

Dear Sidney HSPS Fresher,

Hi! Henry and Niamh here, we're both second years in HSPS and we're your Subject Reps! As Subject Reps, we'll try to answer any question or concerns you might have about the course. First of all, congratulations on getting your offer! We're really looking forward to meeting you when you arrive in October. Sidney is a really friendly college with a great community, and you'll get to know lots of other students really quickly. There are always plenty of social events going on, be that in the gardens, at formal halls, at balls, or in the college bar or JCR. Sidney is also very central (opposite Sainsbury's!) and everything you could possibly need is probably just around the corner!

HSPS at Sidney is a relatively small subject – there are five of us in second year and only two in third year. This means you will get to know all the HSPS students, and 2nd/3rd years are generally willing to help if you are struggling with essays – I know they really helped us in our first year. As you will know, HSPS is a super flexible degree course which allows you to choose from a wide range of subjects. In first year, you have the option to do what are known as the 'core four' – politics, international relations, sociology and social anthropology – but there are also other options such as psychology, biological anthropology and archaeology. There will be an introductory lecture for each module before you have to make your choice, so don't worry if you are undecided.

Teaching is through a mixture of lectures and supervisions. You'll have eight hours of lectures a week, none of which are held before 10am which is amazing, especially if you like going out! They are only a 10-15 minute walk from Sidney through town. The libraries you'll use depends a little on which options you choose, although you should find most of the books you need in the Sidney college library (which is open 24 hours a day). Something perhaps to think about – although you can definitely experiment with this over your degree – is whether you want to type or handwrite your lecture and reading notes. People do all sorts of combinations, so it's really about what suits you best, although bear in mind that most supervisors will probably want typed essays, but you'll be handwriting in exams (unless you have exam arrangements).

As well as lectures, you'll have twelve hours of supervisions a term. Supervisions are normally with a member of staff and one or two other students and will be based around an essay you've been set. Sidney has several HSPS staff members so your supervisions will mostly be within college, although this is not always the case. It's quite a different teaching system from A-level, and although it takes a little while to get used to, it is a really fulfilling way of learning. Even if supervisors might seem scary, remember that they want you to learn and do your best!

You've probably been sent a pre-arrival reading list, but don't worry too much. It's useful to have a read through a couple of overviews, but all of the reading you need you'll be doing once you get here. You especially don't need to buy any books, as all those that you need once you arrive will be in the libraries, and many are also available to access online. It is useful to come with perhaps one folder for each option though, and plenty of paper and pens!

We do want to stress though, that university life is not all about work – it's also a lot of fun! There are plenty of sports teams and societies that you can get involved in. We really recommend going to the freshers' fair and signing up to try a few things out, as it's a great way to meet new people and take some time out from work. Of course, there are also lots of social events such as bops (basically a disco in the college bar) and pub quizzes which you'll experience during Fresher's week – our personal favourite was the silent disco! Life at Cambridge can be busy and hectic, and you really don't need to fill every spare minute of time with an extracurricular activity; sometimes just chilling in the JCR, bar, gardens, or in someone's room chatting is the best way to unwind.

I know this may seem overwhelming, and your first week at Cambridge will be really busy, but make sure to take time out to enjoy yourself and get to know people. Please feel free to message us on

Facebook (Henry Nolan and Niamh Hodges) or email us (hfn23@cam.ac.uk and nh505@cam.ac.uk) with any questions you might have. I look forward to meeting you all, and hope that this will be the start of three amazing years for you!

See you soon,

Henry and Niamh