



Humanities & Social Sciences at Univ

Dr Andrew Bell, Senior Tutor: Hello and welcome to the University College, Oxford, Virtual Open Day. My name's Andrew Bell, I'm the Senior Tutor here at Univ and, as Senior Tutor, I have a general responsibility for all academic matters including teaching, learning and undergraduate admissions. I'm very sorry not to be able to welcome you in person, I wish that I could. And my thoughts go out to everyone who is struggling as a result of the pandemic.

I'm particularly aware of the challenges faced by students and by their teachers, their parents and their carers and I wish you all the very best. Thanks for taking the time to find out a bit more about the College and the University today and I hope very much that you find the resources we've made available to you helpful.

In a moment you're going to hear from some of our tutors who are going to talk about teaching and learning in their subjects. We've not got every subject represented because, well, we've got a lot of subjects on offer but nonetheless I hope that those who you do hear from will be able to give you a meaningful sense of what it's like to be a student here. We've got a lot of courses and of course they've all got their own subject specialities but they've got a few things in common with each other. They're all of them wide-ranging, they're all of them fast moving, they're all of them introduce students to new materials, which they're very unlikely to have encountered before. And all of them are concerned with questions, with problems, with analyses and with techniques and so this means that we're very interested in a student's individual engagement with and individual response to their course. All of the tutors whom you're going to hear from teach in small groups a lot of the time. They teach in a very discursive way and students engage very actively with the material that they're studying. This is what we call the tutorial system and it's one of the things that makes an Oxford education so special. I hope very much that as a result of what you hear today you decide you'd like to find out more and I'd be absolutely delighted if you decided you wanted to study with us.

Our students come from a wide range of backgrounds. They're all very different people and they have their own individual reasons to be here. But I think there's one thing that they all have in common. They take their subjects very seriously and they all take themselves seriously. If that sounds like you, I'd be really delighted if you decided you wanted to apply. In any case, I hope very much that you have fun exploring the courses that we've got on offer and I really hope that this gives you some interesting things to think about and some things to follow up on in the future. Good luck!

Dr Benjamin Jackson, Tutor in History: Hi, my name is Ben Jackson. I'm a tutor in History at University College Oxford. I teach Modern British History, 19th century 20th century British History and also the history of political thought.

What does a tutorial in History look like? Well, in History, students are assigned a reading list and an essay question and they spend a week working through that reading and writing an essay of about 2000 words on whatever topic we're looking at that week and the topics we cover can be a huge range of things including political, social and cultural history. This week, for example, I have one group of students writing on the history of race and immigration in 20th century Britain while another group are writing about how Ireland became independent in years around the First World War. Once the essays are written they are emailed to me the night before the tutorial, I then read them, I mark them then I meet with the students the next day for an hour to discuss the essays and the wider period

that the essay has been looking at, some of the issues that come out of the essay title that they were working on. Typically this would be in a group of two students though sometimes it could be a student on their own or three students. At any rate it's a very small group who meet together so it's a very intense form of teaching but what's really special about studying at Oxford and studying history at Oxford is we spend a lot of time working with students on the writing, on developing their analytical skills and, of course, just on discussing with them an amazing variety of historical periods, places and approaches.

Dr Laura Varnam, Tutor in English: Hello everyone, my name's Dr Laura Varnam and I'm one of the English tutors at Univ. I'm the medievalist, which means I teach Old and Medieval English literature so *Beowulf*, Chaucer, the Middle English mystics like Margery Kemp and Julian of Norwich. And I also teach a first year paper in linguistics where we study important topics such as a language and race and gender.

I have quite an eclectic range of research interests in my own work. I've written a book on the medieval Church in the 14th and 15th centuries. My most recent academic article was on Julian of Norwich and medieval Christianity in the Harry Potter series and I'm currently writing a book on the 20th century author of *Rebecca*, Daphne du Maurier.

At Univ, alongside tutorials students also have classes typically one or two a week in small groups with the rest of their year group. So, in English this is around six to eight students. Students are asked to prepare materials for these classes. With me that might often be a commentary passage or a piece of translation say from *Beowulf*, which we will work through together as a class. Or for other classes that cover broader topics, students will be asked to prepare presentations. For example, I do a class on heroes, monsters and kings in *Beowulf* and students will be paired up to prepare a short presentation on one of those topics, which we will then share together. These kinds of broader context form building blocks for tutorials where students can then go away and prepare their own essays and work in more detail on the topics we've covered.

Dr Rajendra Chitnis, Tutor in Czech: Hello, my name is Rajendra Chitnis and I'm the tutor for Czech at Univ. I teach Czech literature from 14th century through the present day and Slovak literature since 19th century. I also teach translation from Czech and Slovak because if you study Czech at Oxford you will get two languages for the price of one.

The really nice thing about the Czech literature papers at Oxford is that students every year can choose the writers and topics and periods that most interest them and in the same way I can also bring in material that I'm working on in my own research. I think students enjoy seeing how academics try and make sense of material and they enjoy participating in that process. I definitely think the questions and the comments they make show me what the most important things are about that material.

My research mainly focuses on modern and contemporary Czech literature and I often write about how writers have tried to shape and respond to different historical contexts. For example my first book was about how Czech, Russian and Slovak writers changed the way they write during the fall of communism. I've also written about how Czech writers responded to the expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia in 1945. And I'm currently writing about the portrayal of silence as a response to occupation during the German Occupation in the Second World War.

I would really like much more Czech and Slovak literature to be available in translation and I've just finished a very big project about how the literatures of smaller European nations try to get themselves translated into bigger languages. I think we thought the project was going to be quite a depressing experience but in fact it wasn't at all. It was fantastic to work with all these different translators, publishers, agents, other advocates of translated literature who have very clever creative, clever and imaginative methods to get these literatures into the spotlight and an absolute priority for me is to ensure my students are able to join that community that supports and facilitates intercultural conversations and exchanges so that more and more marginal voices are heard and better understood.

Dr Laura Varnam, Tutor in English: One of the great things about being an English tutor at Univ is all the extra-curricular activities we do with our students. We're known in College as "Team English" and we get together for our annual English subject dinner with undergraduates, graduates and my colleagues. We do play readings from Shakespeare to Ben Jonson and run a Chaucer reading group every other week in term time where we read Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* or the *Canterbury Tales* together. We've also just relaunched Univ's Shakespeare Society where visiting writers come and talk to us about their work.

Univ is a really exciting place to study English and it's wonderful to work with so many enthusiastic students and colleagues.

Dr Andrew Bell, Senior Tutor: Thank you very much indeed for taking the time to find out more about Oxford and about Univ. I hope that you find the materials that we've made available to you helpful and that you enjoy exploring what it might be like to be a student here. Remember you can take part in the online Q&A, you can take a virtual walk around the College, you can read more about our courses and about their entry requirements and of course you're very welcome to email us if you have any remaining questions. We'd love to hear from you. For now, I wish you the best in your future academic career and I'd be absolutely delighted if you decided you wanted to study with us in the future. Good luck!