Alternative Prospectus

CUGS introduction to Cambridge Geography
Intro.

Geography is such a diverse and exciting subject and where better place to study it than Cambridge! Life as a Cambridge Geography student is filled with so many wonderful opportunities and experiences, from visiting incredible places on your Part 1B Fieldtrip, to planning a fascinating dissertation on a topic which you are passionate about and will be proud of for the rest of your lives! And not to mention becoming a member of CUGS! CUGS is the University’s Geographical Society – a very successful student-run subject society which hosts a full calendar of events including insightful speaker events from world-class academics, informative careers evenings and of course exciting social events! For the first time, CUGS has created an alternative prospectus to help prospective students, such as yourself, make an informed choice as to whether studying Geography at Cambridge is right for you! We hope that the following information is interesting and helpful to you all.

Laura Whalley

President 15/16
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To give you a flavour of life as a geographer, here are 4 average days in the lives of 4 different students…

**Hannah, a first year geographer**

During the week, when I have morning lectures I am up early and at the geography department to get some work done before the lecture. After writing up the lecture I will have lunch with friends often in Downing Café, a popular student coffee shop and chilled out work space.

I tend to have a swim in the Cambridge Park Side pool before returning to Fitz to work, or for supervisions. At Fitz we generally have supervisions in groups of two or three and it is interesting to discuss ideas, themes and to ask questions about submitted work or lectures.

For dinner I often go to the Buttery with my friends, finish some reading afterwards and then take the evening off. There is always something exciting happening in Cambridge so I frequently spend evenings at Union debates, talks by interesting and inspiring speakers or trying a new activity like yoga or joining a drama group. At the weekends I enjoy horse riding and playing squash, as well as relaxing with friends in the JCR or heading out for cycle rides.
Lucy, a second year human geographer

6am: Early rise for me today! Off to the river for an early morning row. We are training for bumps at the end of term which is when Colleges race each other up the river trying to catch the boat in front. It is a beautiful morning and after a brisk cycle I am wide awake for the day ahead.

9am: No lectures till 10 today so I meet a friend for brunch in Spoons. We have a supervision together later so discuss questions we want to ask and talk about our favourite aspects of the topic.

10am: Economic Geography lecture. Today we are learning about the relevance of gender in the global political economy, particularly in regard to the global remittance trends.

11am: Off to the Geography Library now. I am currently working on a piece of coursework for my Development paper, discussing to what extent the Sustainable Development Goals are going to be "transformative" in the development agenda.

1pm: The weather is beautiful so I head to Christ's piece with some friends to eat our sandwiches in the sunshine.

2pm: Supervision at Emmanuel. We discuss Victorian citizenship and sort out any problems we are having with the topic.
3pm: Now for a RAG (Raise and Give) meeting. I am organising a university-wide charity event set to raise £15,000 for a variety of causes so report back to the team on how planning is progressing. I have just finished filming the promotional video and am set to edit it this weekend. Very excited!

4pm: Back to college for some power hours in the library before dinner. A friend is bringing round some sweeties to keep us going.

7pm: Join friends in the college buttery for some yummy food.

8pm: Another few hours in the library.

11pm: Tonight's a Wednesday so I join my friends in the college bar before heading to Cindies. Thankfully no rowing tomorrow morning so I can have a lie in!

Charlie, a first year geographer

8am: Wake up, shower and head to breakfast in hall. 9am: Head over to my only lecture of the day – the topic is the ‘New International Division of Labour’. Globalization was one of my topics for geography A level, but the lecturer’s focus is more critical than my teacher’s was.

10am: Some of my friends and I get coffee and play some pool in Downing Bar, just next to the lecture theatre.
10:30am: I go to the geography library to do some reading for my essay about the links between tectonic uplift and global climate change during the Cenozoic.

12:30pm: Lunchtime – it’s a sunny day, so we eat our food on the grass in college. Do a bit more reading afterwards.

2:30pm: Cycle over to Wilberforce Road for our rugby game against Homerton. Promotion to division 1 is resting on this, and I’ve been excited for the game all day.

5:30pm: Have dinner in Wetherspoon’s with the team to celebrate the victory and promotion!

6:30pm: Get back to college just in time for a meeting with the other Emma geographers. It’s first year so we all do the same essays, and have meetings before we write them to discuss the ideas with each other.

9pm: Head down to the bar with some friends for a drink.

10pm: Watch some TV in the Junior Common Room before going to bed after a tiring day.

Annabel, a first year geographer

I like to wake up at 8:30am to go for a run from Fitzwilliam to Girton College and back before the start of the academic day.

After showering and making breakfast I cycle into town for my lecture at 10am. Today it's Alex Jeffrey talking about 'the war on terror' in our Geopolitics lectures. He’s a fantastic lecturer and it is all incredibly capti-
vating. We had done a little bit of Geopolitics at A-level with The Cold War but nothing like the lectures and reading here.

At the end of the lecture, 11am I head to the Geography library upstairs to read about how internal feedbacks contributed to Quaternary climate change.

At 12:30pm I start to get hungry, so a couple of friends and I go to this cute little cafe near the department called Christine's where I have a brie and cranberry baguette.

At 1:30pm I have a skills practical, where we look at how to use a software called ArcMap to map a glacier. These skills will be very useful when we embark on our dissertations in third year.

I cycle back to the college at 2:30pm, and then go to Fitzwilliam library to continue my reading, before going to Fitzwilliam cafe for a break and catching up with my non-Geography friends.

At 6pm I head to the buttery to get some dinner, today it's fajitas! Later I go to the ADC theatre to watch a modern version of Hamlet, which was amazing! And then stop off at the Maypole for a quick drink on the way home.
Fieldtrips form the backbone of geography as a discipline and are what probably get most of you guys excited to want to study geography. They can take a variety of forms, from the local area in the first year to more exotic places in the second year. Here is a brief taster of what has been happening this year…

**Part 1A Fieldtrip - Emily**

As part of the skills section of 1A, we completed a project on Water Quality & Fluvial Processes. The project focused on the River Cam, where we visited the Saffron Walden Sewage treatment works and Upper Cam Valley all in a day. We were able to get a closer look at the processes that treat the sewage before being released into the river, before conducting tests on the river itself to assess the success of the treatment works in minimising harmful effluent. In groups of 6, we conducted tests on the biological quality, physico-chemical conditions, environmental quality standards and hydromorphological conditions at different stages of the river. It was great to be able to get so hands on, wading about in the river wielding different measuring instruments! It was really useful (and a lot of fun!) to have been out in the field to make sense of the data when analysing the results in the lab and in the report that we submitted.
In your second year, each student gets the amazing opportunity to travel abroad to undertake fieldwork and research. There are usually five different trips to choose from, this year including trips to Denmark, Mallorca, Morocco, Crete and Tenerife. Students choose their top three choices, with the majority being able to go on their first or second choice of trip.

I was lucky enough to spend 6 days in Morocco with 22 other students and three members of staff. We spent the first evening of the trip in Marrakech, where we had the chance to explore the vast and magical Marrakech market and practice our bartering skills, followed by a huge traditional Moroccan buffet at the hotel.

The next day we travelled into the Atlas Mountains, first stopping off at Asni market where locals come on a Saturday to buy and sell goods. We were tasked with researching the different products in the markets, their prices, and where they came from. Bringing out some slightly rusty French skills we worked in groups, chatting to stall owners about their products. It was an incredible experience as, unlike the market in Marrakech, Asni is first and foremost a local’s market giving us a truly authentic experience. We even had the chance to drink some traditional Moroccan tea in a local ‘café’! We then travelled further into the mountains to Imlil, on the edge of Toubkal National Park, where we spent the next five days of the trip.
We were lucky enough to stay at the beautiful Kasbah du Toubkal which is a traditional hotel located at the top of Imlil village (meaning a slight trek to reach it!). The Kasbah offered the best of Moroccan hospitality, providing us with delicious Moroccan cuisine for breakfast, lunch and dinner and offering beautiful views of the Mountains from its roof terrace. We even got the chance to experience a traditional Moroccan Haman!

The next two days were spent exploring the mountains and other villages around Imlil, led by local guides who were able to point out sites of local interest. One of my highlights of the trip was having a buffet lunch at the top of mountains with beautiful views over the valley. The hikes helped us to understand the region’s geography and think about different topics we might like to research further and base our fieldtrip project on. Having discussed various research ideas, the next two days were spent conducting fieldwork on a topic of choice. The nature of research was wide ranging, from gender relations, understanding irrigation systems, to how technology was being used in the region. To help with our research, each group (of around five), was given a guide to help them navigate the mountains and to act as a translator. Following our research, each group would then give a presentation about what they had found out during the day. It was truly amazing to see how much you could learn with just two days of research, and really made you view Imlil in a very different light. The trips were a fantastic experience, which really opened up my eyes to what doing research is like and has been important in helping me think about how I am going to conduct my dissertation research. Above all, it was a great way to get to know other geographers really well, and I have come away not just with a great experience of Morocco but also with new geographer friends!
Skallingen Fieldtrip- Emily

Skallingen, Denmark was the physical geography field trip. It involved studying the beach and associated waves and tides as well as the salt marsh and adjoining tidal mudflat. The trip was really fun and allowed bonding with geographers from other colleges as well as completion of personal fieldwork. Don't forget your wellies though, otherwise you'll be made to wear two left wellies!
One of the most exciting parts of a geography degree at Cambridge is the ability to carry out your own research during the long vacation between the second and third years on any geographical topic you decide upon. This has taken geographers to many different places around the world. Here is one example of where dissertation research can take you!

**Ben - Kathmandu**

I spent five weeks of summer 2014 in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, studying how schools in Kathmandu seek to manage their English speaking volunteers and how this relates to debates about power and agency in international volunteering. This was an area of particular interest for me, as I had spent six weeks as a volunteer teacher in one of my research schools the previous summer, and had enjoyed the experience immensely. The process in 2nd year of choosing a dissertation topic is quite lengthy – and you find out why when you come to research and write up your dissertation! It’s really important that you do enough background reading into your research area to form coherent research questions that might be answerable with data collectable within an undergraduate dissertation timeframe. For me, all of this reading and reflexivity led to my visiting six different schools in the Kathmandu Valley to talk at length with Head Teachers and...
teachers (and sometimes volunteers too) about their experiences and aims regarding volunteers. The key thing to emphasise about the pre-research period is planning. When you are travelling abroad for a limited period of time, the chances are that you won’t be able to return to the field. So you need to have as much in place as possible before you travel. The difficult thing about researching in Nepal was that much there is organised in the last minute. So I had to be prepared to be flexible and take what opportunities came.

However, the experience itself was one I would definitely recommend to everyone. Nepal is a particularly interesting place to conduct development-related research, as the country has endorsed western concepts of development in a number of highly interesting and sometimes paradoxical ways. I had unrivalled access to the thoughts and ideas of teachers and volunteers by living in one of my research schools, and was able to sit late into the night having fascinating discussions with the school’s Principal. The school was very hospitable, and also very helpful in linking me to contacts in other schools.

If I had to conclude with one piece of advice for those conducting dissertation research abroad, it would be to combine patience with flexibility. There will be frustrating and worrying times when you fear that things are not working out for you. You have to be patient, but you also need to have some flexibility in your plans if you are going to collect useful data.

Above all, don’t let the challenges of travelling abroad to conduct your dissertation research put you off. I highly recommend it, and between the Department and College, there are funds available to help you pay for your travel.
We think Geography is pretty cool, and we hope you do too. But there is more to Cambridge life than studying. There is a huge array of student societies to get involved in, that tailor to almost any sort of interest or hobby that you might have. Whether it be something conventional such as hockey or debating, to something more unorthodox, such as Quidditch playing or chocolate eating, there is probably a society to match your interests. For a full list, please have a look at http://www.societies.cam.ac.uk/, but here are a few societies that may be of particular interest to geographers:

- Cambridge Union
- Amnesty International
- Cambridge University Wildlife Conservation Society
- King’s Politics
- International Development Society
- Zero Carbon Society
- Cambridge RAG
- Cambridge Positive Investment Campaign

For full details, do please look for these websites on the links above. Of course, this is only a brief snapshot of what geographers can do, and there are plenty more than to get involved with than this!

Cambridge University Geographical Society
The Cambridge University Geographical Society (CUGS) is the student-run society for geography students at the University of Cambridge, and is, of course, the number one society for geographers in Cambridge. Our active committee works for the service of one of the largest society memberships in the University. Our number one concern is to provide a space for members to share in their passion for all things geographical.

Socials (or, ENTS):
Despite the College system providing a fantastic social and academic atmosphere, it can sometimes prove challenging for people to meet friends beyond dividing walls. Through the year, the committee will aim to provide a few social evenings to get people to know each other in a relaxed atmosphere. Sometimes our sponsor, Ernst&Young, may pay for our first couple of rounds which is always good. Your first will be a Freshers’ drinks evening!

Speakers Events:
The speakers officers work tirelessly to try to grab interesting speakers for your attention. For members these events provide free access to leading people in research and society on geographical themes. Usually in the intimate setting of a lecture theatre or over drinks, members can have their questions asked and satisfy their interests. In the past we have entertained the likes of Saskia Sassen, Derek Gregory, Martha Crockatt, NatGeo Photographers, and Klaus Dodds. If you don’t know who some of these people are now, you will do soon!

Garden Party & Christmas Dinner:
In the winter we are one of the few societies (if not, the only) which bothers to put on a lovely Christmas dinner for our members at a host College. With Black Tie, good food, and good wine, members can have a nice end to Michaelmas term in the company of staff and peers. In the summer, we round off
the year with a large garden party which, for a relatively cheap price, provides some food and a fair amount of refreshment in elegant surroundings.
People

Please feel free to get in touch with any of us, if you have any questions or queries at all!

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