Colby College Off-Campus Study
F.A.Q. ON APPLYING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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Please consult with the Off-Campus Study Advisor at Colby College before beginning the application process.

Part I:

Is Oxford for you?
Before deciding to apply, please review the information on what it means to study as a visiting student at Oxford below.

THE OXFORD EXPERIENCE: WHAT IT MEANS TO STUDY AS A VISITING STUDENTS AT OXFORD

We recommend contacting a past participant to talk about the experience and for advice. You can find Colby students who studied abroad at Oxford University and review their evaluations at http://www.colby.edu/academics_cs/ocs/evals/index.cfm.

What is a Visiting Student at Oxford?
http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/visiting
A Visiting Student at the University of Oxford is considered a full member of both the college that accepts them and Oxford University. Visiting Students have unrestricted access to all University facilities, including the renowned Bodleian Library, and with the exception of varsity sports, they may join any club, association, or sport offered at the University or collegiate level. Visiting Students live in housing owned and assigned by their college and eat meals in the college dining hall.

Further information:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/international-students/events/visiting-students
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/why-oxford/studying-oxford
http://www.ifsa-bu.tler.org/oxford-university.html

What do Visiting Students study?
Undergraduate Visiting Students typically take the same courses that are available to Oxford undergraduates.

Depending on the subject, the topics offered will usually be from the first or second year of the undergraduate curriculum.

It may sometimes be possible for Visiting Students to take an introductory level course in a subject unrelated to their course at the home university or a subject in which they have no university-level experience. However, we would typically expect Visiting Students to have an academic background in the subject areas they wish to pursue.

Oxford does not work on a credit system, so it is not possible for students to ‘build up’ a composite programme of study from many different subject areas. Most successful applicants are admitted for specific degree programmes; it is then up to the home university to assess their worth in terms of credit at the home institution.

What is the tutorial system?
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/why-oxford/studying-at-oxford/tutorials

What do I need to know about tutorials?
• The tutorial system is at the heart of Oxford’s approach to university education.
• Tutorials last for an hour and include an in-depth discussion between one student or a pair of students and a tutor assigned by the college.
• Tutorials take place usually once a week (primary) or once every other week (secondary). You must complete a total of 12 tutorial meetings for each term.
• At the center of each tutorial is an essay (usually around 7 pages in length) that you have researched and prepared in the week prior to the meeting. This means you write 12 essays or around 80 to 90 pages total in one term!
• In a traditional tutorial, you may be expected to read your essay aloud to the tutor. However, today many tutors ask to take the essay home with them or request the essay early in order to read it before the meeting. Your tutor will comment on the essay and suggest other ways of approaching the subject matter.
• Remember that you’re the only one at the tutorial meeting, so be prepared! You will have the undivided attention of an expert in your field, so utilize the opportunity.

• Tutorial = meeting with tutor and approx 3 other students (one on two for some subjects, one on four for others); Tutorials meet 3 – 4 hours per week. Or for some schools 24-36 tutorial hours per year = normal load (one full course and one half course) full = 1 meeting per week and ½ = 1 meeting per fortnight;
• You will write 1 essay /tutorial meeting. Some go by pages, some by words, some by how long it takes you to read it aloud. (3000 words, 15 minutes of reading, 5 pages)
• While there is little directed work you should plan on 36 hours per week of study.
• Lectures could be 5 hours per week.
• Some courses have a required list of lectures, others you pick relevant lectures. It is possible (if you already know what you are going to study next term) that you might need to go to a lecture this term for next term’s topic. Lists of lectures are on the web and your tutor should point out relevant lectures.
• You may have to go to another college for a lecture.
• You should do “collections”- term exams - (not always required) yet it is a good way to judge your progress.
• Advice from your peers: It can be isolating, mainly independent learning, you need to know time management, don’t take the criticisms of your tutor personally, defend your work not your person.

What subjects can I study?:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses-listing

What do Visiting Students study?
• Undergraduate Visiting Students typically take the same courses that are available to Oxford undergraduates. Depending on the subject, the topics offered will usually be from the first or second year of the undergraduate curriculum.
• It is not usually possible for Visiting Students to take a subject unrelated to the course at the home university or a subject in which they have no university-level experience.

What subjects are available to undergraduate Visiting Students?
• Visiting Students may study any course from the undergraduate courses available, except Fine Art and Medicine.
• Oxford does not work on a credit system, so it is not possible for students to 'build up' a composite programme of study from many different subject areas. Most successful applicants are admitted for specific degree programmes; it is then up to the home university to assess their worth in terms of credit at the home institution.
• It is occasionally possible, however, for undergraduate Visiting Students to study elements of different courses, if the accepting college has this teaching provision available.
• It is also possible for undergraduate Visiting Students to study one element of a joint course - for example, Politics or Economics (which are not offered as single degree subjects to applicants for a full degree).

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/international-students/events/visiting-students

OXFORD: Frequently Asked Questions

Here’s a brief explanation of what you can expect from an Oxford education:

• So what will my classes be like? There are no classes! Instead, you will take two tutorials per term. You meet with your primary tutor for just one hour, once a week, and your secondary tutor for one hour every other week. Yes, one or two hours of “class” per week!
• So what am I supposed to do with the other 167 hours of my week? You are expected to prepare a paper for each tutorial meeting. Treat this assignment like a 9-5 job and work on it Monday through Friday during the day.
• Treat it like a job? How long are these papers supposed to be? Usually 8-10 pages, though this can vary.
• And at night? Have fun! Socialize with your new friends, discuss politics in the pub and join a club. You can even play a sport. All of these activities are an important part of the Oxford experience. We urge you to join at least one club or society while you’re at Oxford – it’s your responsibility to make the most of your experience!
• I’m still confused: what the heck is a tutorial again? A tutorial is a chance for you to sit down and discuss the paper you’ve prepared for that week with your tutor. Most tutorials consist of one to three students and one tutor, or “don.” Each student is expected to be active in discussion and defending their weekly essay. The tutors want you to participate and show off that big brain of yours!
• How do I know what to write my essays about? You will discuss the topic of each week’s paper with your tutor. Your tutor will offer suggestions and materials but it is up to you to develop ideas. Remember, outside of tutorials, it is you and the library; there are no teaching assistants to guide you. While your tutor will accommodate questions, there are no office hours and bugging your tutors incessantly is not encouraged.
• How will my tutor evaluate me beyond the essays I prepare? There are no other assignments beyond your weekly essay: no quizzes, no exams, and no big paper at the end of the term. To further your learning, feel free to attend the lectures offered every so often by the university. We recommend that you attend lectures in the subject you’re studying because they are a great way to get ideas for your papers.
• So how do I know what grade I’m earning during the term? You don’t, really. Your tutor bases his assessment on the progress you make in your writing skills and knowledge over the course of the term. You will not be given grades for your papers or a grade report at the mid-term. You will only receive an assessment at the end of the term.
• Hold on! My home university wants a syllabus and course descriptions before I study abroad. Since there are no true “courses” there are no course descriptions. You will create a loose syllabus with your tutor once you arrive at Oxford. Since every tutorial is tailored to the student, there is no set path to follow, no finalized reading list, and no standard course topics.
• When will I register and finalize my tutorials? When you arrive at your host college at Oxford. If you are accepted, you will be provisionally “registered” for the tutorials you requested in your IFSA-Butler application to Oxford. Once you have submitted your application, it is not possible to change your tutorials later on, so please be flexible with your tutorial requests!
• But I am applying to Oxford for the academic year! How can I possibly know every tutorial I want to take next year? If you are applying for the academic year program, most colleges will give you the opportunity to amend your Hilary- and Trinity-term tutorials during the Michaelmas term. You are responsible for inquiring about any changes to your tutorials when you arrive at your host college, as well as receiving approval from your home university for your tutorial changes.
• What if I am applying for the spring two-term program? Same deal; you won’t be able to change your Hilary term tutorials (the first term you’ll be at Oxford) but you may be able to change your Trinity term tutorials once you arrive. Again, it is your responsibility to pursue this and receive home university approval.
• I like to study in groups and enjoy classroom discussions – is this part of the Oxford experience? No. Going to class is not a social event in Oxford, for the tutorial system is essentially a solitary academic experience. There are optional lectures incorporated into the academic system, but your attendance at lectures is infrequent. As you will not normally attend class with other students, you will not walk to class, sit in class, or study outside of class with other students/friends. You will work for many hours in the library and in your room preparing your essays on your own. While you will be able to discuss your tutorials with your fellow Oxford students, very few other students will be taking the exact tutorials as yourself, which will minimize your ability to chat about the specifics of your class with your fellow students.

While this is not meant to scare you, it is also not a joke. The system at Oxford is very independent. One of the biggest challenges American students have at Oxford is the lack of structure. You will be expected to rise to your tutor’s level without a lot of guidance.

Please be honest with yourself when evaluating your decision to study abroad at Oxford. It is okay if you don’t think you would be successful in such an unstructured, solitary, independent environment. It is certainly not for everyone. There are a host of excellent academic institutions in the U.K. that would be more than happy to consider your application.

If you decide Oxford is a good fit for you as a student, it is your responsibility to take control of your learning experience overseas and make the best of it. The bottom line is, if you think you would be successful in this environment, then you’ll find Oxford to be a fabulous place to study!
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

How much does Oxford cost?
Tuition and College cost for Visiting Students:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/tuition-and-college-fees/visiting-and-recognised-student-fees
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/international-students/events/visiting-students

What are the dates of the program?
Academic year: October – late June
Spring terms: early January – late June

When are application deadlines?
Application deadlines vary for each College and depending on how you decide to apply but may be as early as January or February, even in you are planning to attend for the 2 spring terms of the following year.

Part II:

HOW TO APPLY?

When can I attend the University of Oxford?
You may apply to attend Oxford as a Visiting Student
   a) for the full academic year
   b) for the spring only i.e. 2 (Hilary + Trinity) terms

Since the “Fall” term is less than Colby’s required 14 weeks long, Colby College DOES NOT approve study at Oxford for the fall only.

How can I apply?

There are 3 ways to apply to attend Oxford University as a Visiting Student.

Some Oxford Colleges only accept applications from certain US colleges or universities. Others may require that you apply via Butler or OSAP.

a) Applying directly to a College of Oxford

Once you’ve identified a college you may submit your application directly to that college. Each college may have their own application process, deadlines, and forms. They usually have a contact for visiting students as well where you can ask questions. Use this webpage to research colleges and find application information:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/international-students/events/which-colleges-accept-visiting-students

b) Applying through IFSA Butler

You can apply through IFSA Butler, a US study abroad provider which offers student services from application assistance to full on-site support abroad. IFSA Butler works as partners with several colleges at Oxford during the academic year and also for the spring only (second and third term) of the year. http://www.ifsa-butler.org/oxford-university.html

The advantages of applying through Butler have more to do with the services Butler offers in terms of advising during the admissions and pre-departure processes, as well as the support services you receive while you are abroad from their office in London, etc. You can find out more about what is included in the program fee at http://www.ifsa-butler.org/apply/included.html

NOTE: Applying through Butler, the fees are generally higher than applying directly to Oxford.

c) Applying to Oxford’s central Undergraduate Admissions Office
Using the Undergraduate Admissions Office application form, you can either submit an **open application** to Oxford University OR you can **specify a College** on your application. These applications will be processed by the central Undergraduate Admissions Office, University of Oxford, and allocated to the Colleges. 

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/international_students/visiting_students/index.html#14

**NOTE:** We have generally had mixed results with this way of applying so we generally don’t advise using this option.

**Can I apply to more than 1 college of Oxford?**
Applying to more than one college at Oxford at a time is generally frowned upon by Oxford. There is a strong preference for students to only apply to one college. Since there are a limited number of spots, they don’t want the application pools to be filled with students who are not actually interested and/or are weighing their options. If the student is good, yet they don’t have a place for him/her, the college can reach out to others. There is no real penalty for multiple applications, and some students do it, but it is not advised unless you are really concerned that you will not get in to your first choice. We recommend researching 1 or 2 of your top colleges that are the best fit and where you have the best chance of being admitted.

**Recommendations on the application process:**
- Review the information above
- Speak with other students who have studied at Oxford
- Understand how to apply
  - applying through Butler may be easiest but tends to cost more
  - applying directly to a chosen College is effective but takes some prior research
  - applying to central Oxford admissions has had mixed results in past experience
- Research which college is best for your needs
- Keep in mind studying at Oxford is expensive, sometimes costs more than Colby College
- Application is very competitive, have a backup plan. If you are not accepted you will still have time to apply to other universities in the UK.
- Apply early! (January-February-check deadlines). You will likely hear about your admission status in March or April.

*Please tell OCS how and to where you plan to apply. Once you are accepted to an Oxford University College, Colby OCS will need to see your acceptance letter from the University of Oxford.*

**RESEARCHING THE COLLEGES**

**How do I choose which College to attend?**
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/choosing-a-college
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/introducing-colleges

In choosing a specific College it is important to first make sure that:
- b. The College accepts students for less than the Full Year. Some do not accept students for Spring (2 terms) only.
- c. The college offers courses in all subjects. Choose a college which offers the subjects you are interested in.

**Which Colleges accept visiting students?**
Use this webpage to research colleges and find application information:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/international-students/events/which-colleges-accept-visiting-students

**Which colleges offer which subjects?**
http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/which-oxford-colleges-offer-my-course

- Not all colleges offer tutorials in all subjects
- In the sciences, not all colleges have lab facilities available to visiting students. For example: St Anne’s College is the only one of the Butler partner colleges which guarantees lab facilities to visiting students

**How important is which college I choose?**
Don’t agonize too long over choosing a College: The colleges have more in common than they have differences, and we find that students develop a fierce loyalty to whichever college they are in, and all believe their college is the best! All the colleges are alike in offering good computing, library, sports and music facilities, as well as in providing students with quality food and accommodation, plus a common room and a bar.

- How many undergraduates a college has, from 200 to 450
- How old or new a college is (an 800-year-old college looks very different from one built in the 1960s)
- Where the college is (some are in the city centre, others further out, though none is more than 15 minutes’ walk or 5 minutes’ cycle ride)
- What rooms it can offer and who lives with you (some provide accommodation – on site or in college-owned properties – for all students; others expect upper classmen to live off campus for one or two years)
- Also consider how many visiting students will be in your cohort (some schools have a tradition of hosting study abroad students others do not)

**PREPARING TO APPLY TO OXFORD**

**What are the entry criteria?**
Each individual application is judged on its own merits, taking into account a range of factors, including:
- academic achievement at the home institution
- any relevant pre-university qualifications
- strength of academic references and personal statement
- suitability for study at Oxford
- correlation between the course at Oxford and the curriculum at the home institution

Applicants should be of similar academic standard to full-degree students. As a guide, successful students will typically have GPA of at least 3.7 on a 4.0 scale (for North American students), or a level of achievement at university equivalent to a 2:1 UK degree classification (for students whose university courses are graded differently). There is no minimum qualification, however, since each application will be considered according to all the information available and in comparison with other applications. Extra-curricular activities are not taken into account.

Please also see the English Language requirements for [undergraduate students](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/international-students/events/visiting-students).

**What does Oxford look at when choosing applicants?**
Applicants should be of similar academic standard to full degree students. As a guide, successful students will typically have GPA of at least 3.5 on a 4.0 scale (for North American students). There is no minimum qualification, however, since each application will be considered according to all the information available and in comparison with other applications. Extra-curricular activities are not taken into account.

Being accepted as a visiting student at Oxford is highly competitive. In the past, successful students have typically had a GPA of at least 3.7 on a 4.0 scale. Extra-curricular activities are not taken into account. Oxford looks at a number of things when it comes to applicants. First and foremost, the GPA. Most of the colleges are not flexible when it comes to GPA minimums. They also look at class rank, how many courses you have taken that are directly linked to the tutorials you plan on taking. It is recommended you have 3-5 previous courses in the subject you intend to study.

Each individual application for the Visiting Students program is judged on its own merits, taking into account a range of factors, including:
- A student’s overall academic achievement
- Strength of academic references and personal statement
- Achievements in the student’s major area(s) of study. All Oxford colleges prefer students who have taken three to five courses in their tutorial field prior to the term they are studying abroad.
- Correlation between the course at Oxford and the curriculum at the home institution
- Suitability for study at Oxford (understanding of the tutorial system)
- The tutorials requested by the student.
- Writing samples-These show off your writing style and background in your subject(s) of study.
You must indicate on your application the subject you intend to study. It is not possible for Visiting Students to take a subject unrelated to their major at their home university or a subject in which they have no university-level experience.

**How should I write the personal statement essay?**

Your personal statement should generally address your reasons for wishing to study at Oxford, and at this College specifically. Try to think about what the College would want to know about you to decide if you are a good candidate for their college based on what you wish to study and how you will fit in. You should also describe what subjects you are interested in studying, how they relate to your academic path at Colby and what about the Oxford tutorial system appeals to you. You may be asked about other extra curricular activities or clubs you may join while at Oxford to show how you will fit into the College life.

**How do I choose my subjects?**

It is important to verify that the college to which you apply offers tutorials in the subject in which you are interested. Otherwise your application will be rejected.

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/which-oxford-colleges-offer-my-course

**Where can I find a list of subjects and/or tutorials that the university offers?**

Remember that at Oxford the term “course” refers to the name of the degree, not individual subjects

Because of the individualized nature of the tutorial system, colleges at Oxford do not have an online course catalog. However, each college has a page with a list of possible tutorial subjects. All tutorials are subject to availability of tutors.

Your tutorial topics should be limited to no more than two subjects, and those subjects should be related. For instance, the tutors reviewing your application will look more favorably at a tutorial request form that has choices limited to politics and history departments. They would not be as impressed with a tutorial request form that lists choices in chemistry, economics and art history.

**How many tutorials will I take?**

You will take 2 tutorials per term so 6 for the year or 4 for the 2 spring terms.

You will take 1 primary and 1 secondary tutorial per term

**How should I complete the tutorial request form?**

- Following are some of the things you should keep in mind as you complete the tutorial request form:
- The tutorials you choose should build on knowledge you have already acquired at your home university. Do not request introductory-level or survey tutorials. You should not plan to fulfill elective requirements while studying at Oxford. Stick to tutorials in your major or another discipline where you have already taken at least two classes.
- Your tutorial topics should be limited to no more than two subjects, and those subjects should be related. For instance, the tutors reviewing your application will look more favorably at a tutorial request form that has choices limited to politics and history departments. They would not be as impressed with a tutorial request form that lists choices in chemistry, economics and art history.
- We recommend that you complete the form by requesting all of your top-choice tutorials first. Then, after you've completed your top choices, go back through and add your second choices. Occasionally, the college may accept a student based on some of their second choices, so make sure you like all of the tutorials you list.
- It is difficult to change your tutorial choices once you've made them, so make sure you are comfortable with your choices. Tuition is organized specifically for you based on your choices so once the college confirms your choices, your tutors will be expecting you and will have committed their time to you.
- The tutorial preference form is not a registration form; it is a guideline to let your host college know which subjects you are interested in taking abroad. You should discuss your tutorial selections with your academic advisor at your home institution. Completing the tutorial request form is one of the most important things you will do as you prepare to study abroad. Your admissions decision will be partially based upon your tutorial preferences, so please do not plan to deviate from your initial choices.

**How should I describe what I intend to study?**

Remember that, depending on the subject, the topics offered will usually be from the first or second year of the undergraduate curriculum.
It may sometimes be possible for Visiting Students to take an introductory level course in a subject unrelated to their course at the home university or a subject in which they have no university-level experience. However, we would typically expect Visiting Students to have an academic background in the subject areas they wish to pursue.

Oxford does not work on a credit system, so it is not possible for students to ‘build up’ a composite programme of study from many different subject areas. Most successful applicants are admitted for specific degree programmes; it is then up to the home university to assess their worth in terms of credit at the home institution.

Go to the Oxford University website and look at the departmental offerings and descriptions: http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses-listing . You can be even more specific about your interests within the department, if you wish, but do not be too specific or obscure because you may not be accepted if they cannot identify a tutor who is a specialist on that subject.

  e.g.
  Victorian Lit – you may indicate who you’d like to study if they’re not too obscure
  PPE – would you prefer to focus on Politics, Philosophy or Economics?
  History - area/geographical region? Or time frame?

On your application to Oxford University, the proposed subject can be given simply as the Oxford degree title (e.g., Philosophy, Politics and Economics), a subject area (e.g. Philosophy) or individual courses from within a degree (e.g. Philosophy of Ethics). It is not essential to be very specific, but the colleges will be able to assess whether or not they can offer the appropriate teaching provision based on the information given. Visiting Student courses should be selected from the 2nd & 3rd year listing. Applicants may name as many individual courses as they are interested in (with the understanding that not all of their interests may necessarily be accommodated).

Once you get there, you will narrow it down to the standard course load of 1 primary and 1 secondary tutorial per term.

**What if I need to take a required course?**
There is no guarantee that your host university will offer a particular course, or that you will be allowed to take that particular course. However, if you need to take a required course, you may indicate that it is required on your tutorial preference form. Your IFSA-Butler program advisor will communicate your needs to your host university.

**Sending in your application materials?**
More and more Colleges are accepting or requiring application documents sent in PDF format. If you are emailing your application, you should provide your faculty recommender with the email address to which they should send the confidential letter of recommendation.

Or, in many cases, you may be able to mail all the application materials together (keeping the confidential documents in a sealed envelope) and mail them using a traceable express services such as FedEx.

**When will I know if I’m admitted?**
You should hear of your acceptance in March or April. If you are not accepted you will still have time to apply to other universities in the UK.