

Dear Geography fresher,

Firstly, congratulations on making your offer and welcome to Sidney! My fellow Sidney geographers and I (pictured below) look forward to embracing you into the college very soon.



I'm Ben (top left), a soon to be second-year geographer who will be acting as your geography fresher's rep for the year. In this role, I will aim to act as a port of call, providing answers to any questions you may have, whether it may be life at Sidney, the Geographical Tripos, or general queries.

Sidney has many benefits as a college that contribute to such an enjoyable university experience. Its location within the city is unmatched – opposite Sainsburys, a stone's throw away from the best Cambridge night life and less than a ten-minute walk from the Geography department. Alongside being ideally located, the college is also ideally sized. Because Sidney is a fairly small college, with around 600 total students, socialising is made very easy and friendships quickly develop, both within your year, and with fellow students from other years, and this creates a strong sense of community and involvement. You will soon meet your college parents, one of whom will be a second-year geographer like myself. Your parents will help to introduce you to college life and act as another port of call to assist you with anything you may be unsure of.

Geography at Sidney is also a community within itself. As a subject on the smaller size, yearly cohorts generally consist of between three to five students. This allows you to acquaint yourself well with every geographer within Sidney and makes for a comfortable experience. In good time, you will become familiarised with the 'Sidney bench' in the department – a true Sidney Geography tradition. You will also soon be introduced to the Chorley Society, named after Richard Chorley, a respected geographer who taught at Sidney for many years. The society involves a student organised seminar series, alongside events and an annual dinner (from which the photograph above is taken). This is a great place to share ideas and explore geography beyond the Tripos lecture material. As you may (or may not be) aware, our Director of Studies, Catherine, is away on maternity leave for the duration of Michaelmas, so will unfortunately be unable to greet you in fresher's week. However, our temporary DoS, Francesco, is equally as friendly and enthusiastic about the subject and will ensure you settle comfortably into Sidney.

The first year of the Geographical Tripos is structured by the department and provides no choice of modules, introducing you to a wide variety of geographical studies, ranging from Cultural Geography, to the Environment in the Quaternary to Life on Earth. This is extremely useful in allowing for the exploration of such a dynamic and vibrant subject and informing your selection of modules in your second year. Pre-reading through the summer, beyond what has been set by your DoS, isn't

particularly necessary, as the reading lists for lectures and supervisions are often extensive and sufficient. I would personally advise you to enjoy the rest of your break! However, if you intend to do some preparatory reading, Foucauldian theories of discourse and power, as well as work by Edward Said, such as Orientalism, are useful across the breadth of human geography. Whilst you may wish to purchase this material prior to arriving in Cambridge, every other book, journal or article necessary for the course of your degree is available at the Sidney library, Geography library and University library, so there is no need to buy lots of books! To keep up with the course, I've personally found downloading the online timetable from the Geography intranet to my phone (you'll be informed on how to do this) to be a lifesaver this year and would highly recommend it for staying up to date with possible lecture changes.

You are likely to have one or two supervisions per week this year. These tend to require an essay but can sometimes be just reading and discussion. Whilst this may seem daunting, you will be eased into this routine through Michaelmas, so try not to worry too much about work during fresher's week, as you'll come to realise it wasn't all that bad! This is not to say that the work beyond Michaelmas is unbearable – it is very much manageable! Human essays tend to be 2000-3000 words, with physical ones being shorter at 1200-2000, both of which can often be written in a day, given you've prepared well. The supervisions can range from groups of two to six and this is where you'll receive feedback on your essay and discuss further the topic in question. This is a great time to ask questions and clarify any uncertainties in understanding, as you have an expert in the field at your disposal!

You will tend to have lectures daily, ranging from one to three per day, however some weeks you may be lucky and have no lectures one day (allowing for a guilt-free lie in). Unfortunately, geography lectures aren't currently recorded, so I strongly advise attending every lecture, if possible, as lecturers can vary quite drastically in what they decide to include within their slides. Luckily, Sidney is very close to Downing Site, and can be reached on foot within ten minutes, and if cycling, in less than five. I, personally, was unsure on how to approach note taking in lectures, but soon found digital notes on my laptop to be most effective for me, as it allowed for easy organisation and editing.

Finally, I will share with you my motto from my first year - 'work hard, play hard.' I like to think that it's important to treat yourself, relax and have fun outside of your academia. Maintaining a work-life balance is essential and is, ultimately, manageable, despite what you may expect. There is truly something for everyone, may it be college sport, university-wide societies or Union debates. College events and bops are a great way to socialise and unwind and are always good fun. The college bar and formals are also nice for chilled evenings and celebrating occasions such as birthdays. For those who enjoy it, the Cambridge night life also guarantees a good night and offers regular LGBT+ nights. Conclusively, I urge you to enjoy your first year here with us at Sidney, however that may be!

I hope this has been of some help and eased your mind with any worries or uncertainties you may be having. The Sidney geographers and I look forward to meeting you soon, and until then wish you all the best. If there is anything I've failed to cover in this letter, feel free to get in touch at bjs64@cam.ac.uk, or alternatively, on Facebook at 'Ben Speakman'.

See you soon,

Ben