

King's Student Perspectives

Philosophy

Becca, 3rd year

I've just completed my finals, having studied the Philosophy tripos for three years.

I have enjoyed studying philosophy at Cambridge very much, and would recommend it to anyone with a strong interest in analytic philosophy and an enthusiasm for discussion.

When did you decide to apply for Philosophy at Cambridge?

I became interested in philosophy through studying Philosophy of Religion at A level. I enjoyed the rigorous line of thinking that the subject matter demanded, although I found the focus on religious philosophy constraining at times in that course. My further reading and discussions with teachers convinced me that I wanted to study philosophy at university, and the Cambridge course was attractive due to its analytic focus.

The decision to apply to Cambridge for Philosophy was one I made comparatively late. Before sixth form I hadn't considered studying at Oxbridge to be a realistic possibility for me, and I had no sense of how competitive it was or where I would stand compared to other applicants.

Even during the application procedure I felt completely unsure of my chances, and it wasn't until I arrived for interview and found myself in King's bar debating the subject with a table of fellow applicants that I really decided that I wanted to study here.

In retrospect I would say that while the idea of Cambridge can seem very imposing, particularly to those who are unfamiliar with its application procedure, it's definitely worth applying if you are genuinely excited at the prospect of studying philosophy in great detail and are prepared to commit to the work load associated with a Cambridge degree.

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What was the application process like?

The application process for philosophy at King's includes a test, interview and personal statement. The interview itself took half an hour, and consisted of two main philosophical questions which I was challenged on and pressed to justify my answers for. Like most people, I came out feeling that it hadn't gone well, as I'd had to back-track a fair amount. Looking back, I now realise that the interviews are surprisingly similar to the experience of a supervision – the majority of the time is spent attempting to keep up

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and revise your position, at the end of which you'll hopefully have a fuller understanding of the topic and how to defend your view.

In preparation for the interviews, I would suggest introducing yourself to some background ideas. All interviews push you beyond the knowledge you already have, so it is not necessary to have prior knowledge of the subject matter. However, I found it reassuring to have an idea of the subject area the questions related to, even though the interviewers rapidly departed from my comfort zone.

What is the course like?

In each of the three years we cover four subject areas, and have four supervisions in each. Generally, at the end of the year we then have five examinations, one on each of these four topics and an essay paper. In second and third year, you can replace one of the four subject modules with coursework, and the essay paper can be replaced with a dissertation. You can borrow certain modules from other Cambridge courses (such as experimental psychology), but that might also mean that you take different exams and course work for a module. You can also replace the essay paper.

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In second year Logic and Metaphysics are once again compulsory, and two other modules are optional. I selected Political Philosophy as well as Experimental Psychology. While I found the Logic and Metaphysics challenging and often wondered how relevant they were, I have since been grateful that they were compulsory, as elements of second year logic and metaphysics have come up in all my third year options.

This year, I studied Political Philosophy, Aesthetics, History of Modern Philosophy and took coursework in Ethics.

I most enjoyed Political philosophy, and in particular debates in Feminism concerning issues such as gender roles, pornography, and how feminism might be approached within a broader liberal framework.

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How do supervisions work?

In each year we have four supervisions, each for an hour, in our four modules. We submit an essay 24 hours prior to each supervision. All our supervisions take place in the first two terms, two subjects being covered each term. This is different to other subjects, and means that we are frequently supervised on topics which we haven't been lectured on. This can make the topics a little inaccessible at first, so it is often necessary to find more introductory texts than are suggested on the reading list.

Supervisions can be a little daunting, but there is a huge sense of achievement after a successful one, in which some problematic area has fallen into place or you've presented an interesting argument. I have found supervisions very useful not only in allowing me to develop my own views in the face of rigorous questioning, but also in helping me appreciate the merits of views I disagree with by having them presented to me very convincingly by someone far more qualified than myself.

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What is it like to be a student at King's?

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Weekly exercise classes are provided for stress relief, and we also have 'chapel chill-out'-chat and bubble wrap in the chapel once a week.

I have enjoyed studying philosophy at King's and I'm really pleased that three other philosophers began at the same time as me. As King's is a large college, you can be more certain of having one or more fellow philosophy freshers to share books and discuss the workload with. King's also has a discussion group, Philosopher Kings, in which undergraduates as well as graduates

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present papers for discussion. I have found these to be interesting, challenging and a great way to get to know other members of the faculty within college.

A note to current King's Philosophy students

If you would like to write about your experiences of studying Philosophy at King's for our prospective students to read, please email Kristy in the Admissions Office for further details: undergraduate.admissions@kings.cam.ac.uk