



PPE at Hertford College

Welcome to Hertford College! We hope you enjoy your Open Day visit, and we look forward to speaking with you and answering your questions about the Philosophy, Politics and Economics degree, the admissions process, and life as an undergraduate in an Oxford College. This handout gives an overview of some of these things, including advice on how to prepare in each of the three subjects. For more information, see our “PPE at Hertford” website at: <http://ppe.hertford.ox.ac.uk/>. This gives details regarding tutors, courses, teaching methods, college and social life etc., as well as relevant pictures and links (including to other College and University admissions materials). If you then have further queries, *please feel free to get in touch with us personally, using the contact details on that site.*

Hertford College accepts around eight students per year in PPE, making them a small and quite intimate group who will get to know each other, and us tutors, very well over the three years of the PPE degree. Some of the current PPE students will attend the Open Days at Hertford College so you will be able to get a feel for the place directly from them.

Details about the application process, including school qualifications, the PPE Test, and interviews are given in the “Application Procedure” section of our website. Please also visit the University site at: http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/courses/philosophy_politics.html (which is linked from our website). You may apply for PPE having done any combination of subjects at school; it is not necessary to have studied Philosophy, Politics or Economics previously. A strong background in Mathematics, while not a prerequisite, is very useful and we strongly urge applicants without A-level Mathematics (or equivalent) to consider taking AS Mathematics (e.g. in your final year at school).

All candidates are required to register in advance for, and to take (normally at their own school or college), a Thinking Skills Assessment test, which this year will be on 3rd November 2010. Section 1 of this test lasts 90 minutes, and involves 50 multiple choice questions designed to assess your ability in critical thinking and problem solving. Section 2, which lasts 30 minutes, requires you to write a short essay on one of three specified topics. More details, including specimen papers and preparation advice, can be found on the “TSA Oxford” website which is linked from our own “PPE Test” webpage. (Note that candidates are no longer required to submit any written work as part of their application, since we are able to rely on the Thinking Skills Assessment essay task to assess your writing abilities.)

Each candidate who comes to interview at Hertford will have two interviews, one for Philosophy and Politics combined and one for Economics, each lasting approximately 20 minutes. Your interviewers will want to find out if you can think clearly and analytically (and, in the case of Economics, mathematically). They are less concerned with what you know than your academic potential, your level of interest, and the way in which you think about issues and are able to discuss them critically.

For general advice on preparing for interviews, please again see our “PPE at Hertford” website (especially the page on “What to Expect at Interview”, in the “Application Procedure” section). Some points here are fairly obvious, for example that you should be keeping in touch with current affairs, following public debates (in quality newspapers, *The Economist*, radio and television discussions etc.), reading around the subjects, practising your maths, and generally keeping your mind active. The following pages of this handout give more detailed guidance on the three disciplines concerned, with appropriate reading suggestions that we hope you will find enjoyable as well as useful.

Discovering Philosophy

Many students, especially those attracted by the other elements of a joint degree such as PPE, come to Philosophy without a clear idea of what it is. So if you are thinking that you might want to study Philosophy, you may like to read some background material to give you an idea of what it involves.

Philosophy attracts a fair share of fanatics and nutters, so you can't take for granted that every book or website that describes itself as "philosophical" is worth reading. Many of these will be putting forward moral or spiritual views in a way akin to political or religious preaching: "Here is my philosophy of life – follow me!". But Philosophy as an intellectual discipline is quite different from this sort of thing: its hallmark is rigour and objectivity, with careful argument for its conclusions rather than persuasive rhetoric. This doesn't mean *at all* that Philosophy can't be *fun*. On the contrary, those of us who love Philosophy do so precisely because we find it such fun to exercise our minds thinking through fascinating puzzles in this way. If you enjoy maths, or strategy games like chess or Othello, or puzzles such as crosswords or Sudoku, then you might well get a lot of similar enjoyment from philosophical puzzles too. But even if you don't, you're likely to find philosophical puzzles interesting and even compelling, because they often arise from trying to address the key questions of "life, the universe, and everything", so the answers really matter.

Fortunately, there are now quite a few good books available, giving tasters of various areas of Philosophy in a way that brings out this fascination and fun, being accessible but at the same time sufficiently rigorous to be genuinely educational. Here are some personal choices: I suggest you browse these in a good bookshop such as Blackwell's in Oxford, and see which you like best.

Stephen Law, *The Philosophy Gym* (Headline Book Publishing Ltd, 2003)

Simon Blackburn, *Think* (Oxford University Press, 1999)

Peter Singer, *How Are We to Live?* (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Earl Conee and Theodore Sider, *Riddles of Existence* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Edward Craig, *Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

The classic of the genre is also excellent, if understandably a bit dated:

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1912)

It's also well worth looking at books by authors such as Julian Baggini and Nigel Warburton, who have produced several good introductions to aspects of the subject. The ideal is a book that really grabs you, and is able to make you feel the fascination and significance of the sorts of problems that Philosophy presents. If you have specific philosophical interests and would like more suggestions, please feel free to email me: peter.millican@hertford.ox.ac.uk.

For more details about Philosophy at Hertford College, please see:

<http://philosophy.hertford.ox.ac.uk/>

Other material – including pictures of events involving PPEists and other Philosophy students (who tend to mix a lot) – can be found on the "PPE at Hertford" admissions site (<http://ppe.hertford.ox.ac.uk/>).

If you want to know a bit more about my personal interests, take a look at:

<http://philosophy.hertford.ox.ac.uk/peter.htm>

which also links to a recorded interview (for the series *Philosophy Bites*) about David Hume. If you find this interesting, then you're likely to enjoy Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (also linked from my page), which would add some more historical perspective to the reading above.

I hope that you decide to apply to Hertford College, and look forward to meeting you in December.

Dr Peter Millican, peter.millican@hertford.ox.ac.uk, Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy

Politics at Hertford College

Politics is a tremendously rewarding subject to study: on past experience, once PPEists start studying Politics, they tend not to stop! It is offered not only as part of PPE, but also History and Politics – the college welcomes applications in both subjects, and typically admits around eight PPE applicants, and also a handful of History joint honours applicants, which can include Politics.

One component of the first year Politics course is Comparative Government, focusing mainly on the operation of democratic institutions in Britain, France, Germany and the USA (though other countries are also considered). Typically the course might start with a discussion of various theoretical claims, for example “Emerging democracies are more likely to succeed if they are parliamentary rather than presidential”, or “Majoritarian voting systems tend to lead to two dominant parties”. Then we consider how well these apply to, and explain, the development of politics in the countries we are studying.

The other component of the first year Politics course is Political Theory. Students look at some key texts by Marx, Rousseau, and Mill, as well as studying some contemporary topics, such as power (“Is power held by elites in modern societies?”), liberty (“If I am poor, am I free to dine at the Ritz?”), and the application of economic models to the study of Politics.

In the second and third years, Politics students take two core papers out of five (International Relations, Political Sociology, Comparative Government, Political Theory, and 20th Century British Politics), and there is a vast array of optional subjects, ranging from the Politics of Sub-Saharan Africa, through Statistical Methods, to Marxism, to International Relations during the Cold War. Amongst the most popular choices at Hertford have been Latin American Politics, West European Politics and Classical Political Thought, but students are encouraged to follow their own interests.

Teaching is delivered in tutorials, usually in pairs though sometimes individually. Students are encouraged to collaborate outside tutorials, and lectures organised by the Faculty are also an important part of the course. There are numerous political societies in Oxford: political parties have their own student organisations, there is the Oxford Union society, which hosts debates and speaker meetings, and the European Affairs Society – to name but a few! Hertford College also has its own Politics Society. Taking advantage of these sorts of talks and discussions can greatly enrich your study of the subject.

So what are tutors looking for in potential Politics students? First, a keen interest in the subject! We would expect students to be interested in current affairs – not just political trivia, but also some of the big questions underlying contemporary politics. Secondly, strong analytical skills are important: successful Politics students often enjoy a good argument, getting to the heart of issues, unpacking the case advanced by others and the assumptions on which it rests. Although quite a few students have done History A-level (and a handful have studied Politics before), for the Politics course this is by no means essential, and there are no compulsory subjects.

We will be looking, above all, for interest and potential at interview – an ability to think seriously about problems in understanding the world. There is no compulsory reading for the interview, although it would help to think about contemporary political debates. To get a flavour of the subject, you might find it handy to dip into books like:

Jonathan Wolff: *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (OUP, 2006)

Patrick Dunleavy *et al.*: *Developments in British Politics 8* (Macmillan, 2006)

Tony Wright: *British Politics: A very short introduction* (OUP, 2003)

Adam Swift: *Political Philosophy: A Beginners Guide for Students and Politicians* (Polity, 2006)

Dr Radek Zubek, radoslaw.zubek@hertford.ox.ac.uk, Fellow and Tutor in Politics
Mr James Panton, james.panton@politics.ox.ac.uk, Lecturer in Politics
Please do get in touch if you have any queries – we’re happy to help!

Economics at Hertford College

Oxford University offers Economics as part of Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE), Economics and Management (E&M), History and Economics (HE), and Engineering, Economics and Management (EEM). Hertford College welcomes applications for all of these subjects and typically admits eight PPE applicants, eight Economics and Management applicants, and one or two in each of the other degrees.

Economics is a subject that gives students the tools with which to analyse a broad set of issues, ranging from the decisions of the UK's Monetary Policy Committee, the high growth rates of China and India, financial crises, environmental policies, and the London congestion charge, to illegal downloading of music from the Internet. An appreciation of Economics and the general workings of the economy have become increasingly necessary to make sense of governmental policy-making, the conduct of businesses and the enormous changes in economic systems occurring throughout the world. Besides being highly valued by potential employers, our PPE students find Economics very rewarding, especially when they are able to analyse issues, interpret articles and examine human behaviour through the lens of economic theory.

Since 2006, Hertford College has had one Economics Fellow, Dr Anthony Murphy, and one Stipendiary Lecturer in Economics, Dr Dimitra Petropoulou. Dr Murphy is leaving Hertford at the end of the 2009/2010 academic year to take up a new position abroad, and the procedure has already begun for appointing a new Fellow by next summer. Till then, Dr Petropoulou will run Economics at Hertford College and a second Lecturer will be appointed for the academic year 2010/2011. Hertford College is committed to offering in-house tutorials for the major core courses and we will continue to carry out all first year and core second year tutorial teaching at Hertford, as well as certain options courses, with students taught in small groups of 2 to 4.

In their first year, PPE students take the Introduction to Economics course. The first year Economics tutorials take place in Michaelmas Term (October to December) and Hilary Term (January to March). The terms have a length of 8 weeks, so there are 16 Economics tutorials altogether in the first year. These are split roughly into 10 weeks of Microeconomics (incorporating the Mathematics content) and 6 weeks of Macroeconomics.

Tutorials in Introduction to Economics are taught alongside weekly lectures, which form an important part of the introductory course and inform tutorial teaching. The lectures are for all students across Oxford University taking the Introduction to Economics course, and so they are held in large lecture theatres.

University-level Economics makes use of mathematical techniques (e.g. optimisation involving differentiation; use of partial derivatives etc.) that are taught alongside Microeconomics. While A-level Mathematics is not a prerequisite for application, it will certainly make your first year much easier if you have this qualification. For those without A-level Mathematics, we urge you to consider taking the AS at least.

Some applicants voice concerns over not having done A-level Economics. But Economics is taught rather differently at University, so while those with A-level Economics may have a small initial advantage (through a familiarity with some Economics concepts and terminology), this is only short-lived. Typically, all students are at a similar level within a month or so, and those without an A-level will almost certainly have caught up by the end of the first term.

In the second year, Economics students take three core papers (Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, and Quantitative Methods), taught over all three terms. Students wishing to take further options in Economics are spoilt for choice with a large range of courses on offer, including International Economics, Economics of Industry, Money and Banking, Public Economics, Economics of OECD Countries, and British Economic History, to list just a few.

Applicants are naturally anxious to prepare as well as possible for their Oxford interviews. The Economics interview will typically revolve around discussion of some Economics issues – perhaps recent events in the popular press or discussion of general ideas in Economics – as well as some mathematics.

Your interviewers will be aware of the fact that you may not have A-level Mathematics or A-level Economics, and the sorts of questions you will be asked will take this on board. We are not so much interested in the Economics you have been taught at school, but your powers of reasoning and your ability to think critically and discuss issues.

Showing a keen interest in Economics is important! We would expect students to be interested in the subject and to have taken the time to read about it, whether by reading *The Economist* regularly, newspapers more generally, or recently published books on the subject.

While interviews vary, it is reasonable to expect to be asked whether there is anything you have read that has interested you in particular. Moreover, if your personal statement indicates that you have read a particular book, you may be asked to discuss some aspect of this book during the course of the interview.

There is no compulsory reading for the interview, but thinking about economic issues and their implications, for example, rising food prices, high oil prices, the prospect of an economic downturn, or anything else that interests you, is useful.

Some books that can give you a flavour for Economics are indicated below. These are readily available in bookshops and on websites such as Amazon:

Levitt, S. and Dubner, S. (2009), *Superfreakonomics: Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance*, Penguin

Levitt, S. and Dubner, S. (2007), *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, Penguin

Collier, P. (2008), *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It?*, Oxford University Press

Harford, T. (2007), *The Undercover Economist*, Little Brown

Sachs, J. (2005), *The End of Poverty: How We Can Make it Happen in Our Lifetime*, Penguin

Kay, J. (2004), *The Truth About Markets: Why Some Countries are Rich and Others Remain Poor*, Penguin

Kay, J. (2004), *The Everlasting Lightbulb: How Economics Illuminates the World*, Erasmus Press

Krugman, P. (1999), *The Accidental Theorist*, Penguin

Landsburg, S. (1995), *The Armchair Economist*, Free Press

Dixit, A. and Nalebuff, B. (1993), *Thinking Strategically*, Norton

We look forward to receiving your application. Enjoy the Open Day and do ask us any questions you may have. Should you have any further queries, please don't hesitate to contact me personally by email.

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