Welcome

We hope that this prospectus will give you an idea of what Worcester College offers, and what it is like to study here. As you will see from the photos, and the map at the rear of the prospectus, Worcester is a beautiful college, set in 26 acres of grounds, including landscaped gardens, a lake and sports field, and a diverse range of old and new buildings – an ideal place to study, and to relax from work, and close to the city centre, and the railway and bus stations.

We aim to provide a friendly and supportive academic and social environment, with excellent facilities for sport, and strong musical and theatrical traditions. The College welcomes diversity amongst its students, staff and visitors, and recognises the benefits of having a wide variety of backgrounds, and range of experiences amongst its members. It strongly supports the University’s aim to attract the brightest students regardless of their social, educational, regional or ethnic background.
Academic Life

The University of Oxford is a collegiate university. This means that some of the buildings (such as the famous Bodleian Library, the science laboratories, and the Museum of Natural History) are university owned, and the University supplies some of the teaching through lectures, seminars and classes open to all students. Colleges provide their own facilities (including accommodation, catering, libraries, sports grounds) and supply teaching to smaller groups consisting, in the main, of members of that particular college. Permanent academic staff usually have appointments with both the University and a college, and research and teach for both.

Colleges are therefore much more than halls of residence even though they do house their students. They are self-governing independent institutions and so provide a personal academic focus as well as a social base. They break a large university up into friendly-sized, diverse communities, and provide individual care and opportunity in academic, social, artistic and sporting activities. The University as a whole has about 12,000 undergraduates, and 11,000 graduates; Worcester College has about 400 undergraduates and 200 graduates, with roughly equal numbers of men and women.

Colleges are also, initially at least, where undergraduates will have the small-group tutorial teaching for which Oxford is well known. An academic may give lectures to large numbers of students in a University lecture hall, as well as teaching his/her college students in groups of 1-3 in tutorials. As a result college tutors are well aware of the academic progress of their students.

Student Profile

Hi! I’m Emma and I’ve just finished my fourth and final year studying maths at Worcester. It’s been a really fantastic four years and I would definitely recommend applying. There are many sports you can do at Worcester, but this doesn’t mean you have to do sport if that’s not your thing. I’ve dabbled in a few sports; I rowed, played Ultimate Frisbee, was on the Worcester Women’s darts team, played croquet in the biggest croquet competition in the world, tried out Parkour and many more things! There are so many unique opportunities, and it really doesn’t matter at all if you’re not very good! On the more academic side of things, over the last four years I’ve had about 8 lectures a week with a few tutorials (one tutor to about three students, going over the problem sheet you’ve been set) or classes (a tutor and a teaching assistant to about 6-12 students, run in the department) every week. Most of the work you do is in your own time, working through the problem sheets and going over what you’ve learnt in lectures. However, you’re not just left to fend for yourself, there’s so much support and help available if you need it. I’ve also been president of the Oxford Mirzakhani Society, a society for female or non-binary mathematicians, which has been a really great way to make a difference to something I’m passionate about. As well as the academic and extra-curricular side to college life, there is of course a great social scene. With lots of organised and unorganised fun, there’s always an opportunity to let your hair down!
A Typical Week

A typical week for an undergraduate will vary considerably by subject; a student in a lab-based science subject is likely to have more timetabled hours than a student in a humanities subject, but both will have to spend considerable time during the week studying independently. For the humanities student this may well involve tackling the suggested reading list before collecting their thoughts in the required essay; for the science student there may be a problem sheet relating to some of that week’s lectures.

Whatever the subject, independent study is a key feature of higher education and a student will need to seriously engage with the set material to succeed on the course. This can be challenging but any difficulties can commonly be resolved subsequently in tutorials. These are weekly or twice-weekly meetings with your tutor when you, and maybe one or two other students, will present work you have prepared, have it analysed by your tutor and discussed. You will be encouraged to develop your own ideas and questions, and be guided on how to explore further, deepen your understanding, and improve your ability to communicate your ideas. Oxford students are expected to be keenly interested in their subjects and strongly motivated in studying them. Such engagement with the subject is key to making the most of the tutorial system.

If you are a graduate student, the main focus of your study will usually be at the ‘university level’, where your faculty or department will organise classes and lectures, and provide your research supervisor. In addition to your subject-based supervisor, who may be in any college, one of Worcester’s tutors will be assigned to you as College Advisor and will take a general interest in your progress, offering help and advice if needed. In some taught courses (e.g. BCL, BMus, and in some cases MPhil) tuition is provided or arranged by colleges in much the same way as for undergraduates.
Recreation

Worcester is fortunate in having its sports field on the main site. Undergraduates and graduates, men and women, can get involved in a great variety of sports at many levels. There are regular teams in athletics, football, rugby, tennis, hockey, cricket, netball, and lacrosse and commonly there is college or inter-collegiate involvement in minor sports too, such as squash and ultimate frisbee. The sports field provides three hard tennis courts and a netball court. There is also a well-equipped gym. For rowers, there is an active Boat Club, with a boathouse on the River Thames.

The drama society at Worcester is called Buskins. Their main production is in the gardens every summer, but there are also smaller productions throughout the year. The Worcester College Music Society arranges an active calendar of events throughout the academic year, including choral and orchestral concerts (some of which take place beside the lake), and a regular series of chamber music recitals. There are also opportunities for students to participate in less formal choral and instrumental groups. Rehearsal and practice facilities are available.

The College, which has a strong choral tradition and provides a high standard of chapel music, offers both Organ Scholarships and Choral Awards (details of how to apply are given on the University’s website). The Chapel Choirs sing four services each week during term under the direction of the Organ Scholars. Two services are sung by a predominantly male-voice choir, and two services are sung by a mixed-voice choir.

Common Rooms and Bar

The College’s Cellar Bar is open every evening in term time and has a jukebox, darts board and table football, as well as an adjacent pool room. The Junior Common Room (JCR) is the representative body to which all our students belong. It elects its officers, provides a forum for student opinion, gives welfare information, organises social events and helps with school/college liaison including a JCR-led open day. The common room is large and has a TV and table tennis table. The Middle Common Room (MCR) is the representative body of the graduate community. It has its own elected officers and is based in a restored nineteenth-century building in the College grounds. In addition to the MCR study which includes computing facilities, the building provides a reading room, a TV, pool and football tables, a darts board and a bar. The JCR and MCR organise a range of social activities each term, such as guest night dinners, ‘bops’, quizzes, and an annual ‘Arts Week’. The MCR also organises Franks Society talks which are bi-terminally talks given by graduate students to all members of the MCR. Both Common Rooms have representation on a number of the College’s committees with the two presidents attending Governing Body meetings.
The College Libraries exist to serve undergraduate and graduate members of Worcester, and the modern collection contains about 65,000 volumes. Around 1,000 volumes are purchased each year and the holdings have also been enriched by substantial donations. The collections are intended to support students in all subjects and suggestions for new purchases are welcome.

The Main Library consists of two parts: the Upper Library (the modern library) and the Lower Library (the old library). There is also a separate Law Library which is open to all readers. The Upper Library and Law Library are open 24 hours a day. The beautiful Lower Library, with its fine view over the college grounds, is also available as a study space. WiFi is available in all Library reading rooms. The college also provides vacant teaching rooms where students can revise in the lead up to exams.

Finance/Financial Support

The college is concerned that students should not be adversely affected by financial hardship. In addition to the bursaries and scholarships provided by the University, undergraduate students can also apply for a book allowance or vacation study grants from the college. There are also a number of prizes and scholarships offered by the college to reward excellent academic work.

There are two main sources of funding available to students affected by unforeseen financial difficulties:

Grants from the Access to Learning Fund (government money, providing a supplementary source of financial assistance for publicly funded students suffering financial hardship).

College and University hardship funds (these are aimed primarily at those who are in financial hardship, but who are not eligible for a grant from the Access to Learning Fund. Help may be given either as a grant or a loan, or both). The College has some resources for this purpose arising from certain bequests in the past.

At www.ox.ac.uk/funding the University’s website provides up to date information about fees for undergraduate study as well as information about financial support available for students.

Student Profile

Hello! I’m Hannah, a 3rd year English student, and a former JCR President. Worcester has been the most phenomenal home to grow up in these past few years, and being JCR president in my 2nd year has meant that I’ve been able to be involved in every nook and cranny of college life.

I had an overwhelming sense of imposter syndrome before I arrived, but Worcester turned out to not just be a place where I could survive but a place where I could bloom. I fell in love with my course through the tutorial system, and have been able to develop so many of my passions (sport, music, drama and journalism being a few) surrounded by an incredible community.

The unbelievable opportunities that Oxford and Worcester offer through travel grants, charity volunteering schemes, internship grants and theatre workshops have so far taken me to the Edinburgh Fringe, Copenhagen, Hong Kong, China, New York and Bolivia. I could not recommend Worcester more - there is such a tangible sense of support and encouragement here, and the staff and students have become my second family.
Undergraduate Admissions and Access

At Worcester College, our longstanding dedication to the advancement of knowledge and understanding is today also an active commitment to teaching - and learning from - students from any social background, of any race and culture, of any physical ability, of any gender, sexuality, religion, and of none.

Choosing a degree course that’s right for you is the single most important aspect of applying to university. Enthusiasm for and engagement with your degree subject(s) is essential to success on course and an enjoyable time in higher education. It is also worth noting that there is a very wide range of courses available at university so, for example, a student who enjoys Physics and Chemistry at school might find that Earth Sciences is the degree subject that best reflects those interests at university.

Application to Oxford undergraduate courses is competitive, but perhaps less so than you might expect. There are currently, on average, around 6 applicants per place at the university though this varies from subject to subject. Oxford tutors are most interested in applicants’ academic potential and enthusiasm for their proposed course of study.

For most courses you are required to take an admissions test, normally at your school or college. The University website is a valuable source of information about this with samples or past papers available. Some preparation in becoming familiar with the style and format of these papers is highly advisable.

On the basis of the information in the UCAS application (e.g. past exam results, predicted grades, teacher reference, and the personal statement), written test scores (if applicable), and written work submissions (where appropriate) around 3 applicants per place are shortlisted and subsequently interviewed in Oxford or remotely via phone/Skype. These are academic, subject-based discussions with tutors and students may have several interviews depending on the subject.

As the application process varies somewhat from subject to subject, you should carefully review the university prospectus and/or the university admissions website for details relating to your chosen subject. However below are some of the key dates and stages of the application process.

- **15th October** – this is the UCAS application deadline for Oxford.
- **15th October** – many subjects have pre-interview admissions tests (check for your chosen subject). This is the registration deadline for such tests and needs to be done through your school, college or a test centre.
- **Late October/early November** – date for pre-interview admissions tests.
- **Early-mid December** – interviews in Oxford or remotely.
- **Early January** – final decisions are sent out.

Student Profile

Hi there, I’m Lucy, a French and Italian student here at Worcester. During my time here, I have been really involved with Access. I served as the student Access Rep on the JCR committee, and as part of this, I organised a student-led open day with the Social Mobility Foundation, who come to visit Worcester with a cohort of students from disadvantaged backgrounds each year. I also helped with college tours and open days, always enjoying chatting to prospective students. I have volunteered for IntoUniversity as a Mentor, which I found hugely rewarding; this involves meeting with a student from a disadvantaged background in East Oxford once a week, to help with their social, academic and career-related development. I also worked at the Oxford and Cambridge Student Conferences, which take place in the Easter holidays each year all over the country, targeting state schools to encourage more students to consider applying to selective universities.

I am a Moritz-Heyman Scholar, and so greatly indebted to Oxford for its hugely generous financial support. I have found access volunteering an extremely rewarding way to give something back to the university, and show others the amazing place that it can be, regardless of the background you might come from.
Accommodation

The College can offer accommodation to all undergraduate students for three years of their degree and aims to provide one year’s accommodation for most first year graduate students, with the possibility of a further year, subject to availability. All accommodation is within the College grounds, or not more than 300 metres from the perimeter. Worcester’s buildings span many centuries; some of the undergraduate rooms are in the historic fifteenth-century and eighteenth-century buildings, but most date from the mid-to-late twentieth century. Over two-thirds of the student rooms are en-suite and have access to good kitchen facilities, and there are also a number of shared student houses. Married students or graduates with partners may apply to live in one of the college’s flats. There is wireless coverage in all buildings, including student accommodation. We are committed to making arrangements to enable students with disabilities to participate as fully as possible in student life, and applicants are advised to contact the Academic Office to discuss provision and perhaps to arrange a visit.

College History

There has been an institution of learning on the College site since 1283 when Gloucester College, Worcester’s predecessor, was founded by the Benedictine Order. The Dissolution of the Monasteries ended the existence of Gloucester College, and after 154 years as Gloucester Hall, the site became known as Worcester College in 1714 when a Worcestershire baronet, Sir Thomas Cookes, left a benefaction for the foundation of a new Oxford college. The buildings of the main quad reflect this chequered history. On the south side are the ‘pump quad’ and a row of medieval cottages, the surviving parts of Gloucester College and amongst the oldest residential buildings in Oxford. On the north side is an imposing eighteenth century neoclassical building. Because of lack of funds, the eighteenth-century building programme proceeded by fits and starts and the medieval cottages, which were to have been demolished and replaced by a further classical range, survived only because money for this purpose was never available. The Hall and Chapel, by James Wyatt, were not completed until the 1770s and in 1864 the Chapel was extensively redecorated and refurbished by William Burges. Over the past fifty years several new residential blocks for students have been added. Although Worcester is close to the centre of Oxford today, it was on the edge of the city in the eighteenth century. In the long run this was an asset, since it has allowed the College to have its sports field within the grounds and to retain very extensive gardens and lake, which are as much of an attraction to visitors as our architecture.
Food and Drink

Worcester has a well-deserved reputation for excellent food. Catering is subsidised and prices are very reasonable. Meals are paid for as they are taken so that students can decide how often to eat in College. Many students eat dinner in Hall during term and can choose between informal (daily cafeteria-style sittings) and formal hall (four times a week); others will choose to prepare their own food in the many communal kitchens around college. Currently breakfast times are 8-10am, with panini, baguettes and salads available from 10am-noon and full lunch being offered from noon-2pm. (Slightly different times and arrangements apply on Sundays.) We are happy to cater for vegetarians, vegans and those with special medical diets, and students with specific dietary requirements may request rooms with appropriate kitchen facilities.

Welfare

The well-being of our students is extremely important to us, and we are keen to ensure that proper support is available to anyone who needs it. The College Welfare Officer is a first point of contact and can direct you towards the most appropriate support – this may be the Dean team (who have particular responsibility for welfare), Peer supporters (trained undergraduates who support fellow students and offer drop-in support), the College nurse (who has a room in College), the College Counsellor, the College doctor (whose surgery is only a short distance from the College), the Chaplain or wider University support such as the Disability Service. In addition, each student is assigned a college tutor who has particular responsibility for providing them with advice and support and many academic matters can be addressed this way because of the more personal nature of tutorial teaching.
Further Contact Advice and Visiting the College

The College is open to potential applicants every day from 2pm to 5pm during the summer and from 2pm to 4pm during the winter (except for public holidays). Students and parents are very welcome to visit and look around the College grounds. For individuals, or groups of fewer than 6 people, no booking is required. Please contact the Admissions & Access Officer if you wish to visit during the morning.

Annually, the three official College Open Days (which coincide with and are part of the wider University Open Days) offer a chance to meet subject tutors and current students, and be given a tour of the College. Booking is not required and the College is open throughout the day for those wishing to look around informally or be shown around the College’s site. Admissions staff are available during the Open Days to answer questions about the College and the admissions process. Further information about the Open Days is available on the College website. Schools and colleges wishing to arrange group visits are very welcome to do so by contacting the Admissions & Access Officer. We are also happy to visit schools and colleges to talk to students about applying to Oxford.

Thanks go to Bertie Beor-Roberts, Benjamin Darwent, Oliver Fluck, Allison Leslie and Marie Wong for permission to reproduce various of their photos within this prospectus.