

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00491-6 - The Student's Guide to the University of Cambridge,
Third Edition, Revised and Partly Re-written

Anonymous

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION.



THE direct object of a Student at Cambridge is to obtain one of the degrees which are conferred by that University, in the faculties of Arts, Law, Medicine, Divinity¹, and Music. The first degree which is conferred in these faculties is that of Bachelor, and the vast majority of Students become Candidates for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. It is the object of this introductory article to describe in outline the course of a Student before he takes his degree; in technical language, of an Undergraduate; and in such a manner and with such careful explanation as to make, if possible, the whole subject clear even to persons who have no previous acquaintance whatever either with this or any other University.

In order to obtain the Bachelor's degree it is indispensably necessary, (1) to reside for a certain

¹ The degrees in Divinity being only granted to persons who have already graduated, i. e. taken a degree in Arts, it will not be necessary to allude again to this Faculty in this Introduction.

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period in Cambridge, (2) to become a member of the University by being admitted either as a member of a College, or as a Non-Collegiate Student, (3) to pass certain examinations.

The period of residence is measured by terms, i.e., the divisions of the year during which the business of the University is carried on. These are three in each year, the Michaelmas or October Term, beginning on the 1st of October and ending on the 16th of December, the Lent Term, beginning on the 13th of January and ending on the Friday before Palm Sunday, the Easter or May Term, beginning on the Friday after Easter Day and ending on the Friday after Commencement-Day, which is the last Tuesday but one in June.

As the period of residence may commence in any of the three terms, it will be desirable to point out at which time residence may, generally speaking, be most conveniently commenced. And for the purpose of a general rule, it will only be necessary to consider the case of Students in Arts, since these form the great majority.

These Students are to be distinguished as either Candidates for Honours, or Poll Men, that is, Candidates for the ordinary B.A. degree without special honour or distinction.

The period of residence required in Arts is nine terms. Thus a person entering in January may become eligible for his degree in the November of the next but one succeeding year; he who enters after Easter, in the March of the third

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year after; he who enters in October, in the June of the third year after. But the three terms of the year do not all offer the same opportunities of undergoing the prescribed examinations. The final examinations for the ordinary B. A. degree occur only twice a year, and a Poll man who enters in the Easter term must wait an additional term before he can be examined for his degree. For a Poll man who wishes his University course to be as short as possible, the choice is thus limited to January and October: and it is plain that he who enters in October has the shorter course, owing to the fact that the long vacation, as it is called, that is the time during which lectures are suspended between June and October, enters only twice, and not three times, into his course. This then is a practical reason for entering in October for all such as wish to arrive as soon as possible at their goal, that is, for all who believe themselves able to master in this time the subjects in which they are to be examined, and who aim at nothing beyond the Ordinary Degree, i.e., the degree of Bachelor of Arts simply, without special distinction. And the course of Examinations for this Ordinary Degree is in truth not so difficult but that any person of common abilities, and common preliminary training, with tolerable industry while at Cambridge, may reckon with certainty upon passing it. But for those who wish to win their degree with honour and distinction, which is the best time to enter? Such persons may desire their time of pro-

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bation to be as long as possible, in order that their attainments may be the greatest possible. Now to Candidates for Honours in any Tripos a limiting period is fixed, in order to equalize the competition. The Honour examinations are held only once a year, the Mathematical, the Classical, the Theological, the Semitic Languages and the Indian Languages Triposes in the Lent Term, and the Moral Sciences, the Natural Sciences, the Law and the Historical Triposes in the Michaelmas Term. For the former it is required that the Student shall have entered upon his ninth term at least, having previously kept eight terms, and that not more than ten terms shall have passed since his first term of residence; for the latter he is required to have entered upon his eighth term at least, having previously kept seven terms, and not more than nine terms are to have passed since his first term. The Student may therefore secure the option of the longest or the shortest period of preparation by entering after Easter; but College arrangements never encourage this, and in some cases they do not permit it. It is sometimes not inconvenient to commence residence in January. The most convenient and usual time for entering the Colleges is October. The course of studies prescribed in each College begins at this point; and the Examination held in each College on the eve of the Long Vacation, for those of its students who are not at the time undergoing any University Examination, commonly embraces the subjects on

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which lectures have been delivered from the October previous. Other considerations make it undesirable for an average student to commence his residence in the Easter Term, when the season invites to an anticipation of the enjoyments of the Long Vacation, and the studies which go forward are less of the steady and quiet kind by which solid progress is made, than of the violent competitive kind by which prizes and Scholarships at the Colleges are won. It is not convenient that a young student should make his first acquaintance with the University at so unsettled a time. In exceptional cases these considerations are of less importance. Non-Collegiate Students, who are only partially affected by College arrangements, may enter in any term, subject to the above-mentioned conditions as to the times at which the University examinations occur. But even these students may in their first year at least derive more assistance from the College lectures which are open to them, if they have entered in October, than if they have chosen either of the other terms for the commencement of their residence.

A person is not said to be *resident* in the University even though he be living in Cambridge, unless he be occupying either rooms in College or one of the lodging-houses in the town which have been licensed to receive University men, or be living with his parents, or, under special circumstances approved by the authorities of the University, with other friends or in his own or in a hired house.

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Once resident, a student or pupil, that is, every member of the University under the degree of Master in some faculty, cannot go out of residence without the written permission or *exeat*¹ of the Tutor of his College, or, if a Non-Collegiate student, of the Censor. Students who have been guilty of misconduct are sometimes sent away for the rest of the term. As it is the indispensable condition of obtaining a degree to have resided nine terms, the effect of this punishment may be to prolong by a term the period of undergraduateship. Residence for two thirds of the term is accepted by the University as residence for the whole, and no more than this is necessary in the case of Non-Collegiate students, but the Colleges usually require residence for a much larger part of the Lent and Michaelmas Terms, except for some good reason.

So much with respect to residence. We now come to consider the student's relation to his College and to the University, or, if he be a Non-Collegiate student, instead of his relation to his College we have to consider his relation to the Officers of the Board to which the University entrusts the supervision of such students. First, then, as to the College. There are seventeen Colleges at Cambridge, and they are very various in the advantages which they offer to their members. The selection of one College rather than another, or of a College rather than the position of a Non-Collegiate

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Student, is often made with a view to other than purely educational advantages. It being assumed that with whatever body a student is connected he is equally likely to take a degree, both the student and his parents will often think comparatively little of the question, whether abler teachers are to be found in one College than another. The more studious think of the prizes offered in a College, and as far as they take account of the better or worse teaching to be obtained, they regard it chiefly as affecting their chance of gaining high University distinction; the less studious think of little beyond the opportunities held out of living agreeably in a congenial society.

The incidental advantages of life at the University are for a large proportion of the students quite equal in importance to the intellectual culture or the information to be secured there. The opportunity of mixing with a considerable society of young men of easy circumstances, at an age when intimacies are readily formed, in a state of freedom tempered by an easy and well-understood discipline, and by an obligation to do some intellectual work, is of high value to all who come to the University prepared to use it. The arrangements of a College are particularly favourable to close intercourse of its members one with another. The smaller the College is, the more likely is it that all its members, or at least all who are of the same standing, will be acquainted with one another, if there be no marked disparity of previous

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education to keep them apart. The diffident will thus find themselves introduced into a society ready formed for them ; those of less culture, or force of mind or character, will benefit by the superior average of their neighbours ; at any given time, something of a common tone, both social and moral, will prevail in the whole society of a moderate-sized College ; and though this may change rapidly, it concerns those who are choosing a College for an average student, to get such information as they can at the time, as to the reputation of the undergraduate society of each College that is in question. This is not less important, and it is sometimes less easy, than it is to ascertain what reputation the Tutor has for stimulating the minds or guiding the conduct of his pupils. A person of greater force of character may be more independent of these considerations. If his choice is not determined, by personal connexion or the hope of prizes, in favour of a small college, such a student may prefer one of the larger, as offering either greater variety of companionship, or a greater number of persons whose tastes and circumstances are similar to his own. Members of different Colleges meet together in associations for religious, literary, social or merely athletic purposes ; ties of school friendship, of home neighbourhood, or of family connexion, frequently unite members of different Colleges or different social sets in the University ; and each new acquaintance may in its turn become an introduction to others ; but all these causes together do less to

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mark out the circle of acquaintance of any one average undergraduate than membership of one and the same College. But if it is important to consider what the society is into which a freshman is to be introduced, it must also be considered how far he is himself a person likely to make what is good in the society his own, and to withstand any temptation he may meet in it. What he gets from the society will very much depend on what he brings to it.

What has been said is but slightly affected by the difference between living within the walls of a College, and living as a College undergraduate in licensed lodgings. The interval is much larger which measures the difference between a member of a College and a Non-Collegiate Student. The latter does not necessarily come into any close association with the men of his own class. He has no dinner in Hall, no compulsory lectures, no officially-provided religious worship, to connect him with all other Non-Collegiate Students of the same standing. If he chooses to restrict his intercourse with them to the narrowest limits, he will sometimes meet them at the rooms or house of the officer who has the charge of them, at University lectures or examinations, and possibly at College lectures, but hardly elsewhere. The only duty prescribed to Non-Collegiate Students, as distinguished from other undergraduates, is to call on their Censor on five days of the week at times indicated by him, and to sign their names in a book kept for the purpose. No lectures have been specially provided for them.

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At the lectures which they attend in Colleges or in the University, they are associated with members of Colleges. It is arranged that they shall have a common reading-room ; a cricket-club has been for some time in operation ; other voluntary associations may spring up among these students, as their number increases, to bind them more closely together as members of one body. At present the Union Debating Society, the Volunteer Corps, the University Football Club, and other University Associations and Clubs, are as likely to bring them into contact with members of Colleges, as to draw them nearer to one another. The wider the area covered by these organizations, the less likely they are to affect the condition of an otherwise friendless or diffident student. On the other hand, one who is desirous of society, and has ordinary social power, need not long be at a loss for opportunities of making sufficient acquaintance to render his Cambridge life pleasant, as well as wholesome. Hitherto he has been assumed to be of the usual age of undergraduates, and to be living alone in lodgings. If he is older than usual, or married, or living with relations in the town, it makes comparatively little difference to him, whether he is a member of a College or not.

The student who has selected a College will write to the Tutor of that College: one who wishes to be a Non-Collegiate Student will write to the Censor of Non-Collegiate Students. The names of these officers will be found in the Cambridge Calendar ; through