History

The History course allows candidates to cover a wide range of options from ancient to contemporary history, with a slight concentration on the history of the British Isles but with the possibility of studying most parts of the world.

The History Faculty is one of the largest in the United Kingdom and is consistently ranked as the best in research and teaching assessments. It has internationally recognised experts in all relevant fields of study. For more information about the History course at Cambridge, see the University website.

History at Peterhouse

Peterhouse historians such as Herbert Butterfield, Maurice Cowling, David Knowles, Hugh Trevor-Roper and Tony Wrigley have played a prominent role in the intellectual development of the modern historical profession. The College currently has five Fellows in History, who cover, between them, ancient, medieval, early modern, modern and contemporary history and who teach across British, European and extra-European history and the history of political thought. As a result, most supervisions in your first and second year, and many in your final year, may take place in College. The Peterhouse History Society meets regularly and is organized by our undergraduates. It invites distinguished speakers from outside Cambridge to talk about their work in an informal setting. The Ward Library – named after one of the editors of The Cambridge Modern History – houses one of the most complete collections of modern historical literature in the University, tailored to the needs of undergraduate historians.

Students’ views

‘I really enjoyed my time studying History at Peterhouse - knowing that I was working and living in the oldest college in Cambridge, complete with lots of traditions, definitely added to the experience! The large cohort sizes and the friendly fellows means that there is a lovely community of historians within college, who are always willing both to offer support and to socialise. On the work side of things, the library is brilliantly stocked, and Peterhouse undergrads tend to get the best supervisors Cambridge has to offer. Lecturers and other historians from across the university also always comment favourably on the calibre of Peterhouse historians, which is nice to hear! If I had my time again, I would definitely apply for History at Peterhouse - I don’t think any other college offers the same experience for an undergraduate historian.’

Ellie, History graduate 2019, now Medieval History MPhil student at Peterhouse
Course requirements

Applicants for History will normally have studied some period of history to A level or equivalent; however A level History is not a requirement. One or more essay-based subjects are desirable, particularly if they have looked at topics from a historical perspective.

The History Faculty website has lots of information of interest to prospective students, as well as a Virtual Classroom offering advice on how to structure your extra-curricular study.

The application process

Candidates should expect two interviews. One interview will be based largely on discussion of written work – for this, we ask candidates to submit two examples of recent written work. Essays are preferable to a source-criticism exercise or similar. A second interview will consider the candidate’s comprehension and analysis of a short written text, which will have been made available to the candidate shortly before the interview. No preparation or specialist knowledge is required – we wish to assess how you read and cope with unfamiliar material of the kind that you will regularly encounter in your historical work as an undergraduate.

In the past, all applicants for History have been asked to sit a written assessment. These form part of our evaluation of candidates’ abilities and potential. Due to the ongoing pandemic, arrangements for this year’s written assessment remain under review. Information will be added to the College website later in the year.

Typical conditional offers

Our typical conditional offer for History is A*AA at A level. IB offers are usually for a minimum of 40-42 points, to include 776 or 777 at Higher level in relevant subjects. Offers are designed to be realistic, taking into account individual circumstances, and to reflect potential and likely levels of achievement. Most of those who receive offers will attain the grades required.