Human, Social and Political Sciences

The Human, Social and Political Sciences (HSPS) course is a three-year degree that offers a broad background in the human, social, and political sciences. Subjects include politics and international relations, social anthropology or sociology. This course allows students the flexibility to explore their interests across these various subjects whilst still gaining the specialist knowledge to ensure they leave as experts in their discipline(s). For more information, please see the University and Faculty websites.

The three main themes within this subject are:

1. **Social Anthropology** (overlapping and complementing the Archaeology course)
2. **International Relations and Politics** (students may also be interested in the History and Politics course)
3. **Sociology**

For information on the structure of the course, please see the University website or prospectus. The Directors of Studies at the college will help you to work out a path through the degree that best suits you as an individual. This means supporting you in seeking to develop your intellectual potential through your choices. Second and third years involve advanced study in either one or two specific subjects. In addition, as part of the HSPS degree it is also possible to take a limited number of courses in Psychology and in Archaeology. You will graduate from Cambridge having specialised in one or two of the subjects above.

**HSPS at Peterhouse**

Peterhouse has a strong tradition in many of the subjects that make up the HSPS course. The College has excellent facilities, including the well-stocked Ward library. Peterhouse is well located between the two main sites where HSPS teaching takes place. It is also extremely well situated for the University Library, the Seeley Library and the Social and Political Sciences Library in the New Museums Site. Peterhouse also has a thriving student-run Politics Society and a History Society.

Peterhouse has two internal Director of Studies for HSPS. Prof. Laura Diaz Anadon, who holds the Professorship of Climate Change Policy, is Director of Studies for Part Is and Part IIs in HSPS focussed on Politics and International Relations. Prof. John Robb, Professor of European Prehistory, is director of Studies for the Part IIs focussing on Social Anthropology.
Students’ views

‘I was in the first cohort of HSPS students at Peterhouse, when they began offering the course in 2017. I think Peterhouse is really lucky to have a small cohort of students doing the subject (two in my year, six in the most recent year) as it means you get to know all your course mates in college really well, but are also likely to branch out and make friends across different colleges. Our Director of Studies Laura is also wonderful and puts in a lot of work to make sure we get good supervisors for our papers, and has been really helpful in my applications for further study / work. I was also lucky as I specialised in the history of political thought, and the course director for one of my papers was a fellow at Peterhouse and agreed to supervise me for two papers. Lastly, Peterhouse is also in a prime location for HSPS students - most of the sociology and anthropology lectures are on Mill Lane (quite literally 5 seconds away from our library), and the politics lectures are at Sidgwick, which is ten minutes’ walk away.’

Rachel, HSPS finalist 2020

Course requirements

No previous study of a social science is necessary. No specific A Level (or equivalent) subjects are required.

It may be helpful if your subjects relate to the area of the course in which you are hoping to specialise, e.g. History or Sociology for Social Anthropology etc. However, most subjects are relevant and a mix of science and arts subjects is welcomed. HSPS is a broad course, so a range of subjects will provide a good background – from Mathematics to social sciences (e.g. Psychology, Politics and Geography) and arts (e.g. English, History and modern languages).

We are looking for candidates with an outstanding academic track record, strong academic interests and a keen intellectual interest in the course. We do not expect students to be interested in all the subjects on offer in the degree. Neither do we expect you to know exactly what you wish to do when you apply. It is more important that you show an intellectual curiosity and a passion for understanding the world than that you have any particular set of subject interests.

The application process

In the past, all applicants for HSPS 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. We ask candidates to submit two examples of recent written work.

Candidates should expect two interviews. Both of these will be subject-based, and before one of them you will be given 10 minutes to read a short text which will be discussed during the interview. No special preparation is required for the interviews, although applicants should ensure that they are fully familiar with all material that has been provided as a part of the application process (e.g. their Personal Statement and submitted written work). In addition, candidates are likely to be asked questions about their school or college work. More specific questions may focus on a wider exploration of intellectual matters and the candidate’s academic background and interests, as well as their awareness of, topics covered by the HSPS course.

**Typical conditional offers**

Our typical conditional offer for HSPS 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.