

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

This section aims to provide information on the Oxford college system and how you can best advise your students on college choice.

OXFORD COLLEGES: THE BASICS

The University is a collection of more than thirty individual colleges and halls. A college is an academic community which enables leading academics and students across subjects and year groups, and from different cultures and countries to come together to share ideas. Students will have some of their teaching in their college (in the form of tutorials and/or classes), and will spend time studying in the college library. Each college also provides accommodation, as well as clubs and societies, and facilities such as a dining room, bar and common room. All students are member of both a college and the University through their department.

Most colleges offer places for most courses, and they excel in all subjects that they teach. Teaching is delivered by means of college-based tutorials and department-based lectures, classes and lab work, depending on the subject. There are also numerous occasions for students to engage in extra-curricular activities outside of their college, as there are hundreds of University-wide clubs and societies to join, as well as those in the colleges.

Being a member of a college gives Oxford undergraduates all the benefits of a large, international university while living in a small, friendly community. The college system affords students much more personal tuition and greater pastoral and academic support than many other universities may be able to give.

As a member of the wider University, students will also have access to University and department facilities such as laboratories and libraries, as well as hundreds of University groups and societies.

Our advice is to encourage your students not to worry too much about college choice. While architecturally they can seem quite distinct, Oxford colleges have more in common than they have differences, and we find that students develop a fierce loyalty to whichever college they are in. All Oxford 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.

WHAT IS AN 'OPEN APPLICATION' AND WILL IT AFFECT MY STUDENT'S CHANCES OF GAINING A PLACE AT OXFORD?

- Applicants can make an 'open application' and leave the college choice decision to the University – as just under 20% of applicants do. An algorithm assigns open applicants a 'college of preference'. The algorithm looks at which colleges have received fewer applications in that subject and assigns open applications for consideration to colleges which are relatively undersubscribed in that subject area.
- This will **not** affect the candidates' chances of securing a place at Oxford: the best candidates are just as likely to be offered a place whether they choose a college or not. However, whether choosing a college or making an open application, applicants are unable to change the college to which they are allocated. So, if there are any colleges they definitely do not want to be considered by, they should specify a college of preference on their online UCAS application.
- Note that expressing a college of preference in an application will still not make that candidate exempt from potential

reallocation or redistribution.

- The allocation of open applications occurs before all applications are sent out to colleges for assessment by their academic tutors. It is important to remember that the colleges **cannot** see whether or not an applicant has applied directly to them or whether that applicant has been allocated to them in the 'open application' process; all the applications are therefore treated equally based on their merits.

CAN STUDENTS APPLY TO MORE THAN ONE COLLEGE?

- No. Students may indicate **one** college or permanent private hall of preference on the online UCAS application (by inserting the college code into the campus code section), along with the course code and institution code for Oxford. Additional college preferences may not be specified by the applicant, though they may be allocated a second or third college which may also consider their application. In addition to their college of preference, all candidates will also be offered the opportunity to be considered by a permanent private hall, if they offer the relevant course. Note there is a separate code for applicants who wish to make an open application.

AT WHAT STAGE CAN AN APPLICATION BE REALLOCATED TO OR REDISTRIBUTED TO ANOTHER COLLEGE?

- There are two points in the admissions process where an application may be reallocated or redistributed to another college. Reallocation may happen before the interview period, particularly if a certain college is oversubscribed in that subject area. At the time of interview, an application may be redistributed for consideration at other colleges in addition to the college of preference.
- If a candidate is reallocated prior to, or redistributed during, the interview process, this is not to be interpreted as a sign of weakness in a candidate's application; these processes are in place to ensure the strongest candidates who demonstrate a great deal of potential have the best possible chance of securing a place at Oxford.
- Note that tutors at **all** colleges are working from the same Common Framework for admissions and that the selection criteria for entrance are defined by subject across the University, so tutors at one college will be assessing an application against the same selection criteria as tutors in that subject in another.

WHICH ARE THE 'POPULAR' COLLEGES? CAN I FIND OUT SUCCESS RATES BY COLLEGE AND BY SUBJECT?

- The University does not produce success rates by college and by subject as these statistics can be very misleading due to annual fluctuations in reallocation, redistribution and open offers. What we do provide our website is the number of current undergraduates studying a certain subject at a particular college.
- Note that these figures do not refer to 'quotas' or a fixed number of places available, but are rather indicative of current student numbers in that subject at that college. To get the number of students in one year group, you will need to divide this number by the number of years in the course.
- You can also find overall applicant success rates by subject in the individual course entries in the prospectus and on our admissions website

SHOULD MY STUDENT BE APPLYING TO A CERTAIN COLLEGE FOR A PARTICULAR DEGREE COURSE?

- All Oxford colleges are very strong academically, and most colleges offer a wide range of the courses offered at the University.
- When looking at colleges with your students, there is no need to focus on a certain tutor's research specialisms. Very often, for optional subjects in their second or subsequent years of study, undergraduates will be taught by specialists in that area, and this specialist may be at another college.
- Also, the lists of tutors are compiled based on current staff and a certain tutor may well leave the University before your student arrives.
- All tutors are experts in their field and are adept at covering a wide range of topics; if there is someone else in the department who would be better placed to teach a certain set of tutorials, the student's college will try and arrange for tuition in the expert's college.
- A student's academic experience of Oxford will be the same whichever college they study at; the syllabuses for the degree courses are devised on a departmental not college basis.
- Undergraduates attend the same lectures and classes and will take the same exams irrespective of college choice; the main difference will be who is providing their tutorials and which college these are held in.
- Final degrees are awarded by Oxford University, not the individual colleges.

WHAT OTHER FACTORS SHOULD MY STUDENTS CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A COLLEGE?

After they have checked which Oxford colleges offer their course, the choice then really becomes a question of personal preferences. They might like to consider:

- the size of the college (how many students it has)
- how old or new it is
- the location (is it in the city centre, or a few minutes away? Is it near a particular department building, the park, the river or the swimming pool?)
- what accommodation options the college can offer and whether they suit the student's needs (all colleges will offer accommodation for the first year of study and many are able to offer accommodation for the duration of the student's course, though this provision will vary across colleges).
- any other particular facilities depending on individual requirements (e.g. specific accommodation for disabled students)

Prospective applicants may also wish to talk to current students at an Oxford admissions event and they might like to make a

shortlist of colleges before coming to an open day.

WILL MY STUDENT ONLY BE INTERVIEWED AT THEIR CHOSEN COLLEGE?

- Tutors from different colleges have access to data on students across the University and are able to compare and contrast candidates' applications. This exchange of information is in place to ensure that the best candidates get an offer, whichever college they chose.
- As well as their college of preference (or allocated college, if they make an open application), another college may also interview them and perhaps offer your student a place.
- One in five current students is at a college other than their initial college of preference; you'll find that Oxford students are happy in their college, even if it is not the one they originally specified.
- For more information on interviews, see [\[embed link to Interviews section of the e-brochure\]](#).

FINDING OUT MORE

- Read further details about each college.
- One of the best ways for students to get a feel for the different colleges is to come to an open day to look around. Students will have the chance to see several colleges in one day.
- If they are unable to attend an open day, they could consider coming on a college tour during the school holidays instead, or they may wish to download an audio tour.