



History

Full details about the course are available from

<http://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/prospective-undergrads>

The subject at Selwyn

As well as being the College closest to the History Faculty, History is one of Selwyn's strongest subjects, and Selwyn historians have a fine reputation in the Faculty. The heart of Selwyn History teaching is a weekly supervision. We are keen to maintain the tradition of one teacher to one pupil, and tailor supervisions to students' individual needs. We also run regular year-group seminars on general historical topics. Our new joint courses with Politics and with a Modern Language give students different ways to study history at Selwyn in close contact with those studying the History course. (See separate sheets)

We are keen to help students to make the most of the great flexibility and variety that the Cambridge course offers. Two things distinguish Selwyn History. First, we encourage undergraduates to range widely in their choice of courses in the first two years of the degree, and avoid seeking to repeat their sixth form syllabus in the first two terms. The second distinctive feature is the positive encouragement we give to those wishing to undertake a dissertation in Part II. This is piece of extended research and writing, up to ten thousand words in length. Selwyn is keen to assist students to prepare dissertations and provides some financial assistance towards the cost of travel and research.

There is a thriving History Society that organises a variety of events, including speaker meetings. This brings together the whole community of postgraduate History students and Fellows as well as History undergraduates. The Master of the College, who himself studied History as an undergraduate, also regularly hosts visiting speakers who address students and Faculty on topics that include historical interest. The College Library holds over 40,000 books, and in the large history section you will find books of central importance to your course. The holdings are continually updated and the College Library will move into a purpose-built new building at the beginning of 2021

The College hosts the prestigious annual Ramsay-Murray Lecture. This is usually on a historical topic. Speakers have included Sir Keith Thomas, Sir Michael Howard, Paul Kennedy, Niall Ferguson, Sir Ian Kershaw, Sir David Cannadine, Quentin Skinner and Mark Mazower. The 2016 lecture "The Obama Legacy" was delivered by Professor Theda Skocpol of Harvard University, it is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wfGna_egDU. The 2018 speaker was the distinguished BBC correspondent Frank Gardner.

The Teaching Fellows

Selwyn has four History Fellows and can therefore provide supervisions on many subjects in College as well as being in a strong position to exchange teaching with other Colleges. Dr Mike Sewell specialises in modern American history. Dr David Smith specialises in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century British and European history. Dr Christopher Briggs is a Senior Lecturer in Medieval British Social and Economic History. Dr Robert Lee is a Lecturer in American History.

Qualities we are looking for

We are looking for ambitious and hard-working students who relish a challenge and seek to excel. Study at University is very different from work at school. If you read History at Cambridge, you will be expected to organise your own routine of study.

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Your supervisors will discuss a weekly essay based on intensive reading with you each week, and your Director of Studies will keep a close eye on your progress, but there will be no one standing over you organising your daily timetable for you. Only those with the deepest commitment to History will have the motivation and stamina necessary to cope with the course, and to continue to improve their skills.

We look for an ability to excel in thinking and writing about history. We seek signs of a genuine curiosity about the past and are on the look-out for independent-minded candidates. A talent for historical analysis is essential, as is a voracious appetite for historical reading. Selwyn has recently produced a number of young scholars who have graduated at or near the top of the University Class List, and have won University as well as College Prizes for excellence as well as History Prizes. Many of our students have gone on to undertake postgraduate study in History or other subjects, where they have again excelled.

Written work

If you apply to us you will be asked to submit one or two pieces of recent and marked essay(s) from your sixth form course, which will be used as a basis for discussion in one of the interviews. These should not be written especially for the occasion and should be on a subject which has especially interested and excited you, and which you would like to talk about at interview. One may be a timed essay, but should not be work based on stimulus materials (from documents modules). We seek to stretch candidates and gauge how they respond to new insights, go about tackling problems, and react to new ideas or questions.

Interviews

On the day of the interviews you will be given a short piece of historical writing to read. You will then be asked to discuss it in one of your interviews.

You will also have a shorter general interview. This is intended to let us find out more about your motivation in applying for History at Cambridge. It is intended to give us a fuller sense of your aptitude for your chosen course, the maturity of your approach towards academic work, and your historical and other interests.

Finding out more and Open Days

The Faculty will be participating in the virtual Cambridge Open Days on 2 and 3 July. Full details are also available on our website.

Full details about the course – including the new structure that years one and two of the degree will feature from 2021 - are available from

<https://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/prospective-undergrads/history-course>