR (Junior Common Room) was introduced to us as the hub of the college where we met regularly to find out interview times, chat, and munch on the endless biscuits and hot drinks.

I had both of my interviews on the first day. An Interview Helper took me to the interview location on time and helped me to feel at ease with friendly chatter. With the exciting opportunities of meeting so many new people and taking in the new surrounding I didn't have much time to be nervous!

I expected the interviews to be a grilling on dates, times, locations, and everything I had learnt since year 7. I couldn't have been more wrong. The first interview was a discussion with two tutors about my personal statement. It lasted less than 20 minutes as we talked about voluntary work I had completed, my favourite historical texts, and how I would go about researching a historical topic. Yes, the questions were challenging, but I was eased into them by discussion that provoked thought and encouraging conversation with the interviewers.

I felt that the first interview focused on my interests and personality rather than my academic work. The interviewers linked historical ideas to my hobbies rather than the books I had read and the modules I had covered. It was a really interesting opportunity to view my life from a historical perspective! Of course, my interview experience was not representative of all interviews. Discussion is personalised and therefore my experiences are not

a definitive outline of what Oxford interviews entail.

My second interview did not go as smoothly. In a sudden realisation that I was having a conversation with two esteemed historians in Oxford my mind froze, I was unable to answer a simple question that I had been asked. I spent a few minutes looking blank and trying to think. What could have been a humiliating situation was not; the interviewers reassured me that there was nothing to worry about and quickly moved on. It made me realise that what I had been told by the Interview Helpers was true; the interviewers want to bring out the best in you rather than focus on what you cannot do or understand. They were reassuring, friendly, and certainly less intimidating than the mock interviews that I had had at my school. Of course, I was worried about going blank during the interview and it lingered with me after but talking to other students helped me to realise that I wasn't the only one there who didn't have a perfect interview.

The second interview focused on the A level modules that I was studying and also the written work that I sent to the college a few weeks before. The interviewers asked me to outline the arguments of my essay and why I chose to submit that one. They then asked questions based on my essay. The work I submitted was about the development of education in the USSR which led to discussion about the treatment of different age groups under various Soviet leaders. I was then asked to compare some of the points I had raised to Mao's China, another module I studied. The questions were connected to each other and led to debate, it certainly felt more like a discussion than a quiz.

I was never asked about a particular date or event, instead the questions were broad and thematic. This meant that I could use the information and examples that I remembered rather than worrying about those that I did not. Before coming to Merton I had revised my A level work and also familiarised myself with my written work in more detail. This meant that I had a good collection of examples and evidence memorised that I could support my arguments and points with.

Not all colleges follow the same interview process, so it is worth checking rather than

assuming. Many colleges use an unseen extract for the second interview; a student is asked to read a source in an allocated location just before the interview and then discussion is based on the source. Merton takes a different approach and instead focuses on your submitted essay.

For the rest of the time I was in Oxford I didn't have any more interviews. Some students are sent to other colleges for other interviews (you cannot read into this; it is no indication of whether you will receive an offer or not) but I wasn't. This meant that I spent the rest of my time exploring Oxford, making friends, and enjoying the snow that we had! In the evenings there were events such as a film night, quizzes, etc, organised by the interview helpers. Time during the day was generally spent playing endless table tennis matches, games, or exploring Oxford with other interviewees. Of course, there were moments where I felt lost or uncertain or over-thought my interview answers, that was only natural. But generally, I found that there was always a welcome distraction to be found and the interview process was far more welcoming and encouraging than I had expected.



It was snowing when I was at Merton for interviews. It was also near Christmas so the college was full of Christmas trees!

TYPES OF CONTACT HOURS

TUTORIALS

Tutorials are the primary source of teaching for History undergrads. For each module you will have weekly tutorials with a tutor and one or two other students. You will submit an essay before the tutorial which the tutor will read and then discuss throughout the tutorial. Tutorials are a great opportunity to look at a topic in more detail and to also receive personalised feedback on your work.

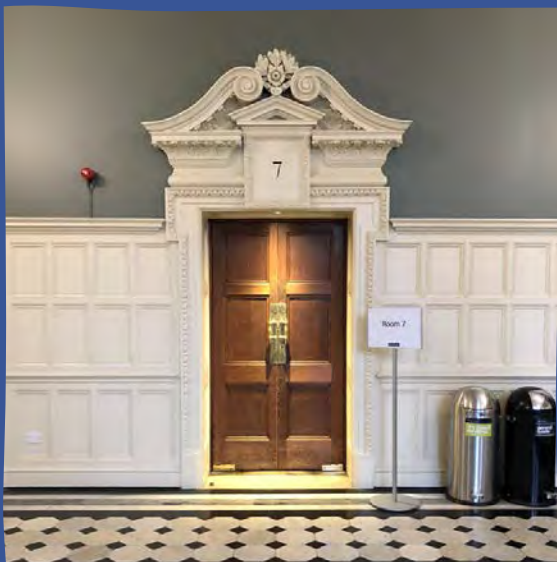


The Radcliffe Camera is the main History library and is also a great place to study.

CLASSES

Classes are introduced in second year and focus on discussion. A group of students taking the same module will meet for about an hour and a half weekly to discuss a specific topic.

A tutor will be present and will introduce themes, questions, and steer the conversation. Generally, the class will start with a student giving a presentation on the topic of the week and then discussion about the presentation and the themes introduced will follow.



A lot of history lectures take place in Exam Schools, situated on the High Street

LECTURES

Historians have lectures about three times per week (this changes depending on the module). During the hour a lecturer, who will be an expert in the field, will give a talk about the topic of the lecture. Each module will have a series of lectures that outline the context, main events, historiography, sources, etc, of the time period/geographical location being studied. Lectures are often chronological and are helpful for gaining general knowledge and understanding of the topic.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HISTORY STUDENT

Morning

I'm generally a late riser and don't get much done in the morning. My day starts slowly, generally with a cup of tea and answering emails. I'm an editor for one of Oxford's student newspapers so I often use the morning to edit and commission articles. I aim to do some work before lunch, generally making notes on a book from the weekly reading list. The great thing about being a History student is that your timetable is flexible. As someone who is definitely not an early bird this suits me and how I like to work.



My room in my 2nd year.



Lunch

Lunch is a catchup in the kitchen with friends. It's generally one of my favourite times of day as we have a chat about our day so far. Sometimes I will go to college for lunch where I will eat in the dining hall. College lunches are often great value and a good alternative if I want a bigger meal.

Early afternoon

I often go to work in a café in the early afternoon as I like to get out of my room but often find the silence of libraries too intense. I prefer background noise while I study; Oxford has a lot of great cafes/places to eat around the city that don't mind you spending a couple of hours over a mug of coffee and a stack of books. The array of options of where to study is another perk of university!

I often visit a library before or after going to a café to get the books I will need for that day and return the ones that I have finished with. I don't work in a café every day as this would be expensive so I will regularly stay at a library and work there.



Vegetarian meal at a formal.

Afternoon

Historians generally only have a few contact hours a week consisting of a tutorial, a couple lectures, and a class (after 1st year). The times and locations of these change termly. Last term my class was at 3:30pm and lasted about an hour and a half. These classes were for a module focusing on the history of madness and mental healing and were a great opportunity for discussion and sharing ideas. I enjoyed walking to and from these classes as I took the route through the University Park.

After the class I often met my friend to go for a run together. There are lots of great places in Oxford to run and I particularly enjoy the range of parks and green spaces.



Punting with friends at the end of Trinity term.

Dinner/late evening

At about 7 I meet my friends for dinner in the kitchen where we each cook (sometimes for each other) and eat together. After dinner we often do things together such as go to an event or do an activity such as getting ice cream, going ice skating, etc. Each week I will have a newspaper meeting and although this term they have been via Zoom, in normal circumstances they often take place in the evening. When I return to my room, I generally do a bit more work and also finish off the journalism work I need to do for the day. When I have finished I read a book or watch something on Netflix to relax before I go to sleep.



Christ Church Meadow at dusk.

Evening

After the run I shower, change, and then continue to work in my room until dinner. This generally includes working my way through the reading list and making notes on the works to build the material for my weekly essay. I sometimes go through and highlight particularly interesting parts or areas that are especially useful for my essay. The day before my essay is due, I start writing and my day consists of writing the essay rather than reading for it. Just before dinner I take a break and use this time to call friends/family or just to relax.



Dinner with friends in the kitchen and at a formal



CHOOSING HISTORY MODULES AT OXFORD (SINGLE HONOURS)

OLIVIA TAN discusses the variety of History modules on offer at Oxford.

There's a huge amount of variety in the History modules at Oxford, taught by some of the leading academics in their field. Over the 3 years of a single honours history degree, the Faculty require you to choose modules that fit these 6 requirements in any combination:

Geographical requirements:

2 British History modules

2 European History modules

1 Global History modules

Period requirements:

1 Medieval Paper (c.500-1450)

1 Early Modern Paper (c.1450-1750)

1 Modern Paper (c.1750-2000)

There are also compulsory modules including Disciplines of History, a finals paper which studies the study of history- it's less complex than it sounds and gives you loads of freedom to choose topics such as nationalism, gender, or medicine in history!

Whilst this might seem like a constraint at first, especially if you know that you have a particular interest in a certain region or era, this ensures that you come away from the three years with a rounded study of history at Oxford. You also might end up liking a topic that you'd otherwise written off and would have never studied!

The modules at Oxford are also being increasingly diversified. Non-Western centric options include:

Imperial and Global History, 1750-1930

The Early Medieval World, 600-1000

The Near East in the Age of Justinian and Mohammed 527-700

The Global Twentieth Century

The Iberian Global Century 1550-1650

Medicine, Empire, and Improvement 1780-1820

History of Madness and Healing in a Global Context

Haiti and Louisiana: The Problem of Revolution in the Age of Slavery

Modules focusing on culture, gender, art, writing, science, and more are also available, whilst modules that initially seem more 'traditional' increasingly include topics that go beyond what has been historically deemed 'important'.

There is a long way to go in diversifying history at Oxford but it a constantly expanding field, and one which is thrilling to be a part of.

History Beyond the Degree

There are lots of exciting and interesting ways to explore history outside of your degree at Oxford.

From talks to societies and events there are plenty of opportunities to express your interest in your subject beyond the weekly essays...

Oxford History Review

This is a personal favourite of ours! Oxford History Review is an example of how students at Oxford are eager to engage with their subject outside of their degree. This magazine provides a platform to write and read about studying history at Oxford and a range of historical topics and opinions. We welcome submissions from all Oxford students and encourage those without previous writing experience to submit articles.

Talks and workshops

The abundance of talks and workshops that take place around Oxford is unparalleled. Every evening you will find an opportunity to attend an event in colleges around the city, and many of them are about history.

Volunteering at the Ashmolean

We are lucky to have the Ashmolean Museum nestled in the centre of Oxford. It is a fascinating museum to visit and their events and guest exhibitions are generally free for Oxford students. If you would like to be more involved with the Ashmolean, there are opportunities to volunteer at the museum. This includes a regular shift where you will help visitors and be involved in the daily upkeep. The Ashmolean also hosts events, lectures, and talks throughout the year.

Oxford University History Society

The History Society hosts lots of events throughout the academic year including guest lectures, social events, and cocktail nights. There is a range of both academic and social events where historians from across the university can meet and enjoy history together. Membership to the society costs only £15 for your entire degree which entitles you to free access to all the events.

The Undergraduate Historians Assembly

The Undergraduate Historians Assembly is a committee of students who act as representatives across all faculty committees, ranging from the Admissions Committee and the Exams Committee, all the way up to the Faculty Board. Whilst all these Committees sound complicated and bureaucratic, they form the fabric of university decision making and they really are the rooms in which things happen, plans are made, and precedents are set. Being a Representative is a really exciting opportunity in which to make a difference for your fellow historians and make sure our voice is heard. There are lots of ways to get involved with the committee during your time at Oxford.

College History Societies

Many colleges have their own history societies and although these are much smaller than the Oxford University History Society, they host interesting events. These events are often free to attend and include guest speakers or lecturers from within the college presenting their work. College events are cosy and enjoyable and are often followed by drinks and snacks where you can socialise and meet other historians.

ACCESS RESOURCES:

We have made a list of access resources that you might find interesting and helpful. There are numerous societies, events and resources working to make the University more open, welcoming and accessible to all students.



Humans of Oxford University

Real stories from current Oxford students.



@oxfordstudents

The official Oxford Student Union account.



@joinzg

Mentoring service matching up university students with state school applicants.

Oxford First Gen

For those who are the first in their family to go to university.

@mertonjcraccess

Most colleges have student-run accounts, so have a look for the ones which interest you!

@TargetOxbridge

Helping Black African and Caribbean students in the UK gain places at Oxbridge

Oxford African & Caribbean Society

@letsoxplore

@projectaccess

Oxford University Islamic Society

@sisters_at_oxford

@oxoutreach

Oxford University LGBTQ+ Society

@studyatoxford

@inside_uni



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