History and Politics

History and Politics at Cambridge is an exciting Honours degree which offers subjects from our highly-regarded History and Politics & International Relations courses, together with bespoke papers which will allow students to explore the space between the two disciplines.

Students will develop skills in analysing the operation of power across institutions and societies around the world, and explore how different forms of evidence can be used to understand the past and the present. They will be able to choose from a wide range of topics in British, European, US and World history, the history of political thought, international relations, and comparative politics.

Cambridge is uniquely placed to teach History and Politics & International Relations together. Both Faculties are widely regarded as world-leading. 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. The Department of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) is a medium-sized department with about 30 academics with a huge range of specialisms. It has particular research strengths in international politics, international history and international law, comparative politics and political thought.

History & Politics at Peterhouse

Peterhouse historians such as Herbert Butterfield and Maurice Cowling have played a prominent role in developing the fields of modern historical scholarship and the history of political thought. The College currently has six Fellows in History and Politics, who cover, between them, ancient, medieval, early modern, modern and contemporary history and who teach across British, European and extra-European history, with specialisms in the history of political thought, modern British politics, international relations, and the environment. The Peterhouse History Society and the Peterhouse Politics Society, organised by our undergraduates, meet regularly to hear from distinguished speakers from outside Cambridge. The Ward Library houses one of the most complete collections of historical and related material in the University, tailored to the needs of undergraduates studying History & Politics.

Course requirements

Applicants will have a variety of relevant examination qualifications, though not necessarily in both politics and history; they will be expected to demonstrate an interest in both subjects and will be assessed on their potential to succeed in them. Strong applicants will probably 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 application process

We ask all applicants in History and Politics to send us two examples of recent written work, which may be discussed at interview. Candidates should normally expect two interviews: one in History and one in Politics. The former 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 either interview, candidates should be prepared to discuss their relevant interests and potential directions they may wish to follow.

In the past, all applicants for History & Politics have been asked to sit a History 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 and Politics will be 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.