

# Rapport de séjour 2017-2018

---

*A year behind the scenes of the bubble or how to deal with expectance-exceeding reality*



Kings college chapel from above 03/2018

## Cambridge University

*Corpus Christi College*

*United Kingdom*

**Martha Schillmöller**  
Campus de Nancy  
[martha.schillmoller@sciencespo.fr](mailto:martha.schillmoller@sciencespo.fr)

## Introduction

I have to disappoint you: going to Cambridge has not been my dream since I was a little girl, neither did I visit Cambridge before applying there. Having grown up in a bilingual family, languages and cultural exchange have always been part of my personal development. The education I received at the German-French secondary school in Freiburg was very important for me not only because it helped me reinforce my binational identity, but also because it encouraged me to learn English and Latin and thus further broaden my linguistic horizon. Since I was little, I have been passionate about the English language and being a huge fan of Harry Potter, dreamt of adopting a British accent. Furthermore, literature in general has always been a great hobby of mine and when I chose not to study literature after school, I promised myself that I would find a way to integrate it into my life. Studying at the German-French European Campus of Sciences Po in Nancy appeared to me as the logical continuation of my prior studies as it offered a large range of topics in social sciences instructed in different languages.

Deciding to go to Cambridge meant choosing an academic experience over the possibility to discover a totally different culture at the opposite end of the world. I spent several months arranging and re-arranging my six choices for the third year. In the end, I chose three universities in Europe and three universities in the USA and Canada, so that my project was split into two. The purpose in studying literature was to broaden my academic profile in pursuing and focusing on language studies to improve my English and to learn Spanish. The study agreement between Sciences Po and Cambridge being specifically with the Department of Modern and Medieval Languages (MML), I was not able to study English literature, as I would have liked to. At first I was disappointed that I would not discover Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the halls of Cambridge, though now looking back I am more than satisfied with the courses I took instead.

Before starting a detailed description of my everyday life and experiences at Cambridge, I would like to highlight two things: firstly, choosing Cambridge was a very personal decision. Even though I didn't know what I wanted to do later in life, I knew that I wanted to spend my third year in an Anglo-Saxon country and focus on my studies, even though that meant missing the opportunity to explore a culture at the other end of the world. This brings me to my second point which is also the main thing I want to transmit to future Cambridge Erasmus students: if you want to spend a year abroad, getting to know the culture and having the time to travel Cambridge is maybe not the ideal place for you. If the year in Cambridge was definitely the most challenging and intense year of my life, it was also one of the best ones of my life. I couldn't be more satisfied with my choice of third year destination and can do nothing but highly recommend it to any student who is motivated and ready to have an incredibly enriching experience. No matter how much work I had to do, there hasn't been a single moment when I regretted my choice or envied my friends who have chosen to spend a year far away.

If I am writing this at the very beginning of the report, it is because I would have liked someone to speak plainly about the fact that even though being at Cambridge is absolutely amazing, there is a reason why it is one of the best universities in the world. However I am convinced that if you prepare yourself to feel overwhelmed, you will experience the transition as less difficult. Voilà, now you might be scared and wanting to stop reading but for those of you who are still willing to continue, let me tell you about my year in the “Bubble”.



Corpus Christi College New Court 10/2017

## 1. Experience

It took me a while to understand the Erasmus application process: as an Erasmus student, the college chooses you out of an “Erasmus pool” on a first come first serve basis. I have to call myself very lucky to have been chosen by Corpus Christi College, because even though I was scared by the name at first and mentally prepared for an austere life in a religious establishment, living in the second oldest and second smallest (and if you ask me, the most beautiful) college in Cambridge highly contributed to making this year such an unforgettable experience. If you want to know what I am talking about when I say that Corpus is almost a cliché of a college, just type in “College” in the English Wikipedia you will find a picture of... Corpus Christi’s New Court where I had the chance to live in a tiny little room under the roof for a year.

### 1.1 Academic experience

The Cambridge University system was completely different from any academic experience I had had before. At first, having been used to 12 different courses per semester at Sciences Po, I was very confused when I was told to choose only 3 *papers*<sup>1</sup> for the entire year: meaning for *Michealmas term* (October to December), *Lent term* (January to March) and *Easter term* (April to June), which is also rightly and scarily called “Exam term”. But having three *papers* turned out to require just as much if not more work than I had done at Sciences Po. For me it was a completely new experience to focus on three topics in depth and I really enjoyed being able to explore my subjects intensely. At the MML faculty, students choose two languages they want to study. As an Erasmus student, I was able to study (in) three languages, also because being French and German, I studied French and German literature, and not the language, while learning only one new language, Spanish.

Now – just like me, you might ask yourself: Why leave France to study French literature? And why go to Cambridge to study foreign languages? Even if that might sound strange: I really enjoyed it and I think that getting this British perspective on topics I had studied back home was very enriching.

In French and German literature, I had only one lecture a week, each taught in English and by a different professor, which gave me a very broad understanding of the topic and also enabled me to meet a great part of the scholars that had written the best-known secondary literature on the texts we were studying. In addition to the lectures I had a fortnightly (every two weeks) *supervision* for which I had to prepare an essay on the topic we were studying.

At first intimidating, *supervisions* became the highlight of my academic experience in Cambridge. *Supervisions* are conversations with a professor that last one hour and during which you discuss key elements, thoughts, questions and controversies of the topic you are studying. What struck me the most

---

<sup>1</sup> Terms, except book titles and names, written in italics are explained in the glossary in the appendix

is that every single professor I had treated me with a great deal of respect and took my work very seriously, carefully listening to what I had to say and giving me constructive feedback. There was not one moment when I felt out of place or uncomfortable, and I think that I have learned a lot. However, I have heard other people say this system was too personal for them or they had difficulties with engaging in discussion with professors. In general, the *supervision* system, whether you like it or not, obliges you to work constantly, and this in turn means that at the end of the year – you will have learned a lot and remember it – something I have missed in Sciences Po where I had trouble remembering anything after having learned for 6 exams on different and often unrelated subjects.

While *supervisions*, contrary to lectures, are compulsory, regular Cambridge students are not graded on their essays. They receive feedback and comments but no marks, which means that until *Easter term* and the exams, most of the students will have never received a numerical grade and this in turn explains why Cambridge becomes a highly competitive and stressful environment in third term (*Easter term*).

As an Erasmus student I was graded on each of my essays, and also had to produce only 6 of the 8 essays regular students had to write. I never completely understood why but I think that the supervisors consider it more difficult to write academic essays in English for foreign students and thus they want us to focus on fewer essays as to be able to improve not only the content but also the form and the writing.

I chose all of my *papers* in the Faculty for Modern and Medieval languages, but each in a different department, since I studied in three languages. The German literature paper and the French literature paper were both Part II papers, which means papers of the third academic year (actually fourth year because the MML students spend their third year abroad). The Spanish language paper was an *ab initio* course, a Part IA (first year) paper. Part IB is thus second year.

Overall, I am very satisfied with my choices, because through the literature papers, that were similar in the method but differed in their course structure and approach to literature, I had to work really hard to learn the Cambridge essay method and to meet the academic requirements. Learning Spanish in Cambridge was less challenging on an academic level, though all the more time consuming and a commitment to follow the pace at which the entire Spanish Grammar had to be learned in only a few months.

Looking back one thing I found very useful, and should have done earlier, were two word-documents I had on my desktop. In the first I noted all the new expressions and vocabulary I encountered and the second one was a reading list, in which I kept tracked of all the books I read and the books that I wanted to read or that were recommended to me.

### GE10: German literature, thought and history, since 1910

The German literature paper (Ge10) was my favourite *paper* because of different reasons. At the beginning of the year I chose to have my six *supervisions* with only one professor, instead of one supervisor for each *supervision* or each section, which enabled a continuity in the learning process and instead of marking every essay my supervisor decided to come up with a general mark at the end in order to take into account the improvement over the two terms. I really enjoyed both the lectures and the *supervisions*, especially because they completed and built up on each other and the *supervisions* were a great opportunity to revisit a topic that popped up in the lecture.

Another thing I really liked about this course was its pluridisciplinarity. Ge10 covered the 20<sup>th</sup> century German literature but also integrated thought and history so that one was able to draw parallels and build an argument that was based on these different disciplines. In the first term I studied Weimar film, where we analysed for example Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*, Ruttmann's *Berlin – Die Symphonie einer Großstadt* or Murnau's *Nosferatu*. I also wrote an essay on Walter Benjamin's *Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* and on Freud's texts *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* as well as *Totem und Tabu*. Finally, I wrote two essays on the topic of post-war literature: I worked on Sebald's *Austerlitz* in comparison to Bernhard's *Frost* and later on Aichinger's *Die größere Hoffnung*.

### FR11: Gender, desire and power in 19<sup>th</sup> century French culture

Common to both the courses Ge10 and Fr11 was that every week a different lecturer gave the lecture. However, in Fr11 the respective lecturer also gave the supervision on the same topic, which was not the case in Ge10. This means that the *supervisions* were organised centrally by the faculty and I got to meet nearly every scholar and professor that was specialized on the topic of 19<sup>th</sup> century French literature at the faculty of Modern and Medieval languages.

The course was divided into 4 thematic parts each consisting of 2 books. In the section "Serial Love and Divorce" I really enjoyed discovering Anatole France's *Le Lys Rouge* which is largely unknown and rarely part of the syllabus in France and in the section "Romantic identities", I was excited to focus on George Sand, as the only female writer we looked at in this course, and her novel *Indiana*. Even though in Fr11 there were no specific classes dedicated to history or society in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, the lecturers integrated context and background into their discussions of the novels and at the beginning of each section there was one introductory lecture on the new topic, which was very interesting and helpful.

### SpA1: Use of Spanish (*ab initio*)

SpA1 was a beginner's (*ab initio*) Spanish class for first year MML students. Having studied Spanish at Sciences Po for 2 years I had first signed up for the next level Spanish class, which was a B1 class. Right before coming to Cambridge I was asked to take a Spanish test to assess my Spanish level and even though I didn't do too bad, together with the responsible teacher I decided that it was better to start all over again. She insisted that the course would be intense and very challenging and I trusted her – this turned out to be one of the best decisions I made in Cambridge. Learning a language in Cambridge cannot at all be compared to learning a language at Sciences Po (or any other university): starting at A1 students have a B1+ level at the end of the year. Having grown up bilingually, I was used to be at the top of my class in any language but coming to the MML faculty I was surrounded by people that loved languages and were highly motivated (and determined to work hard). I had two language classes and an oral *supervision* per week as well as a language supervision, in which we worked on grammar and writing, every week in *Michaelmas* and fortnightly (every two weeks) in *Lent* and *Easter term*.

The workload for the course, grammar exercises for the classes and writing tasks for the language and oral supervision, was high but manageable and the coordinating teacher was very implicated, dedicated and simply an excellent teacher, which made the learning process much easier. Now in *Easter term* I have learned the majority of Spanish Grammar and I am able to hold a conversation in Spanish as well as to produce writings in Spanish. But most importantly, I have developed a passion for the Spanish language and culture of South-America.



Matriculation Day 30.09.2017

## 1.2 Experiencing Cambridge student life – outside university?

Cambridge never sleeps and neither do the students. Whether you like literary societies and rowing, or you prefer dinners with consulting firms and going to one of the numerous nightclubs (Wednesday Cindy's or Friday Life), in Cambridge you won't feel bored. At my arrival I was submerged by the university system but maybe even more by the countless opportunities to join societies, meet people, go out or try out things that I never would have done otherwise. I have even been to several sport events like a rugby game, rowing practices or the Corpus Challenge, an event that takes place once a year where the Corpus Christi Colleges of Cambridge and Oxford compete against each other in different sports for one weekend.

It would be impossible to retell everything I did and experienced in these short two terms (and the third term that is to come) but I will try to give you an overlook of the most important.

### The Cambridge Union

At first I didn't even consider becoming a member of the Union, because I had never heard of it before and I was scared off by the price, but some of my Erasmus friends pointed out a good reason that convinced me to join it: as Erasmus students we are part of the Cambridge University for a year, and even if we would always have an emotional connection to the place and university, we would not be "real" university members. Becoming a life member at the Union meant that we would always have a link to Cambridge and "belong there" in some sense.

The *Cambridge Union Society* was founded in 1815 as a (rather elitist) Debating Society. Today it is open to any member of both Cambridge universities (*Anglia Ruskin university* is a second, less well-known university in Cambridge) as well as Cambridge residents as a platform for debates and a place where celebrities are invited to give an hour-long talk about their life and career or any other relevant topic. During the first two *terms* I already had the chance to listen to many renowned people like Ian McKellen, Dame Diana Riggs starring in *Game of Thrones*, Lady Hale the president of the Supreme Court, the President of Ghana Nana Akufo-Adda, Stephen Hawking, James Blunt and the rapper Loyle Carner. I can only recommend adhering to the Union (very good Christmas or Birthday present) and I can assure you that you won't regret it. Looking back becoming a member of the Union really gave me the feeling to experience the Cambridge life I had imagined. The Union is also a place where you can try out new sports: During Easter term I signed up for an eight-week Krav Maga class, which is an Israeli self-defence technique created for civilians. Having danced my entire life, I was very happy to discover this new discipline, especially because of its usefulness in every-day life.



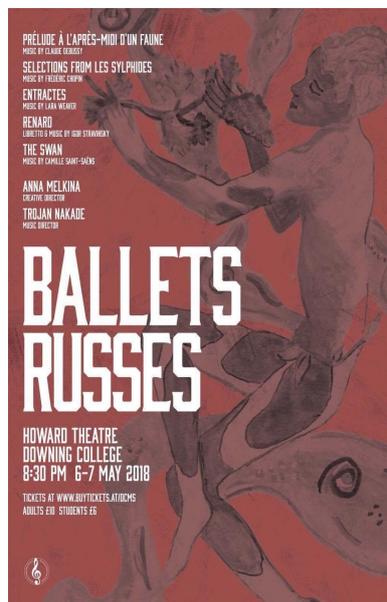
Stephen Hawking at the Cambridge Union 11/2017

### **Schools+ and later Schools Connect**

At my college *freshers'* fair, I discovered “School’s +” a society that connects Cambridge students with secondary schools in which they act as tutors on a voluntary basis. Every Thursday, I tutored a wonderful girl from South Korea who had just moved to England in a programme called EAL (English as an Additional Language) at Chesterton Community College (25 minute walk from city centre). I was advised to help her improve her English, but she learned so fast that she soon asked me for help with other subjects like Geography and even French. Tutoring was one of the most enriching experiences at Cambridge because it was the perfect compensation for the long hours I spent in the library everyday and after every tutoring session I had the satisfying feeling to have left “the bubble” and been back to reality for an hour.

## Dancing

Cambridge offers many opportunities to dance. *The Cambridge University Dance club*, of which *The Ballet Club* is part, has classes for beginners but also for nearly professionals costing 5 pounds for non-members and 3 pounds for members. I did not take classes at the Ballet club and I started to miss dancing a lot. Thus I was very happy when a friend of mine who was very involved in many dance projects and performances in as well as outside of the Ballet club asked me to join her in a dance project entitled “Ballets Russes”, in which we would be dancing Nijinsky’s choreography to Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, *Renard* with music by Stravinsky, *The Swan* by Saint-Saens and *Les Sylphides* by Chopin. The representation will be on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of May in the Downing college theatre.



Flyer of the performance

## The Pelican Poets and Writers

*The Pelican Poets and Writers* is a very small literary circle, organised by students of Corpus Christi and hosted three times a term by the Master’s wife Sibella Laing in the living room of the *Master’s lodge*. I really enjoyed discussing literary topics in a cosy atmosphere drinking wine, tea and eating biscuits. The sessions were all very interesting: we had some “New Writing evenings” at which students presented their creations, an evening on Literature and Computer technology and a meeting entitled “Lost and Found in translation”, hosted by a friend of mine that had the idea to let every international students present one author of his or her home country, analysing both his writing as well as the translation of his piece. Being French and German I decided to present a poem by the French author Marcel Proust and a letter by the German writer Heinrich Heine both describing the composer Frédéric Chopin, and trying to compare their take and writing also reflecting on the English translations of their texts.

## Formal Dinners

*Formal Dinners* were definitely a highlight of my year in Cambridge. In each college there are one or more formal dinners per week. These are events that take place in *hall* where students wear their *gowns* and enjoy a three or four course dinner, for which they pay 10 – 13 pounds as member of the college and 13 – 16 pounds as guests. As the name says, the atmosphere is indeed formal, at least at the beginning when everybody stands up for the entering fellows and listens to the grace in Latin. However *formals* are a great opportunity to spend an evening with friends and for me they were always something I would look forward to when studying in the library. *Formals* are different in every college depending on the college's budget and the hall it takes place in. I went to a couple of *formals*: several at Corpus Christi, a Valentine's day formal at Christ, a Birthday formal at Peterhouse and Clare, a Christmas formal at Trinity Hall, where everybody wore Christmas jumpers and started singing Christmas carols, and a formal at Trinity (definitely the most fancy formal, with free wine being served and the food being just perfect) with friends I met through tutoring.



Freshers' formal 6.10.2017

## 2. Comparative dimension of my experience

### 2.1 Sciences Po Paris versus Cambridge University: getting the best of both worlds

Having mentioned many points of comparison here above, I will come back to some of them as to work out the differences and similarities.

Even though the University of Cambridge and Sciences Po are both institutions of academic excellence, the experiences I had couldn't have been more different. In Cambridge, I really enjoyed being taught in small groups (lectures are given in groups of up to 20 people), because through the close contact with the lecturers I felt more at ease to exchange and engage into discussion with both students and supervisors. Coming from a French university and from a campus that forms its students in writing French "dissertations", German "Hausarbeiten" and American "Essays", while actually focussing much more on oral presentations and learning how to persuade an audience, writing Cambridge essays (that are also different from the Anglo-Saxon essay-method), was an extremely challenging endeavour, and I often felt unprepared and out of place when comparing myself to the fourth year students, that had been used to the Cambridge essay writing method since the beginning of their studies.

Looking back I realise that, having spent way too much time on the first essay I handed in, I somehow managed to adapt to the system and now I can even say that I began to value this method a lot because I understood that approaching a subject through a personal essay-research will not only familiarise you with the topic but give you the possibility to add your personal take on it. At this day, I still remember most of what I wrote about in the 12 essays I produced whereas I forgot most of what I had learned for Sciences Po exams. I think this is due to the very short study period relatively to the number of courses in which you hardly have the time to memorise even the most important concepts. In Cambridge, the study period begins during the Easter holiday and continues until end of May so that the students have almost two month for exam revision. The Easter term is entirely dedicated to exams. I think it's the little details that were rearranged in my college life that really showed me how important exams are in Cambridge: college and faculty libraries started serving tea and biscuits everyday at 3pm, window-blockers were installed in the college top floors and people simply stopped extracurricular activities and having fun. Also uni-unrelated services, like most of Cambridge nightclubs shut down on weekdays and some students even closed their Facebook account during Easter term.

However, looking back at my pre-Cambridge studies, I would go so far as to say that I wouldn't have enjoyed and managed the year in Cambridge so well without my intense experience at Sciences Po. Sciences Po is the right place for multinational students because of its pluridisciplinarity as well as its focus on the international and importance attributed to speaking several languages and being interested in other cultures. The University of Cambridge might be the best or the second best university in the world – even though I met many international students I really missed this openness to the world,

especially speaking to British undergraduate students. An important factor might be that, except MML students, Cambridge undergrads usually don't go on a year abroad. An exchange year is considered additional study time and people tend to focus on getting through their studies without major interruptions.

Both universities can be stressful and competitive environments, but this also teaches students how to deal with a lot of work and manage anxiety as well as working under pressure. In Nancy I had to organise myself to be able to handle 12 different subjects and lead a dance team, while at the same time still take part in student life. Thus coming to Cambridge didn't feel like an enormous shock to me and even though I felt stressed before my first essay-deadlines, I rapidly found a way to structure my week and I even started to enjoy my life-routine. To give you an idea: the MML faculty wants you to work on a 40-50 hour basis per week: this means an average of 6-7 hours of work every day. Considering that I generally tried not to work in the evenings and having some weekends off, I spent most of the days in the library from 9 am to 6 pm with a 1-hour lunch break and some occasional classes. However, in Cambridge I realized that every person has its own working rhythm: compared to Sciences Po students, I would say that Cambridge students work more and are generally more dedicated to their subject, but in turn this means that many *freshers* seem constantly stressed and some of them tend to sacrifice all of their free time for their studies. This brings me to a very important point: Cambridge might be a stressful environment, but I was pleasantly surprised to see how the topic of mental health is presented. In *freshers'* week, first week after arrival, I had several conferences where we were introduced to the college counsellor and briefed about the different types of college-, university- and student-union services specialised on mental health. During my time at Sciences Po mental health, if mentioned, was not an issue that was openly addressed as being crucial for the smooth course of our studies. Since I didn't try to find out about potential other resources, I can't say what types of help Sciences Po does provide, apart from one counsellor for the Nancy-student-community – but the fact that I don't know about it also means that students might not be well enough informed. In Cambridge, the fact that talking about psychological well being became ever more natural made me realise how many people are affected by mental health issues. Even though I didn't have to make use of the mental health resources at Cambridge, I know more people that have than not and merely knowing that these services existed was a very reassuring feeling and I think having this at Sciences Po would definitely contribute to making it an even greater environment in a sense that it would make people realise how important it is to care about your mental well-being especially during the first years of university.



View from the Tate Modern London 11/2017

## 2.1 Confronting difference: the in-between perspective of an Erasmus student

When choosing to spend my third year in the United Kingdom I thought that I had decided against a life-changing and self-finding experience in a far-away country. However, I discovered that you don't have to travel far to leave your comfort zone and discover an unknown terrain. Despite the prospective Brexit, the UK is still a European country, and Cambridge especially is a very international environment to live in. Nonetheless, I would say that living in the UK feels like living halfway between Europe and the US. Moving to Cambridge also meant living in a country that I didn't have any familiar or cultural connection with. Having received good results on the IELTS test, I was confident that my English was not too bad. Though when I first arrived to Cambridge, I soon discovered that this wasn't exactly the case. At my college most students were practically monolingual and apart from having studied some French and German in school one cannot say that they were particularly interested in learning other languages or going abroad: however most of them really enjoyed travelling and showed a lot of interest for other cultures, for instance asking me questions about German school system or French food. As one of two Erasmus students in my third year, with an undefined accent, not being used to English culture or behaviour, I clearly stood out in a group of freshly baked *freshers*. At first I struggled to adapt to the British humour and politeness, constantly feeling out of place and terrified of saying something that

could “offend” anyone. Even though I went to England mainly to improve my English, I sometimes found it really difficult having British people correct my English while they didn’t speak any other language properly – but apart from this, I really enjoyed living in a foreign environment and it was a new and extremely valuable experience not to feel completely at ease about basic things like communication. Being the one having to adapt and trying to become part of an in itself socio-culturally similar group of people as well as making friends whilst being “the Erasmus student”, who is only here for a year was a challenging but incredibly interesting experience. Eight months later, there are still moments were I simply feel “foreign”, and I think it takes years for that to change, but overall I can say that I have integrated Cambridge into my comfort zone, and don’t want to imagine how it will feel to leave all these amazing people and this inspiring place.

In Cambridge I realised that for me it was the little basic things, such as food or public transports in which I constantly encountered difference. Having heard a lot about British food before coming to the UK I must now say that, even though it is not as bad as I had expected, I am happy to be back in France next year. In College Hall, there were always different options, one of them vegetarian, and sides. While the main dishes were fattier than the food I ate in France or Germany, there was always a salad bar and if you chose carefully among the sides, you could end up eating rather healthily. Since in Cambridge everything is within walking distance, I very rarely took public transport, but I will always remember the first time I took a bus in Cambridge, because I was pleasantly surprised that everybody was thanking and saying goodbye to the bus driver when getting off.

Another way in which I encountered difference in everyday life was not a cultural but rather a socio-economic one. Coming from a middle-class background I had to get used to life in college, where your room, kitchen and bathroom gets cleaned and you regularly attend dinners at which you get served. Living and studying surrounded by a team of “college staff” including housekeepers, maintenance people and catering managers was a strangely new experience. This being said, what made me feel very uncomfortable at first was this strange dichotomy of elder people treating younger people who just started studying and never worked for a single day in their lives, as if they were employing them. I was surprised how easily you get used to it and though ending up integrating it into college life, everyday I feel extremely grateful for the great job that the housekeeping is doing in order to make college such a well-functioning place.

On a more general note, one thing I want to address is Cambridge University claiming to be accessible for everybody disregarding his or her background. Even though I have met many people coming from less privileged backgrounds I still felt that the majority was coming from socio-economically advantaged or educated middle-class backgrounds. I would say that Cambridge’s elitist reputation is based on true grounds. Despite needing a strong budget to afford the living cost, you will also be confronted to a (I would say dominant) group of people coming from wealthy families, that don’t have

to worry about their budget. In October 2017, the Guardian published an article saying that Cambridge was getting less diverse: whereas 79% of the offers from Cambridge in 2010 were made to students of the top two socio-economic groups, in 2015 the numbers increased up to 81% for the same groups. Also figures show that between 2010 and 2015 an average of 37% of students from Cambridge were educated in private schools, while just 7% of children overall are educated in private schools. Taking this into account, I would say Corpus Christi College is average in terms of diversity.

### **3. Contribution of the experience to my academic and personal development**

In order not to repeat myself about the Cambridge academic system discussed in the first part, I want to highlight that even though the differentness I encountered in the academic system, was an obstacle to gaining confidence at first, I learned how to overcome it and more importantly to turn it into a challenge to always try my best regardless of the results. Studying in such a competitive environment also made me realise the hard way that comparing myself to other people wouldn't bring me anywhere.

Overall, I am more than satisfied with my third year. Choosing to go to Cambridge University I expected to make a work-intensive but incredible and unique academic experience, while having to sacrifice a year of traveling and focusing on my personal well being. But surprisingly I got both: being an Erasmus student at Cambridge might be more challenging than at other universities, but it is also less of a commitment than being a regular student. Even though I had to write my essays and spend a lot of time in the library, I also had the opportunity to focus on other activities and to make the best of all the exciting events. I also had 5 weeks of holidays over Christmas and another 4 weeks around Easter, in which I had the time to think about the continuation of my studies and focus on topics I discovered during term and didn't have the time to look at. During my German literature supervisions I found out about my supervisor's field of expertise, the topic of dance and literary studies and more specifically the time period of early 19<sup>th</sup> century modern dance evolution. Having finished the required number of essays after *Lent term*, my supervisor agreed to supervise me on two more essays about the topic of dance and avant-garde and being completely passionate about this, I am currently thinking about maybe later pursuing into this direction.

Also I really enjoyed being in the UK in 2018 because there were many events around the centenary of women's right to vote. Spending a year at the University of Cambridge is incredibly inspiring, not only because you get to study in a place where so many important things have been discovered, written or accomplished, but also you become part of an aspiring organism made of people, events, valuable opportunities and inspirational possibilities. After this year I feel prepared to do a Master's degree and

even for the working life, since I learned how to adapt to yet another stressful and competitive environment.

## Conclusion

As I already mentioned, going to Cambridge has not always been my biggest dream. Before applying to Sciences Po, I had only a vague imagination of what Cambridge University was like and I would have never considered applying there. Thus I am also very thankful for my time in Nancy and the opportunity to spend an entire year abroad with access to so many incredible universities and partnerships. For me, one year in Cambridge was exactly the right duration, because this way I really made the best of the short time I had. At my arrival I thought that studying at Cambridge as a regular student must be absolutely amazing, and so I was sad to hear that quite a few undergraduates don't really like their time in Cambridge, finding it a stressful and terrible environment. I realised that one reason might be that most students only spend three years (their undergraduate studies) there, and frankly – I think that studying for a bit longer and discovering other countries is one of the best things about studying. It also means that you can put less pressure on yourself and actually enjoy the time, as I did in my third year.

To put it in a nutshell – I can sincerely and without any doubt recommend spending your third year at Cambridge and I promise that no matter how you organise your time or on what things you focus you might have a completely different experience than I had but you will love it!



Corpus Christi College Old Court 04/2018

## Attachments

### **Before arrival**

Having finished my second year at Sciences Po at the end of May, I had 4 months of summer holidays before coming to Cambridge. Even though I read a couple of books during the summer, I think I started mentally preparing in September. Depending on your course, you will receive reading lists or assignment papers at some point during the summer. But you might have to look them up on the faculty's website when you know which courses you will take.

My Ge10 reading list included approximately 90 primary texts and another 100 books for background reading. I chose one or two books from each section that I read over the summer, so that I got an overview of the course. In Fr11, there were only 8 primary texts of whom I had already read one or two before so that I only had to read some of them. I didn't prepare for SpA1, because I didn't know which course I was in – so that I had to catch up on the holiday work at the beginning of term.

If you want to **prepare for writing essays** over the holidays I can recommend Gordon's *How to write an essay*, that you can find online for free under the following link:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/a-students-writing-guide/BB5F5247739F8FA0004A5DAC1ECCCA28>

In general I think that many students don't prepare before coming to Cambridge, so you are absolutely fine if you only try to get an idea of what you will study. I wouldn't spend much money on buying books (unless you have a Kindle reader) because firstly you will have to carry them to Cambridge and secondly you can find all of them in one of Cambridge's countless libraries.

Your college provides **accommodation**, so that you just have to wait for an email telling you to choose your rent band and the rest will be organised for you. Notice that most colleges will contact you only around mid or even end august, so don't panic if you don't hear anything before. My room was very small but cosy and it had a breath-taking view on Kings College. I shared bathroom and kitchen equipped only with a kettle, a fridge and a microwave with five people.

If you start writing **emails** i.e. to the college tutorial office, your *DoS* or *Tutor* make sure to use the correct title. When I contacted my *DoS* for the first time I started my email with "Dear Ms ...". I received a friendly but explicit reply telling me that the correct title was "Dr" and that some people might feel offended if you didn't pay attention to that. From that point on I always looked up the title of the person I was writing to.

Before flying you might want to check your **passport or ID** is up to date and register at your country's **office of foreign affairs**. Also Ryanair has a partnership with ESN, the Erasmus Student Network: if you get an **ESN card** (simply contact the ESN office in your home university's town or even your

hometown) you can register on the Ryanair website and you will get a 15% discount on 8 flights during your stay with a free checked-in suitcase.

### **Packing**

When you start packing, remember to bring one or two **adapters** for your electronic devices. Most colleges provide **bed linen and towels** (40 pounds in my college) but you can also bring them. Make sure to take **warm clothes** even for *Michaelmas term*, because it can be very cold in November. **Smart clothes** for *formals*, balls, dinners and *slacks* will be useful. You will also need one *Matriculation* outfit (black suit for men and white blouse, black trousers/skirt for women) and in *Easter term* you will need a black-tie *Mayball* outfit.

Even though you there are no hobs in most of the kitchens, you might want to eat simple meals from time to time: before buying **crockery** check out the Cambridge International Students' Union's welcome page and events. During *freshers'* week I got a free bag full of crockery.

### **How to get to Cambridge**

To get to Cambridge the easiest way is to **fly to London Stansted Airport**, that has a Ryanair connection. You can also fly to any other London airport i.e. Luton or Heathrow but notice that they are further away from Cambridge and you might have to take several trains or busses to get to Cambridge.

If you don't like flying you can take the Eurostar to London.

From London Stansted, the Stansted **train** express takes you to Cambridge in 35 minutes for the fix price of 10 pounds. It takes around an hour to get to Cambridge with The National Coach **bus service**, that costs around 8 pounds depending on when you purchase the ticket,.

From London Liverpool Station or London King's Cross Station, the Greater Anglia Service takes you to Cambridge in either 50 minutes or 1 hour 25 minutes depending on the route.

Once in Cambridge you can either take a **taxi** that will take you to city centre for around 6 pounds or you can take the bus: the number 1 to city centre costs 2.50 pounds and the U-whippet line bus costs only 1 pound for students and will take you to the Fitzwilliam Museum or Queens college (slightly south of city centre).

The U-whippet line is university subsidized and very practical to go to *Sidgwick Site*, where most of the Humanities faculties are. You can find a timetable under this link:

<http://www.go-whippet.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/U-timetable-8-Sept-2017-for-web.pdf>

Very important: make sure you let the *Porters* know at what time you are arriving, especially if it is after 6pm so that they can give you your room key – also simply because you want to make sure that you are on good terms with the *Porters*.

### **Administrative arrival**

Once you are in Cambridge there are a few things I would recommend doing before the start of *freshers'* week (very busy – no time). You will need a **gown** for *Matriculation* and *formals* and you can either get a new one for 40 pounds at Ryder & Amies or Ede & Ravenscroft both on the same street (the first on King's Parade which later turns into Trumpington street where the second is) or second-hand at your Porter's lodge.

I would recommend waiting to buy a **sim card** until *freshers'* fair, because someone will definitely give them out for free. I got mine from Lycamobile with a 10-pound monthly student bundle including 1GB free data, 100 minutes international calls and unlimited UK calls/sms as well as EU-roaming.

Your college also wants you to **register with a doctor**. The easiest way is probably to do that at the Trumpington Street Medical Practice (opposite Kings college chapel). Make sure you have a **European Health Insurance Card** (EHIC) to access NHS services for free in the UK.

Depending on your **bank account** you might want to open one in Cambridge, but most of the French bank accounts have an international option for free cash-withdrawal and no credit card fees so make sure you check this before arrival. Also notice that many stores don't accept 50 pound notes so rather go for 20 or 10 pound notes or pay by card.

### **Living in Cambridge**

Living in the centre of Cambridge is very convenient because everything you need is within walking distance. You can choose between Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer's **supermarkets**, depending on your budget the first might be more attractive, or you can go to Aldi, which is definitely the least expensive but also the furthest away from city centre.

Eating in **College hall**, as *Corpuscles* call it, or *Buttery* that would be the most common name, is mostly very good but can get pricey: at Corpus a main dish, one or two sides and salad cost around 4 pounds, but some colleges provide cheaper alternatives. I really enjoyed eating in other *halls* (or *Buttery's*) with friends from different colleges, because you get to know other people and try out other meals: to give you an idea Trinity Hall college (not the same as Trinity college) has probably the best quality/price ratio, whilst Corpus food might be tastier (and more expensive).

Apart from food, Cambridge offers a wide range of **leisure activities**. The **Fitzwilliam Museum** is a perfect place to go on a rainy afternoon and **Kettle Yard** gardens and modern art museum is lovely for when family is visiting. Cambridge **Art Picturehouse** is the place to go if you like movies and film festivals, though cinema tickets can be a bit pricey in general.

Also every day there are countless theatre plays, musicals and music or dance performances in Cambridge. Most of them are organised by students and thus you can easily find them on Facebook. I loved going to the **ADC theatre** that always has very diverse and entertaining term cards with something for everyone.

Apart from university lectures, there are a great number of **talks, panels and colloquia** on every topic you can imagine: The **Forum on Geopolitics** has interesting talks and debates about current political issues and just started an Eastern European reading Group on the New Geopolitics in Eastern Europe that will continue in *Michaelmas* 2018. In the **CRASSH** centre, the Centre for Research in the Art, Social Sciences and Humanities, located in the Alison Richard Building on *Sidgwick site*, you will find many events, seminars and festivals on very different topics.

Between the 15 and 28<sup>th</sup> October 2018 will take place the **Cambridge Festival of Ideas** that again is a great opportunity to engage with something you might never have heard of before.

The **German and French societies** and every other national society invite speakers from their countries and organise events or formals that I really enjoyed going to.

The **Language centre and the Carriers centre** both University services, are a great help for your academic and professional development. They offer seminars and language classes (the latter around 200 pounds for a term) that are an additional preparation for the working life.

And finally, being an Erasmus student at Cambridge gives you the possibility to **travel**. I went to London on several weekends and visited Bristol. Trains from Cambridge to London King's Cross run frequently. Direct trains can take 50 minutes to 1 hour 25 minutes depending on the route. The last train back to Cambridge from Kings Cross is around midnight. I am planning to visit Oxford and Brighton in the coming weeks. However, Stansted Airport being so close you can easily get a Ryanair flight to Dublin or Belfast or, as I did to Sweden or any other place to see friends and family. I wouldn't recommend travelling by train, apart from going to London, because it can be very expensive. But the UK has a great long-distance Bus-network so that you can travel around for little money. Also if the weather is fine, I would recommend walking to **Grantchester**, a little village close to Cambridge. There you can enjoy a picnic close to the River Cam or drink tea in the *Orchard Tea Garden*, an iconic place for Cambridge students that was visited by Virginia Woolf, Bertrand Russell and Maynard Keynes.

## **Budget and Finances**

Overall, you should expect to spend between 6000 and 7000 pounds depending on your lifestyle.

My room being the smallest in college I paid 1128 pounds a term. Since I opted for short lease, meaning that I had to leave my room during the breaks I paid a total of 3384 pounds for accommodation. On top of that I had to pay 190 pounds kitchen fixed charge for each term, so another 570 pounds in total. The room deposit was about 150 pounds.

I estimated my living costs for a year in Cambridge at around 2500 pounds. This includes the meals in hall (270 pounds x 3), bus rides and travelling, my phone tariff (10 pounds a month) and grocery shopping (approximately 400 pounds per term) as well as going out, eating out and formals (around 120 pounds).

Personally I tried not to spend too much money, but I lived in a college where I couldn't cook for myself, so depending on how your kitchen situation will be like you might be able to save money on food. Life in Cambridge can be very expensive with prices similar to London. That means that how much you spend will depend on your lifestyle and the things you want to do. I decided to become a member of the Cambridge Union, which cost me 150 pounds, I also signed up for Krav Maga classes for another 64 pounds and bought a St. Catherine's *Mayball* ticket for 140 pounds as well as a Cambridge Union Garden party ticket for 28 pounds. Even though these expenditures were clearly extra, they made sense for me as I consider them part of my Cambridge experience.

## **Working and Student grants**

Cambridge University does not want ("does not expect") undergraduates to **work** during term time, which means that I had to rely on my savings and my parent's support. However I found a job for 6 weeks in Germany over the Christmas break, which gave me a basis for all the extra expenditures. As an Erasmus student you will receive an Erasmus **grant** of approximately 1200 euros. Even though this is definitely a good financial support try not to rely on it, because you might receive it only around November, which means that you won't benefit from it during *Michaelmas term*. You can also apply for a regional grant in France. Coming from the Nancy Campus of Sciences Po, I received 500 euros "aide à la mobilité" from the "Grand Est" region – here again, don't expect to get the money until February.

If you need any other information, this **international student guide** really helped me during the first couple of weeks and also the Erasmus office should send you a similar one in the next months:

[https://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/files/international\\_student\\_guide.pdf](https://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/files/international_student_guide.pdf)

**Small glossary of Cambridge jargon**

**Ab initio** – beginner course; starting from scratch

**Anglia Ruskin University** – other Cambridge University

**Bedder** – bed maker and housekeeper, depending on the college they empty your dustbin and vacuum your room as well as clean the kitchen and bathroom (common areas)

**Corpuscles** – Corpus students

**CRSid** – your university identification mostly 3 letters 2 numbers; beginning of your mail-address

**DoS** – Director of Studies who is responsible for your academic progress and organises your supervisions; (mostly) college member

**Formal Hall** – weekly formal dinner in every college; good opportunity to wear your gown

**Fresher** – first year undergraduate

**Gonville and Caius College** – pronounced Gonville and “Keys”

**Gown** – Harry-Potter-like-cloak you wear to Matriculation, Formal Hall and Graduation

**Gyp** – kitchenette in every college staircase

**Hall/Buttery** – college cafeteria

**Hermes** – university webmail service

**JCR** – Junior Combination Room: refers to 1) a room in college and 2) the college undergraduate representatives

**Matriculation** – formal admission of a student to college/university membership

**Master/Dean/President** – head of the college, title differs; lives in the Master’s lodge

**May week/May Ball** – first week after the end of exams in June; fancy balls in many colleges

**MCR** – Middle Combination Room: 1) room in college 2) the college graduate representatives

**Paper** – undergraduate unit; equivalent of course, subject or topic **Pigeon Hole ‘Pidge’** – every student’s letterbox in the college post-room **Porters** – able to answer most college-related questions; sort out college post; receive college visitors or students; coordinate outside college housing related activities

**Porters’ lodge ‘Plodge’** – at the entrance of every college

**Raven** – university authentication system

**Sains’** – Sainsbury’s supermarket

**Sidgwick Site** – site where most humanities faculties are located

**Slack/Bob** – internal college party; mostly in the college bar; name differs

**Supervision ‘Supo’** – fortnightly small teaching lesson; a supervisor and one or two students that have prepared an essay

**Swap** – party or get-together with a group of people from two or more different colleges

**Term** – trimester; 8 weeks; Michaelmas (September – December), Lent (January – March), Easter (April – June)

**Tutor** – responsible for your general well being and person to contact about personal problems

**Wetherspoons ‘Spoons’** – bar/pub/nightclub chain