



## Studying at Girton (Notes for Freshers)

### Welcome to Girton



We are delighted to welcome you to Girton.  
We very much hope you will enjoy your time studying here.

There is a big change from school but we have a team of people here to help, not just with the first few days, but throughout the year, as you experience new aspects of study here. Your Director of Studies will guide you to subject specific support.

We hope each and every one of you will find an environment here where you are comfortable being yourself and do not feel you have to conform to any stereotype.

There is an expectation of mutual respect across the community and if this is not what you experience please let your tutor know, or me as Senior Tutor ([senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk)), as soon as possible

Whilst study is the main reason for being here, life is much more than this and while this document focuses on study it also points you to other aspects of college life, which we hope will help you to flourish as an individual.

### Personal Tutor

Tutors are academic members of college who have chosen to offer pastoral support for our students. Tutors provide a welfare referral service, signposting you to appropriate help: they cannot solve all problems or answer every question, but they can direct students to a wide range of support provided by the College, the University and external services.

- Tutors may be approached for advice in addressing questions about academic, financial, health, family or other personal issues that may be affecting their students' ability to pursue their studies effectively.
- Tutors are not trained counsellors or mental health professionals: they are therefore neither qualified nor able to take on a therapeutic role. However they can listen and discuss with you what support would be best to seek.
- They can also act as your advocate if you wish to make a complaint or are



involved as a reporting person or respondent in any discipline case.

- Do respond to their request for a termly meeting or for any other interim meetings they suggest. This is to help them get to know you and be able to support you if you need it.
- Let them know when good things happen too! It is nice to share good news and they may be able to nominate you for college prizes if they are aware of other things you are doing.

### **The "Thrive" programme**

Girton is committed to helping you to develop not only study skills but also transferable and life skills, to help you make the transition from school to university and beyond. We are organising a series of talks on subjects ranging from presentation skills to online safety, plus occasional informal stress-busting activities at other times in the week. You should aim to attend all the Thrive events that are recommended for first years, and some will be compulsory. See the programme in your room.

Look out for emails announcing "Thrive" sessions

### **Academic Support - Directors of Studies**

A key academic relationship while at Cambridge will be with your Director of Studies (<https://www.girton.cam.ac.uk/girton-community/undergraduate-students/undergraduate-guide/academic-matters/>). Throughout your undergraduate course your Director of Studies will advise you on course choice options and arrange supervisions, which are the small-group teaching sessions provided by Colleges that characterise a Cambridge undergraduate education ([http://www.seniortutors.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/supervisors\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.seniortutors.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/supervisors_guidance.pdf)). He or she will also monitor and support your academic progress.

### **Your Director of Studies' commitment to you**

During your time as an undergraduate, you may generally expect your Director of Studies to do the following. When you are a fresher, or if you have recently changed course, provide an induction into your course by:

- supplying introductory material in advance of your arrival;
- meeting you at the beginning of your first year to explain teaching and learning at the Collegiate University in detail; and
- advising you on how to get the most out of supervisions, lectures, seminars and practicals, and from available learning facilities and materials

Throughout your course:

- Advise you on courses options, academic facilities, and examinations
- Arrange supervisions for you with suitably qualified supervisors
- Read and approve your supervision reports



- Discuss your supervision reports with you and give you feedback and guidance
- Warn you if you appear to be neglecting your studies or if your supervision reports give your Director of Studies cause for concern
- Seek feedback from you on your supervisors and, where appropriate, act on feedback you supply- this is normally via a termly questionnaire and you read of term meetings
- Be available to meet and advise you on subject-related matters, particularly if you are experiencing academic difficulties
- Discuss and explain the detailed published information available concerning your examination results
- Respond promptly to all your correspondence (including email)
- Appreciate the value of the wider Cambridge experience, including your extra-curricular activities
- Advise you on possible future study and postgraduate courses
- Normally, be able to write references for you if given sufficient warning of the deadline

### **Your commitment to your Director of Studies**

In return for their efforts a Director of Studies should normally expect a student to:

- attend promptly all scheduled meetings with their Director of Studies, unless there is a compelling reason why they cannot, and give as much notice as possible of any unavoidable absence or delay;
- discuss their interests and plans with their Director of Studies, and take note of his or her advice and guidance on academic matters;
- attend relevant University lectures, seminars and practicals, and make use of the available learning facilities and materials;
- attend supervisions arranged for them and give as much notice as possible to both the supervisor and the Director of Studies of any unavoidable absence due to illness or other grave cause;
- pro-actively discuss with their Director of Studies any concerns they may have about their supervisions, in particular when they seem not to be working satisfactorily or there is a problem;
- respond to requests for feedback on supervisions and supervisors;
- deal promptly with all academic correspondence (especially email) and with College and University administrative requests, such as enrolling for examinations, completing teaching questionnaires, etc;
- give the maximum possible notice when requesting a reference from their Director of Studies.

### **Supervisions**

Girton is committed to ensuring that supervisions provide a helpful and non-intimidating environment for learning. This is best achieved in an atmosphere of open and free discussion within a clear framework of mutual expectations between students and supervisors.



## How to get most from your supervision

Supervisions provide a unique chance to get feedback on your work. This means that your supervision on a topic may be different from another group's on the same topic. Do not fret about this- supervisions aim for the optimum learning support for each group. They are therefore unlikely to be identical.

You should try and use each hour in the most beneficial way possible to your own academic development. This may include:

- ensuring that your own preparation for a supervision is comprehensive and thorough, enabling you to get the most out of it.
- handing any required work in on time
- participating in discussion. Supervisions are the opportunity to try an idea out/express a concern about understanding/exploring beyond lectures. There is no silly idea or stupid question – if you are interested ask!
- monitoring with your supervision partner/s how the supervisions are going (e.g. whether enough attention is being given by the supervisor to explaining problems and difficulties, whether one student is dominating the supervisor's time).
- giving your supervisor feedback on the positive and negative aspects of the way in which he/she is structuring the supervision. For example, the supervisor may ask male students for input significantly more frequently than female students, or vice versa.

You should see your Directors of Studies or your Tutor if you have persistent problems with either your supervisor or your supervision partner/s. It is possible to change either or both of these.

## What Supervisors are told about supervisions

Supervisors are told

*“It is helpful to students if the initial supervision includes discussion of the supervisor's own view about what the supervisions are intended to achieve. This may encompass*

- *clear guidance about learning goals (e.g. connection to lectures, balance between understanding the subject and Tripos preparation)*
- *clear guidance about your expectations of the students*
- *clear guidance as to the number of supervisions to be attended, and how they are to be timetabled.*
- *clear guidance about how students should best structure their time in preparing for supervisions.*

*Supervisors should be aware that many students see supervisions as a test of their innate ability rather than as an opportunity for learning. It is useful to stress that supervisions are for*



*the students to ask questions, and are not a test of intelligence.”*

Supervisors are asked to contact your Directors of Studies or Tutors if you are not engaging with the supervision process (e.g. submitting work late, cancelling supervisions without good reason, failing to appear). Repeated failure to attend may lead the College to charge you directly for the supervisor's time.

## Study Skills

Please ask your Director of Studies or Tutor if you are concerned about any aspect of study skills and they will point you to where to get help and support. Throughout the year there will be group sessions on various aspects of study skills, including how to revise effectively as well as the possibility of individual support sessions.

## Library Support

The library is a rich resource which in addition to the book collection offers support on how to use library catalogues and data bases, study skills guides, managing your references and much more.

***Look out for emails announcing study skills support sessions***

## Your Workload

Your academic work is the primary reason for being here but remember- Studying well includes having breaks for whatever activity you find helps you relax (it can be anything - sport, watching films, chat with friends, cooking, going out with friends, drama, college societies, board games). You name it there will be someone else at the university interested too <https://www.societies.cam.ac.uk/>

Non-stop work is **not** an effective strategy to do well. Neither is very little work!

Get the balance right and you will enjoy your work and your free time. If you are worried this is not the case then ask your DoS or tutor for help

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses/how-will-i-be-taught>

“During term time, you’re expected to spend an average of 42-46 hours a week on your academic studies (including teaching/contact time and independent study), and you also need to undertake some work during the vacations (eg further reading/research, revision, assignments).”

Seek advice from your DoS or Tutor if you feel you are doing more than this.



## University Teaching

### Lectures, practicals and classes

Lectures, practicals and classes that are teaching sessions provided by the university, are offered to all students on course. Practical and classes are usually compulsory and Directors of Studies will guide you on this and as to which lectures you are expected to attend. If you have a problem with any of this teaching you can feed back via the student reps for your course, but you should discuss anything that is more than a minor issue with your DoS.

There are a wealth of seminars offered across the university and as you progress through your course you may well choose to attend some of these, depending on your developing academic interest. Your DoS or course organiser may point you towards some that are particularly recommended for students studying your subject.

### Moodle

Moodle is the virtual learning environment for the university and you should engage with the Moodle site(s) for your course and for college support, for up to date information and resources.

## Students with Disabilities

The College will do everything possible to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to ensure an inclusive living, learning and working environment for all College members.

If you have a disability that you have not yet declared, or think you should be assessed for a specific learning disability please talk to your Tutor as soon as possible.

All students with a disability should contact the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) who are the experts in preparing student support documents (SSD). In college, the Tutor for Disabilities is Maureen Hackett who will liaise with your Tutor if there any specific needs and arrangements to be put in place in college. You should respond to requests from your Tutor and the Tutorial & Admissions Office to meet deadlines to ensure any special arrangements for examinations can be put in place.

The student support documents (SSDs) are received by the Head of Tutorial & Admissions Office and are forwarded to the student's DoS and Tutor with a request to inform the relevant parties as indicated on the SSD. DoS and Tutors are asked to confirm when they have done so. The Head of Tutorial & Admissions Office also keeps an electronic copy.

College access guide can be found here <https://www.girton.cam.ac.uk/finding-your-way-around/girton-college/access-guide-to-college>

If you are not satisfied that the College has put reasonable adjustments you



should approach your Tutor in the first instance.

## Other support

**Your Tutor** is there to offer help and support: their role is to provide all-round support and guidance to the students in their care, whatever the issue that is concerning you.

**The College Counsellor, Chaplain and College Nurses** are available to provide a 'friendly ear' and/or guidance if you are having problems in supervisions that you would prefer not to discuss with your Tutor or your Director of Studies.

- We very much hope you enjoy your studies at Girton. Please ensure you ask for any help and support you need to do so.
- Help us to help you by keeping your Tutor and/or DoS informed of any difficulties or challenges you are facing
- Please tell us anything you find really helpful as we can then spread good practice!

And if help is not forthcoming when you need it let me know  
Sandra Fulton [senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:senior.tutor@girton.cam.ac.uk)

