Life as an LGBTQ+ student in Edinburgh

As part of Pride Month, Tristan (Ancient and Medieval History, MA Hons) shares his experience as an LGBTQ+ student at the University of Edinburgh.

Navigating your first year at university can feel both intimidating and exciting as you get to grips with higher education, exploring a new city and meeting new people. This experience can seem even more daunting as an LGBTQ+ student, particularly when tolerance can vary so widely between countries. Fortunately, Scotland has strong governmental policy supporting the rights of LGBTQ+ people and the United Kingdom as a whole has consistently ranked highly on the Rainbow Europe Index. But what does this mean for LGBTQ+ students at Edinburgh, and what is life in this city really like for those of us who identify as such?

LGBTQ+ Life on Campus

As an openly transgender and queer man, I did have some anxieties about adjusting to student life and whether I would find my place in Edinburgh. Despite being an Edinburgh
native, beginning undergraduate studies is a big step for anyone. Thankfully, my time here has been overwhelming positive and I’ve had the opportunity to engage in a number of LGBTQ+ centred events. I currently sit on the School of History, Classics and Archaeology’s Equality and Diversity Committee and, as part of that, helped organise an LGBTQ+ History Month event in February 2021. Despite being forced online by the COVID-19 pandemic, this meant we were able to invite a speaker from the US to discuss their work with Queer Britain. EUSA, the University of Edinburgh’s Student Association, also run events to commemorate this month, so you’re sure to find lots to get involved with.

Likewise, there is both a student-led PrideSoc, which you can join, and the Staff Pride Network who hosts events and networking opportunities. LGBTQ+ support is very visible on campus, and I’ve felt confident being open about my sexuality and gender identity.

Finding Support

As well as the groups on campus, there are various charities and community organisations which can support you as an LGBTQ+ person. LGBT Health and Wellbeing, based in Edinburgh, host a variety of services, including several social groups, so you needn’t feel worried about being isolated during your time here. You can also find support through the likes of the Scottish Trans Alliance, LGBT Youth Scotland and Stonewall Scotland.

In 2020, Somewhere: For Us, a magazine celebrating LGBTQ+ people in Scotland, was launched here in Edinburgh which is not only a fantastic resource but highlights the importance of visibility in the city.
Bars, Cafes and Eateries

Edinburgh also boasts several venues either owned by or active allies towards LGBTQ+ folk, including sober spaces such as the Greenwood Cafe, and bars and clubs like Cafe Habana and CC Blooms. There is also a fantastic queer-friendly venue opposite the central campus, Paradise Palms, if you want to grab some food (all of which is vegetarian/vegan) or a drink after your studies. Whether you’re looking for somewhere to eat or want to experience the night life, there are lots of options within the city.

Edinburgh as a city is vibrant and beautiful, and LGBTQ+ life here is no exception. If I can offer any advice to you as a prospective student, it’s OK to be yourself and don’t hesitate to reach out for support.
Navigating undergraduate academia as a mature student

Much of university recruitment is aimed at school-leavers, but what if you are older or have been out of education for some time? Tristan – MA (Hons) Ancient and Medieval History – told us his story.

In 2018, the University of Edinburgh launched its Access Programme as part of its Widening Participating Initiative. As a 26-year-old who had been out of education for four consecutive years, having previously studied Acting and Performance, and later Art and Design, I was eligible to apply. My previous study had ignited a fervent interest in History of Art, and it was with the intention of undertaking undergraduate study in this discipline that I enrolled on the Access course. What it revealed to me, through exploring a wide range of subjects within Humanities and the Social Sciences, was that it was history – particularly of the ancient world – that really engaged me and so, the following year, I began my MA (Hons) in Ancient and Medieval History.

By now a 27-year-old student, it would be fair to say that I was incredibly anxious as to what my experience would be like. Would I find my place in an institution filled primarily with students ten years younger than myself? Would I get as much out of the ‘university experience’ than I would have done had I enrolled immediately after high school? Now, coming to the end of the second year of my degree, I’m confident to answer with a resounding yes to both questions, and I feel that my experience has been testament to the need to engage adult learners.

I write all of this as a 29-year-old, well aware of the fact that there are students in my cohort who have been outside of institutional education for far longer, but I think any
significant gap in study can fill one with a great deal of self-doubt. There’s an expectation upon young learners that those who are capable go on to higher education immediately after education, and the six years I spent at high school felt as though I was expected to follow that trajectory. I chose a different path and whilst I have absolutely no regrets for studying the performing and visual arts, I realised that neither really engaged in the way that study ought to. Had I not followed those routes, however, I don’t think I would be where I am today (cliché notwithstanding).

On 6 April 2021, I was invited to participate in the Classical Association Annual Conference on a panel entitled, ‘Inclusive Classics and pedagogy: teachers, academics and students in conversation’. What the discussion revealed is the dichotomy between ‘the institution’ and the individuals within it. Classics has been thrown into the spotlight recently, both in academic terms for the ‘dead white men’ narrative that pervades it, as well as in news stories surrounding the appropriation of ancient iconography by alt-right groups. Much discussion has been had as to how Classics as a discipline can survive when it seemingly perpetuates elitist ideology, owing to the fact that very few high school students have the opportunity to study it. In fact, I had no idea what ‘Classics’ even meant until enrolling on the Access Programme in 2018. But I don’t feel that has disadvantaged me in any way, nor has my status as a ‘mature student’; rather, I feel that it has allowed me to approach the discipline with eyes that seek interdisciplinary study, that see the Graeco-Roman world as one aspect of a rich and diverse ancient world, and that appreciate the diversity of the student experience.
Recently, I launched an article series, ‘Classics in Conversation’, through my work with Retrospect Journal (for those of you who don’t know, Retrospect is the School of History, Classics and Archaeology’s student-led journal). This series poses questions to students both to encourage critical thinking and to provide a space to consider some of the most pertinent issues in the discipline today. I’m delighted with the response we’ve had thus far, and I feel as though it has highlighted the need to engage students in wider issues through a platform that elevates their voices. Ultimately, it’s my hope that Classics continues to thrive as a discipline, and it is also my hope that more students like myself will feel confident to pursue their ambition.

Read ‘Classics in Conversation’ on the Retrospect website

Find out more about the University of Edinburgh’s Access Programme

The website of the Classical Association

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Find your niche on a 4-year course

The ‘Scottish 4-year degree’ can seem confusing and a waste of a year, but History and Politics (MA Hons) student Jack argues that it’s the ideal way to explore and, finally, focus on what really interests you.

There is no doubt about it, starting university can be a bit daunting – a new lifestyle, new accommodation, new friends,
new classes and, for many, a new city.

Not the kind of niche Jack means

Upon starting their courses, something which can often weigh heavy on first years’ minds is this notion of “finding your niche”. At university, you are often presented with many different course options from the get-go, and there is often a kind of pressure to know exactly what you want to do straight away. In reality, however, it shouldn’t feel that way at all. Of course, some people will know that they want to do early medieval Scottish history or modern Islamic studies or whatever their heart is set on. But actually, there is no real need to have any clue about how you want to ‘specialise’ so early on in your university career.

One of the real advantages about studying a four-year degree is that there is plenty of time to try out and experiment with different time periods, different regional histories and even different teaching styles and assessment types. In first and second year (especially while your grades don’t count towards your final honours degree classification!), take the opportunity to try a course which you always thought about trying out but never quite wanted to risk it.
Moreover, not having studied a certain subject in pre-honours does not necessarily exclude you from picking it up at honours (as long as you meet the necessary pre-requisites, of course). That being said, I think I speak for a lot of my peers when I say that third year (moving into honours) is a solid step up. You definitely feel the gears changing. This is only to be expected, of course, and I found myself well-equipped academically by the teaching staff to deal with this change. The point is, however, that it is a good feeling to be taking courses with which you are completely comfortable. In third year and beyond, it is reassuring to be doing subjects with which you are familiar, and you know you enjoy. So using your pre-honours years as a kind of science laboratory of courses to produce your favourite combination of classes is the way to go.

Overall, then, ‘finding your niche’ doesn’t have to be scary. There is plenty of time and opportunity to try things out and even when you get to fourth year, you don’t really have to focus on one specific ‘niche’ one hundred percent of your time. In pre-honours, enjoy the breadth of options and try to combat this expectation that everyone should know their niche within a minute of setting foot through the university doors.

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**Do the knight thing, or why you should join a Society**

Will I find those “friends for life”? Will I be able to balance my studies with a healthy social life? Will there be societies I want to join? Jack – History and Politics (MA Hons) – answers these very questions.
Some of the biggest worries that Freshers tend to have about coming to university are around becoming part of the student community. It can be daunting at Freshers’ Fairs or Open Days (virtual or otherwise) or even just walking around campus. Everyone seems to have their own passions, niches, groups and extra-curricular goals.

I remember thinking how important it was that I “put myself out there”. Yet, in my experience, it’s never as hard as it seems. At Edinburgh, the sheer variety of opportunities means there really is something for everyone. At the end of the day, once you do put yourself out there once or twice, there’s no looking back. For every interest, hobby, sport or passion, you will find an open, enthusiastic community of students ready to welcome any new members. Be it academic, sporty, musical, campaigning, fundraising – finding your niche, your own wee community, doesn’t have to be the scary task it first appears to be.

Student Societies within SHCA.

The School of History, Classics and Archaeology has a thriving student community (made up of various societies and student groups) which continues to organise a diverse array of events.
and activities. For me, I have benefited immensely from being a member of and now officeholder in the History Society. We are a tight-knit student family of history-lovers. We engage in serious academic discussions and respond in historical ways to important current affairs issues, whilst also having fun and organising exciting socials and trips.

In the past, we have had fascinating academic discussions and speaker events, from “A Journey through Ancient Egypt” to the history of Edinburgh’s HIV/AIDS outbreak to disability history to the slave trade in Scotland. We have hosted incredible speakers, from Professor Sir Geoff Palmer, Scotland’s first black professor, to Holocaust survivor, Tomi Komoly. Our programme has also included high-octane ceilidhs and balls at prestigious Edinburgh venues. We have organised trips to our favourite historical sites, as well as city breaks abroad during our (always productive) reading weeks. Our most recent trip was to Prague, where we visited the famous Castle and Cathedral, went on a Communism tour and even dressed up as kings, queens and knights (see the fabulous photo, above). We also have karaoke nights and walking tours, pub quizzes and movie screenings. And to think we are just one of many, many societies!

Undoubtedly, at the time of writing, things are different. Covid has massively changed the student experience. Involvement in societies is no exception. Yet, groups across the university are adapting. Whether its baking or Persian or netball or Harry Potter appreciation, societies are refusing to let Covid ruin the fun, the discussions and the memory-making. The History Society is still running plenty of events online and has been a platform for first years to get to know fellow history-lovers, as well as meet older students to get advice and guidance.

I personally have met some of my best friends through the History Society. Sharing a love for a subject and having a laugh at the same time is the perfect way to enhance your
university experience. Getting involved in societies also affords you the chance to stand for election as a committee member. I cannot recommend this enough: it has been an opportunity for me to get involved in student representation at university and to really connect with faculty members. It also gives you the chance to organise your own society events and represent your society at official occasions. We even got to meet the Chancellor, HRH The Princess Royal, last year!

Moving up to university can be worrying at the best of times and Covid has been a huge challenge. Yet getting involved in our societies and becoming part of our HCA community is a fantastic way to break down those barriers. My advice? Don’t hold back! Reap the benefits of an active campus life and explore the diverse range of student groups and societies waiting to welcome you.

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**Essays – everything you ever wanted to know but were afraid to ask**

Student Ambassador Tess (studying Classics and English Literature, MA Hons) takes a deep dive into how to approach writing essays.

I think writing essays and academic papers are probably one of the more daunting tasks you’ll have to take on as a university student. I’ve spent the last three years trying to figure out a formula that works for both aspects of my degree, and honestly, sometimes I still am not sure if I’ve cracked it. That being said, I do have two tricks of the trade to keep in mind when writing an essay:
Break your question down into its essential parts

Once you write a few essays, you start to realise that all essay questions have a similar structure. There are only so many ways the examiners can ask you ‘To what extent’ and once you recognise certain buzzwords, it becomes much easier to formulate a plan of attack. Here are some examples:

‘To what extent…’, ‘How far…’, ‘What…’ and ‘Evaluate …’ often signify questions that ask you to discuss whether you agree with a certain point of view on a debated topic within the subject. The best way to approach these questions is to pick a stance and then find opposing arguments that you can dismantle to show a bit more academic sophistication.

In comparison, ‘Describe…’, ‘Illustrate…’, ‘How…’ and ‘Explain…’ are usually questions that require a more holistic approach to a topic, in which you have to discuss as many facets of the topics as possible in relation to the question (word limit permitting).

Another aspect of the question to look out for are certain key phrases you can use throughout your essay to signal-post to the reader throughout your essay that you are still addressing the question. Constantly linking your essay back to the question in your essay also helps you to stay on topic as a writer.

Here’s an example of a question and how you can break it down:

‘What is depicted on the Parthenon Frieze?’

This question seems relatively simple, but it is one of the
most debated topics within Classical Greek archaeology. The use of ‘What’ indicates that you have to pick an academic stance and justify why you think this is the most likely hypothesis using both primary and secondary sources. You should then pick one or two opposing perspective to evaluate, in order to demonstrate why your chosen interpretation is still the best. Additionally, you should always round a point off with a: ‘therefore, as (evidence) demonstrates, (point) is what is depicted on the Parthenon frieze.’ That way you are able to double check as you are editing if your points are properly explained to allow such a statement at the end and your examiner will also be able to pick up quickly if you are doing so because you have used words from the question itself, such as ‘depicted.’

Reference well from the start

Referencing is simultaneously the easiest way to secure and lose marks in an essay. I had so many instances in first year where I lost a significant number of points for poor referencing that had me kicking myself, mainly because it would have potentially pushed me up a grade boundary. The one thing I cannot stand when reading feedback is finding out that I didn’t get full marks on a section that is so clearly set out by the subject area. The School uses a variation of the Harvard system and every citation form is listed out in the Essay Guidelines. There is literally no reason besides carelessness for someone to not score fully on this section (I promise I speak from experience).

The best way to ensure you follow the guidelines to a tee is to reference properly from the start. Even when I am reading and taking notes on my computer, I will reference quotes and
points in the correct format from the beginning. This ensures that when I write my essay and use said quotes from my notes, I can rest assured that the referencing is already done and dusted. Additionally, if you start building your bibliography at the start, it means that you have one less thing to worry about in your editing stage of your essay. It’s so much easier to remove any additional sources you ended up not using than scrambling to find a source you forgot to note down during your research stage.

Easy. Right? Don’t worry, there’s lots of help both in the School and the University with writing essays and other assignments. Look out for Peer Support Groups – SHCA has ArchPals and UoE HCA Peer Support – and Societies running sessions on writing and studying, and the Institute for Academic Development offers workshops and online resources on all aspects of learning.

Institute for Academic Development
SHCA Peer Support

The write stuff

Former History (MA Hons) student and now MSc History student, Ruby, takes a look at student journalism and creative writing opportunities at the University of Edinburgh.

Undertaking a degree in the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology means you won’t be short of chances to hone your writing skills. Whether they take the form of a blogpost, an essay, or a translation, most of your assessments will be
written work – plus, you’ve got your dissertation at the end of the four years! But if you fancy yourself as an art critic, investigative journalist, or political commentator, there are plenty of opportunities at the University of Edinburgh to take part in extracurricular writing. Below are just a few of the Societies you can get involved in – keep your eyes peeled for their events during Welcome Week.

“The Student” (studentnewspaper.org)

Perhaps the most obvious outlet for student writing is the University of Edinburgh’s fortnightly newspaper, “The Student”. It was founded in 1887 by Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson (“Treasure Island”, etc.), which makes it Europe’s oldest student newspaper. As you might have guessed from its name, “The Student” is entirely produced by students. Whilst the paper is registered as a Student Society, with the Edinburgh University Student’s Association (EUSA), it is totally independent from the University – meaning the stories they publish don’t pull any punches!

“The Student” covers breaking news, but also has sections dedicated to features, opinion pieces, reviews, sports, science, and lifestyle. Whether you’ve got opinions about events at the Scottish Parliament, the latest film releases, or the price of curly fries at Teviot Row House there’s likely to be a space for you.

All articles written for “The Student” are published online and some make their way into print with physical copies being available for free across campus. Perfect for proudly sticking up on the fridge, or for posting home to your family.
Because The Student is not just a paper, but also society, they run plenty of social events alongside their writer’s meetings. You can write two articles before you need to buy membership, but why wait and miss out on all the fun?

“Retrospect” (retrospectjournal.com)

“Retrospect Journal” is a student-led journal for the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology. Originally founded in 2006, as the journal of the Edinburgh University History Society, it became an independent EUSA society in 2012, and now accepts submissions from across the three disciplines.

It’s the perfect place to submit that essay you’re really proud of, but they also accept everything from interviews, to reviews, to even short historical fiction pieces. Submissions are accepted throughout the semester for its website, alongside publishing a themed print edition twice a year. Copies of the journal – complete with beautiful illustrations – can be found in the Undergraduate Common Room or ordered online.

Much like “The Student”, “Retrospect” is a great way to meet other students, especially those within the School. Members can often be found at school-wide events, such as the William Robertson Cup (an annual staff versus students competition), alongside the History Society, Classics Society, and Archaeology Society.

You do need to buy a membership before you can be published in Retrospect, but all membership fees go right back into funding the journal – either maintaining the website or covering print costs.
"The Rattlecap" (therattlecap.com)

Founded in 2018, “The Rattlecap” describes itself as an “intersectional forum for discussion and change”, and a “thought-provoking, kind, and empowering space.” Their self-confessed “monthly-ish” issues are always centred on a theme, with previous editions including: “Connection”, “Isolation”, and “Recovery.”

Each month’s theme is always open to individual interpretation and submissions can take the form of current affairs reporting, opinion pieces, or creative writing and poetry. It also has a dedicated “History, Philosophy, & Education” section, if you’re interested in turning an essay or seminar presentation into a more concise, journalistic article. Articles are published online and always accompanied by a unique illustration.

Whilst your first submission is free, in order to have more than one article published you will need to pay for membership. Paying for membership also allows you attend its social events, which include everything from a book club, to film screenings, to cooking and crafting sessions.

There are hundreds of societies at the University of Edinburgh, with new ones being founded each year. As a result, this blogpost has only managed to scratch the surface of all student-run publications available to take your submissions. Rest assured, whatever you write, it’s likely you’ll be able to find a home for it – even if it means taking a leaf out of Robert Louis Stevenson’s book and founding your own paper!
Darwin Leighton and the Raiders of the Lost Plaque

When History and Archaeology student Tom’s outreach project fell foul of Covid, he looked closer to home for inspiration and Footnotes was born.

One day in December I was trawling through reports written by the commercial archaeology firm Oxford Archaeology North about the archaeology that they had found in my local area. Commercial archaeologists survey archaeological remains on behalf of companies and governments, usually to help them make decisions about heritage preservation or building projects. Commercial archaeologists are made to work much quicker than academics, navigating strict deadlines and small budgets. Consequently, their reports are often dry lists of facts with few attempts to make them relevant or exciting to a wider audience. They are often referred to as “grey” literature. Not so that day!

Almost by accident I stumbled onto a description of a plaque dedicated to someone called Darwin Leighton. Intrigued by – if nothing else – his name, I looked him up online. It turned out he lived and died in Bleak House, Kendal. It was then that my obsession began. Why? Because Bleak House is less than 100 metres from where I live, where I am sitting right now. In fact, because my house was a bakery during Darwin’s lifetime, it’s possible he once stood in the very room I am writing in.
I just had to find the plaque. This would be an ideal story to share for the same reasons it appealed so much to me. It was local and personal, highlighting how archaeology can allow us to explore the lives of humans who lived in the same places we do and – in many ways – lived quite similar lives to us. The problem was no map was included in the original report, instead just a cryptic reference to another report. The black and white photo of a wall next to some trees was also, to put it mildly, less than illuminating. But I was on the scent and, like Lara Croft or Indiana Jones, I couldn’t be stopped. Admittedly – rather than hired guns, intricate booby traps and (sigh) dinosaur infested Aztec ruins – the challenges facing me were local bureaucracy, rain and overgrown bushes. I eventually found the second report and even a vague grid reference for the plaque. Armed with a paper printout, I strode into the woods convinced that determination, guile and grit would find the plaque. They didn’t. Hours later, I was stood on the roadside, trying to read my crude map by the light of the setting sun. Then, it struck me and all at once I understood the meaning of the map. The plaque was metres away from me. There were two paths I could take, a long route following footpaths or a much shorter route through some bushes. Seconds later, I had found it! “Archaeologists are a peculiar bunch” I thought to myself, pulling twigs out my hair.
Why was I doing all of this? I was enrolled in the course Geoscience Outreach and Engagement, where each student organises their own outreach project in order to share something about our university course with the public. My original plan, a tour of Edinburgh’s archaeology, had been scuppered by the second wave of coronavirus in the UK, forcing me to return home to Kendal, Cumbria. Instead, I decided to make a series of short videos highlighting the unsung archaeology of my local area to, firstly, teach the people around me about the archaeology of my home town, and to tell stories that are deeply personal about the people who lived here in the past, many of whom were just like me. But I realised that, especially at the moment, not many of the people who watch will be able to visit Kendal so I also strive to teach broader lessons about what archaeology can teach us and how people can make their own discoveries.

Four videos are now on YouTube on the Footnotes channel covering lime kilns, time guns and ridges and furrows. And Darwin Leighton, of course.

You can watch all Tom’s videos on the Footnotes channel on YouTube.
Being an international student in Edinburgh

Leaving home to go to University is daunting enough, but what’s it like if you’re travelling across the world to do it? Scarlett is from the US so she can tell you.

At times as an international student, it can be difficult to be so far away from home. But trust me when I say it’s worth it! Now, as a third-year student I can say I’ve found a home in Edinburgh.

When I first started university, I didn’t experience too much homesickness. The first few weeks are packed with classes and social activities. I was so busy meeting new people and going to class I barley even noticed how far away I was! My accommodation was really social, and a few of us would go to the Welcome Week stalls and then go to society events in the evenings. When classes started, my tutorial group would grab coffee or drinks afterward. It was also so much fun to learn more about Scottish culture and history. Although I struggled
to adjust to the accent, Scots are so welcoming, and I loved exploring the city.

It wasn’t until around late November and Thanksgiving was coming up that I started to feel homesick. Most of my friends from home were on break from their own universities and hanging out with each other. It was also my first time missing out on the holiday and the longest I had spent away from my family. It’s not easy to be so far away from home especially since my friends around me could do weekend trips to see their families.

Coming back from the winter break, I felt rejuvenated but still fearful that the feeling would return. Thankfully, by then I had built up a solid group of friends and I started attending more society events, getting closely involved with the History Society. With them, I attended social events like the Annual Winter Ball and Burns Night as well as going on a trip to Prague in the February Reading week. This gave me a group of people to turn to if I was ever missing home, and last year my friends and I put on our own Thanksgiving meal together.

I still get homesick, but it’s so much less frequent now and I absolutely love being an international student in Edinburgh. The city offers so much to do from outdoor climbs up Arthur’s seat or a fun spooky tour of Mary King’s Close to just or popping into different restaurants and pubs in the New Town. I’m so happy I made the choice to study abroad!
LGBT+ History Month

The University of Edinburgh Staff Pride Network supports LGBT+ colleagues and allies, one of whom is HCA staff member Emma. We asked her about her role as Ally Representative.

Hi there! I’m Emma, the School of History, Classics and Archaeology’s Modern Apprentice who has recently been appointed as Ally Representative in the University of Edinburgh Staff Pride Network (SPN). As it’s LGBT+ History Month, I thought I’d let you know how my role works and what you can do to support the community at the University.

Ally reps show constant support to the LGBT+ community in many ways. They familiarise themselves with the language to use when talking with LGBT+ people such as preferred pronouns, they organise and become involved in events, they educate themselves on the history of the movement – LGBT+ History Month is an annual month-long observance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history, and the history of the gay rights and related civil rights movements, founded in 1994, and a great source of information – and last but not least they stand up for what they believe in! As well as an Ally Rep I am also the Meeting Secretary for the Network, and am part of the events team in the committee whilst creating and curating the SPN Instagram account.

I’ve supported the LGBT+ community fully throughout my life so am determined to put my organising skills to work to create some fun and engaging events and make sure LGBT+ voices are being heard and respected across the School and the wider University with my other fellow ally rep, Tara Spires-Jones. We’ll do everything we can to make the UoE a more inclusive place and to encourage other allies to speak out and show their support for the community.

If you are interested in becoming more educated and involved
in the Staff Pride Network, join our lovely group of people in the network to keep making supporting the LGBT+ community possible! If you’re at the University and have any questions, or if you have event ideas or important issues regarding LGBT+ staff or students at the UoE for myself and my other ally rep to follow up on, contact me at the School and I’ll get back to you!

Further information:

Find out more about University of Edinburgh Staff Pride Network

Network events for LGBT+ History Month

LGBT+ Allies

University of Edinburgh staff – join the Network

Dr Molly Merryman

LGBT+ History Month Event

As part of LGBT+ History Month Dr Molly Merryman gave a lecture, ‘Queer Voices from the Pandemic’ on 9 February, 2021. You can view a recording of the lecture at this link.
Considering graduate study?

After four years of study, why would you want to do more? One of our Student Ambassadors, Alfie, has some thoughts.

An undergraduate degree at university is a significant commitment. Time, money, not to mention a lot of concerted effort to complete whilst juggling a variety of other elements of life. So, when considering the option to go into another degree after undergraduate, it’s natural to be nervous. The prospect of another year – or even longer – of study with all the accompanying costs and issues attached can be a frightening consideration for anyone. So why do it?

It is, of course, worth noting that academic study is not for everyone. If you’ve got a real knack for academic work and a passion for a specific research topic or want a job in an industry that requires a specific postgraduate qualification, it may be a good choice for you. Having a suitable research direction in mind will likely be important when looking at programmes and for research programmes such as an MRes or MPhil it will be integral to the application process. For taught courses, such as an MSc or an MA, a focus on skills development and personal qualities will take a precedent. Knowing how to market yourself, be it for your passions or your skills, is a key element to any application.

A graduate degree is a fantastic opportunity and can give you the chance to develop new skills for the workplace, academic or otherwise, but it’s worth remembering that it will come with additional responsibilities. The workload for a postgraduate degree is significantly higher than the average year of an undergraduate degree, and there are often more complicated matters regarding funding. Loans and scholarships are available, but the former can be costly in the long term and the latter are never guaranteed when you begin your application. Don’t let this dissuade you if you’re
particularly passionate about a certain topic, just bear in mind that there are more funding processes to apply to, and this kind of research is worth doing at an earlier stage.

The graduate application process itself can be tough. Between rejections, cancelled courses and funding issues, it can feel hard to bounce back. Personally, I found that losing out on my desired graduate course to cancellation was a very hard moment, but I was able to find an alternative that I’m happy with as it allows me to pursue a personal research project. This was all made easier due to my research into graduate schemes starting early in the year, around the summer before classes start. It’s around this time that graduate degrees will have requirements updated for the new term, and it’s from here that you can make the best of time off from university to begin your search for graduate study options in honest.

So graduate study is a great opportunity for the right candidate that offers a bridge into professional development or further academic growth, and is a very viable choice following an undergraduate course. Just don’t feel like it’s either a guarantee or a necessity.

If you are considering postgraduate study the School of History, Classics and Archaeology offers scholarships for Masters and PhD programmes – more information

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**Approaching the dissertation**

Dissertation. A big word, and often a scary one. Alfie, a Student Ambassador, looks at ways to make it slightly less intimidating.

Perhaps the culmination of your time at university and
exceptional (circumstances notwithstanding), also the longest piece of academic writing you will have created to date. Sounds like a lot – and let’s not mince words, it is a big task and not one to be taken lightly. However, with the right preparation, forethought, and enthusiasm, it is as enjoyable a project as any other. It should represent the sum of your passions and interests that you have cultivated over your time studying, or perhaps afford you a chance to further explore areas you have not yet had the chance to investigate. Simply put, it is a fantastic opportunity to hit your stride as an aspiring academic, or to cap off your university experience.

When it comes to the dissertation, it is never too early to start planning. I’m not suggesting that you should be coming out of your first year lectures and taking an abundance of notes on potential topics and sources to use, rather if something grabs you early on, maybe it could be something worth considering for the future. If a particular topic, method, or concept catches your eye, take notes! Remember it for later, and by the time that third year rolls around and the question is being asked, you’ll have some ideas for what you’ve got planned.

It is worth bearing in mind that third year is an optimal time to start your planning, especially over the summer break. At this point in your studies you will have likely covered a great deal of content and – hopefully – will have found something you enjoy writing about. If this is the case, take notes from any courses you have around the subject area and try to explore them. Consolidate reading lists, discuss material with suitable academics, and read around the subject if you have time. Naturally, this isn’t something that you need to have done by the first day of fourth year, but it’s something worth preparing if you have the time to spare. In addition, try to identify an appropriate member of academic staff to act as your dissertation supervisor – someone who is ideally familiar with the topic, so that you can discuss ideas
Writing the dissertation is a separate beast and surprisingly manageable if you like to break things down into sections. A dissertation will often have a literature review that examines contemporary academic thought on a topic and is not too dissimilar from discussions of readings done for seminars. This is often a large portion of your dissertation, so be sure you’re comfortable doing the reading to follow through. Other key chapters are your introduction where you’ll outline your subject, structure, and points for consideration, and your discussion, where you can make a deep dive into the content, highlighting your own ideas and opinions, as supported by or in opposition to existing thought. Be sure to give ample time for the writing of all this, as it can seem quite demanding, but rest assured that you’ll be able to intersperse this with meetings with your supervisor who can discuss your progress.

When it comes down to it, the dissertation is quite a big process, but one to (hopefully) be enjoyed. The freedom to pursue your own academic interests and supplement your own research with the aid of university professionals is a great opportunity to develop your own researching capability, perseverance, and self-motivation, all desirable and transferable skills for postgraduate study and beyond. While it is a big challenge, it is one that you’re not undertaking alone, as all other undergraduates will be in the same boat as you. So don’t worry, do your best, and remember to engage with the stuff you’re passionate about – it’s all plain sailing from there.
Managing your money at university

One of HCA’s Student Ambassadors, Juliet, looks at ways to manage your money as a student.

Going to university might be the first time many people have to manage their money, and the excitement of seeing your first student loan in the bank account is accompanied by the worry of not knowing how to budget it, but there are ways to make managing your money easier.

Firstly, it’s important to try to keep track of your spending from the beginning. This might be through money tracking apps or banks like Monzo, which lets you keep tabs on how much you’re spending on various necessities and activities, or Splitwise, which makes splitting bills and expenses with your flatmates easier. Simply keeping a spreadsheet or notebook of expenses that you review regularly can also be helpful to divide your expenses into categories, calculate how much to set aside for necessities, and set monthly limits on non-essential spending.

Setting up a student bank account with a pre-agreed overdraft is also a good idea – do some research about which banks offer the best options for students and for your personal needs. As long as you are not in your overdraft at the time you graduate from university, you can borrow interest-free if you do find your loan running out during your time at university.

Edinburgh is home to some of the highest rent prices in the UK, and it’s fair to assume that rent will be your biggest expense at uni. Consider joining a tenants’ union like Living Rent to get to know your rights as a tenant and make sure you’re not paying extra expenses that you shouldn’t be, especially when the time comes to move out.
Statistically, over 30% of students will experience stress related to financial difficulty at some point in their university career – it’s not a personal failure and it’s nothing to be ashamed of. Managing your money can be extremely stressful, especially in the current climate, and if you are struggling to make ends meet there are several places you can go for advice and support.

If you’re looking for employment, The Careers Service, which can offer advice on job-hunting and balancing student life and employment, is a great place to start, and many jobs are advertised on MyCareerHub. Citizens Advice Scotland, which operates online, over the phone or in person across Edinburgh, and The Advice Place, which is university-based and currently open for phone and email service during the pandemic, can both offer student specific advice on a range of issues including budgeting, emergency loans and funding.

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**Boost your mood**

It’s November. It’s cold, dark, and very, very grey. The weeks are filled with endless assignments, frustrating group projects, hours of staring at your laptop screen, and most likely a lot of reading. Asha, a final year History student, looks at how to improve your mood when it starts getting dark at 3pm.

Every year without fail, I fall into the same mid/end of semester slump. And this semester, when we are staying inside way more than before and there is less to look forward to, I definitely rely on a lot of ways to boost my mood. Sometimes I just have to resort to lying in my bed, but most of the time these work pretty well for me!
Talk to your friends and laugh

If you’re struggling to keep your mood up during the semester, make sure you make time to talk and laugh with people who boost your mood. Try and avoid talking about deadlines or classes and take a bit of time to think about other things that make you smile. This could be playing a game, walking up one of Edinburgh’s many hills, or just going for a coffee!

Go for walks in nature or change your surroundings

It’s amazing how much getting out of your room and changing your surroundings can affect your mood. If you are stressed or anxious about deadlines, try taking a long walk and stretch your legs. Holyrood park is a great place to do this, and the beautiful views of the city can help clear your head. Just being surrounded by trees can really help me to feel a lot better. If you need a change of workspace try going to a café or a different library that you haven’t been to before – this could help you get some new ideas and boost your mood.

Sometimes I find it really easy to get to the end of the day and realise that I’ve spent most of my day staring at a screen, whether that be my laptop or phone. Try and take a bit of time away from screens and giving your brain a rest.

Be kind to yourself and take a day off!

When I’m feeling really stressed and I am looking for small ways to boost my mood, treating myself to small things can really help. Taking a day off, or lighting a few candles, or buying yourself some cake can be the little mood booster that you need to regain the will to live.

Cook yourself a tasty and healthy meal

Cooking for yourself and looking after your body are really important parts of self-care and cooking a tasty meal for yourself after a hard day can really boost your mood. For me, this is a chance to have an hour away from my phone or laptop,
and either spend some time in my thoughts, or even better, enjoy the company of your flatmates and cook for them! I find cooking really therapeutic, and even if you don’t think you’re very good at cooking, challenge yourself one day to cook something, it can really transform your mood!

**Finally – ask for help!**

Whether it’s from friends, family, tutors or student support, there are loads of people out there willing to help you. If you’re stressed about an assignment, do not hesitate to contact your tutor, and do not forget, it’s their job to help you!

Find even more inspiration to keep your mental health and wellbeing healthy

‘Let’s Talk Mental Health and Wellbeing’ runs 9-27 November with events and ideas to support mental and wellbeing. Find out more on the EUSA website, [www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/letstalk](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/letstalk)

The University’s Health and wellbeing pages are a great source of information and support, [www.ed.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing](http://www.ed.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing)

Keep moving without leaving the room with live streamed
exercise classes courtesy of the Sport & Exercise team, www.ed.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing/live-streaming-exercise-classes

If you are self-isolating and feeling the strain you can find loads of sources of support on the University’s dedicated Coronavirus (Covid-19) webpages, www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/

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Black History Month

This October we are celebrating Black History Month, and we asked some of our tutors who study Black history within the School for aspects of Black history that they think are untold. From influential figures to fascinating manuscripts, these sources give us a deeper understanding of Black history and why it is so important that we pay more attention to these histories and mark Black history at all times of the year.

We understand that by writing this as non-Black people we cannot understand or represent fully what Black History Month means, and we recognise that there is an urgent need to not only be more inclusive of Black voices in academia but also a wider push within the discipline of history as a whole to amplify Black writers and stories.

You can find out more about the work of these tutors at research.ed.ac.uk Check out the RACE.ED blog (www.race.ed.ac.uk) and the BlackED movement on campus who are carrying out fantastic work on racial literacy and much more. Another great source of knowledge is The Black Curriculum (theblackcurriculum.com), which campaigns for a greater representation of Black British history in the UK.
In both Jamaica and the United States, Amy Ashwood played a major role in the founding and organisation of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, alongside her future husband Marcus Garvey. In a peripatetic career, she remained a significant figure in Black Nationalism after her divorce in 1922 and subsequent relocation to London, where she mixed with activists and intellectuals from Britain’s colonies and, with Ladipo Solanke, helped form the anticolonial Nigerian Progress Union in 1924. Ashwood returned to London in 1935, where, along with C L R James and George Padmore, she helped establish the International African Friends of Abyssinia to protest against Italy’s invasion. She also opened the International Afro Restaurant and the Florence Mills Social Parlour, both of which became meeting places for activists. In 1937, Ashwood, alongside notables that included Jomo Kenyatta, launched the International African Service Bureau, which championed anti-colonialism and self-determination. In 1945, she was one of only two women who addressed the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester. Ashwood chaired its first session and, in a report, condemned inattention to black women’s concerns. After living in Liberia between 1946 and 1949, she returned to London, where she helped found the Afro-
Women’s Centre and in 1958 the Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. Ashwood returned to Liberia in 1960 for four years, and, after some time in London, relocated to the West Indies, dying in Jamaica in 1969.

Dr Jeremy Dell – The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros

This week, students in ‘African Intellectual History’ are reading The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros, the earliest known book-length biography of an African woman. Written in Ge’ez in 1672, it tells the story of Walatta Petros, a female saint of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahado Church who led a successful resistance movement against Portuguese efforts to convert Ethiopians to Catholicism. She is revered to this day as an exemplar of strong female leadership and independent African Christianity.

You can access this book on DiscoverEd.

Dr Ismay Milford – The All-African Students Conference of October 1960
“This conference [...] recommends decolonisation through the re-writing of school textbooks which have distorted the historical facts and denied our peoples’ scientific and cultural contribution to the progress of humanity”

This resolution has remarkable contemporary resonance, but it was passed sixty years ago this month, at the All-African Students Conference (AASC) in London, 12-14 October 1960. The British security services (who kept a close eye on the conference, due to its links with the British Communist Party) dismissed the event as a failure, claiming that it was poorly attended because its organisers, the students and political exiles who constituted the Committee of African Organisations, had sent invitations too late. But looking back at the eighteen resolutions these students passed, we can see the AASC for the achievement it was. The students subverted the Iron Curtain at the height of the Cold War, inviting African participants who were then studying in Eastern Europe, and holding successor events in Belgrade and Moscow during the next few years. They tackled decolonisation of the curriculum even while many were directly involved in the struggles to win political independence for African countries that were still under European colonial rule. They were thinking about the problems of neo-colonialism too: their resolutions protested foreign intervention in the newly independent Congo where, three months later, the country’s first elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, would be murdered.

This conference may itself not have made it into textbooks but, as Priyamvada Gopal has argued, the resistance of people around the world to colonial rule provided lessons and inspiration for protest movements elsewhere – not least in the
UK, where white British people would soon begin to rally around the fate of Lumumba too. Indeed, some of these students had attended a similar Pan-African Student Conference two years previously at Makerere College in Uganda – both events are part of the longer genealogy of protest which inform current demands for decolonising the curriculum.

Both these conferences are explored in Ismay’s forthcoming book. Her current research is part of the project ‘Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s’ (https://globaleastafrica.org/)

Professor Diana Paton – James Williams

Many of the most powerful voices in the campaign to fully abolish slavery were those who had experienced it themselves. James Williams was one of these. Born into slavery in Jamaica to an African mother, Mira, and an enslaved father whose name was not recorded, he became briefly famous in Britain in 1837 with the publication of his A Narrative of Events, since the First of August 1834. The pamphlet told in powerful prose of the terror and violence inflicted under the system of apprenticeship, which the British government had in 1834 instituted in the Caribbean colonies, the Cape Colony, and Mauritius. Apprenticeship was supposed to be a gradual means of ending slavery, but Williams’s pamphlet argued that far from representing an improvement in conditions, apprenticeship had made things worse. Based on his own experience and those of others he knew, Williams stated that ‘Apprentices get a great deal more punishment now than they did when they was slaves; the master take spite, and do all he can to hurt them before the free come.’

Williams’s pamphlet was a best-seller. His shocking exposé led to investigations in Jamaica and discussion in the Houses of Parliament. It played an important role in mobilising public
opinion in Britain against apprenticeship, which ended in 1838, two years earlier than the government planned. His own subsequent history is difficult to trace. The Quaker abolitionist Joseph Sturge, who had paid for Williams’s freedom and his passage to Britain sent him back to Jamaica in late 1837, where he quickly disappeared from the historical record. He symbolises the complicated alliances between enslaved people in the colonies and abolitionists in Britain in creating a successful movement against slavery.

Read James Williams’s Narrative here: https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/WilliamsJames/williams.html

For a longer introduction, see Diana Paton’s edition of A Narrative of Events, published by Duke University Press.

DiscoverEd

Dr Josh Doble – Revisiting anti-colonialism: African women’s activism in colonial East Africa

Queen Muhumuza

In the UK we often suffer from a lack of awareness and lack of nuance when it comes to understanding histories of colonialism in Africa. Such issues of representations are part of our
national ‘imperial amnesia’, which is being increasingly challenged by anti-colonial activism.[1] Yet much work needs to be done to complicate and better publicise the experiences of African people under colonialism. African people were not passive recipients of colonial rule or the ‘civilizing mission’ which underpinned it.

In the early twentieth century two East African women took up arms against British and German colonialism. Between 1900 and 1911 Muhumuza, or Muhumusa, a member of the Rwandan royal family and a medium of the deity Nyabingi launched a campaign against King Musinga, an ally of German colonialism. Her charisma and spiritual power sparked the first armed responses to colonialism in the region, and her virulent anti-colonialism and anti-Christian stance resulted in a rare moment of European solidarity as German, British, Catholic and Protestant actors came together to subdue her. She was twice imprisoned and exiled in Bukoma and eventually Kampala, where she died under house arrest in 1945.

Two years later in 1913 and 1,500 kilometres away on the Kenyan coast another female leader, Mekatilili wa Menza led her people, the Giriama, against the encroaching presence of British colonialism. In response to demands for labour and the spread of Christianity, Mekatilili, a widower without any prior claim to authority, spoke out against the British at public meetings, even allegedly slapping the region’s colonial

![Statue of Mekatilili wa Menza in Malindi’s Mekatilili Garden](image-url)
administrator. She went on to launch a campaign of civil disobedience, cultural pride and non-co-operation. She was arrested and exiled, Giriama lands were seized, their spiritual sites desecrated, and punitive labour recruitment instigated. Mekatilili has since inspired Kenya’s feminist activists and has become an increasingly popular national figure.[2]

Whilst Muhumusa and Mekatilili operated in different contexts, both utilised spiritual and cultural histories to resist colonialism – it was through pre-existing African ideologies that territorial and spiritual colonialism were challenged. The courage and conviction of these two figures was remarkable, as their campaigns disrupted the racial and gender hierarchies which underpinned colonial rule. Through their compelling cultural power and apt critiques of colonial interference they mobilised large numbers of African people to take up arms and repeatedly shook the tenuous structures of colonial power.

Muhumusa and Mekatilili helps us think more expansively about what anti-colonialism looked like. Anti-colonial resistance came in many forms then and continues to do so now. Highlighting the lesser-known histories of those who fought colonialism helps further understandings of the complexity of African social and political economies and the ways in which non-Western beliefs and cultural practices were used with anti-colonialism. In a contemporary political environment where public figures feel emboldened to discuss ‘Why the West Won’, it is important to remember those figures who challenged ‘Western’/white supremacy. Muhumusa and Mekatilili’s celebration as heroes in East Africa foregrounds how black memories of empire contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of history and encourages the on-going struggle for decolonisation within Britain and East Africa.[3]

[1] The Rhodes Must Fall campaign being the most obvious anti-colonial dialogue between South Africa and the UK.
Working as a student

We asked Student Ambassador Alfie for his thoughts on what it’s like working whilst studying.

My first piece of advice for any students looking for a job in term-time would be to make sure you read the job advert closely. If you don’t, you may end up like me. Not that that’s a bad thing. I’ll explain.

When it’s all gone a bit hands in the air…

I’d been at Edinburgh for almost a year, and was coming up to
the start of my second year. The shock of being at university had finally worn off, and I began to realise that my degree left me with some spare time in the week. Now, spare time is a great way to unwind, but for some of us, too much spare time leaves us feeling aimless, and that’s certainly the way it is with me. So, I took myself onto the University’s MyCareerHub and began to hunt for some part-time work because, hey, everyone needs a hobby, and it hardly hurts if that hobby is paid. There I was, flicking through all kinds of different opportunities – Typist? Too uncoordinated. Childcare? Not quite my speed – when I noticed that the Student’s Association were looking for… Security? Sure, that doesn’t sound too hard, and the pay seemed good. Bouncer. Stand on the door and scowl. Right?

Eighteen months later, I’m still working that same job. Except it’s not the job I expected. But that’s OK, because it’s a world away from being a bouncer. The advert emphasised customer service and communication, which, while useful for the job is not the purpose. I now know that the role focuses a lot on managing the expectations of customers and doing your best to make sure everyone is looked after and safe. It’s given me a real sense of freedom and skills I know I’ll use elsewhere. Finding employment and managing the schedule it brings alongside full-time study is an impressive achievement – one that future employers will look for, and one that demonstrates a great step into maturity. What’s more, you can get official recognition for it on your HEAR transcript with an Edinburgh Award.

I have a new income stream alongside my studying, and more focus as I spend less time staring aimlessly at the ceiling. I also have a new group of friends from all kinds of backgrounds, as well as experiences and ambitions that I’d never considered before moving to university, to share an entirely new part of my life.

Some people are fortunate enough to never need to work whilst
studying, but for the many of us that have to, Edinburgh is full of opportunities whether it’s a Saturday job, something a little more regular, or one of the many full-time positions over the summer. There really is something for everyone, and something to ensure that we can all get a little more money in our pocket.

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**Being a Student Ambassador**

One of our Student Ambassadors, Kate, tells us why she was interested in the role.

New beginnings are some of the most exciting experiences of our lives. For me, the most exciting new beginning was when I uprooted myself from Lancashire in the North West of England and came to Edinburgh alone to begin my university experience. Now, in my fourth year, I am just as excited whenever I return to Edinburgh as I was back then.

When the opportunity arose to become a Student Ambassador, I put myself forward immediately because I knew I wanted to be a part of these new beginnings for other people. Getting to be a part of the excitement of open days and talking to prospective students about Classics has been a way that I can show my appreciation for the School, and my enthusiasm for my subject.

Whilst I have been an Ambassador, I’ve been presented with many opportunities to get involved with the School. Not just through Open Days, but also through focus groups for bettering employment in SHCA, calling campaigns to prospective students and giving individual tours of the building. All of these things revolved around my own schedule, which means that they never affected my studies.
The Chancellor, HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne unveils a plaque marking 300 years of history being taught at the University of Edinburgh

I think my favourite experience as a Student Ambassador was attending the celebrations for the 300th year of History at Edinburgh. There was the chance to hear some amazing talks by current students and alumni, to engage with many other alumni of the School and I got to meet the Chancellor, HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne. It was amazing and something I will never forget.

All of the things I have done with great friends, who I wouldn’t have met otherwise because we’re on different courses. This has been one of the best things about being an ambassador.

Anyone who wants to be involved in the School should become a Student Ambassador because you aren’t just helping the School out; you’re also creating memories and opportunities for yourself.
Top tips for exams

One of our students, Sarah, gives us the lowdown on surviving exams.

As a student, exams are inevitable: some courses only require in-term coursework, but most have a final exam to test your learning through the semester. As a fourth year I’ve gone through many exams and have developed my ideal system for dealing with them. This is my list of top tips for exams, based on what has helped me through these four years.

Revision

There is no denying that revision is stressful, especially when exams are early or come closely together. What comes first is figuring out where you can revise best. I personally like to find a good café where there is some background noise and lots of coffee and snacks, however, others might prefer the library, various other university buildings, revising in accommodation, or revising from home. Even if you prefer to move around to revise, I’d recommend finding some reliable spaces where you can work well and sticking with them.

Once you’ve found your revision space, the work itself is the next step. Over the years, most of my courses have been composed of a number of different and distinct topics, with exam questions relating to these individual topics. It’s usually best to revise a few of these topics rather than the entire course, to build greater depth of knowledge in particular areas. Always make sure to ask your lecturer for advice on how to best revise, and how many topics you should learn for the exam.

Relaxation

Revision is important, but you should also allow time to relax and wind down. I have a bad habit of overworking and getting
very stressed, particularly with essays and exams, and have had to force myself to stop working after I’ve done a certain amount or if it’s getting too late in the evening. In exam time you have to take care of yourself – eat well, don’t overdo the coffee, make sure to get enough sleep (I’ve found apps like Sleep Stories and Slumber are good for distracting me from overthinking), and try not to overdo it. Make time to talk to your friends and flatmates, as they’ll all be feeling the stress too. It’s important to get work done, but it’s just as important to keep yourself feeling OK, relieve some stress, and remember, especially, to take a break after an exam if you have another soon after. It’s good to do well but not if you’re sacrificing your physical or mental health to do so.

**In the exam**

The next step is the exam itself. Always remember to take plenty of pens, a highlighter can be useful, and definitely remember a watch in case your seat doesn’t have a clock nearby. Take your time and read the questions carefully (everyone tells you to do this but it’s definitely important!), and try to decide on both essay questions early so when you go back to the second your brain has had a chance to come up with an answer. Before writing, it is always useful to sketch out a plan – even just a basic structure for the answer – that you can go back to when you are writing, to help yourself out later. With two hours for two essays, I take five minutes for each essay to plan its structure, then around ten minutes per paragraph, and any spare time to reread my answers. This may not work for some, but it has done well for me so far!
Living in Edinburgh

It’s only now that I’m in my last semester of my final year, and I’m having to contemplate moving to a new city, do I realise quite how much I love Edinburgh and the people in it. Having lived here for four years now, and I can honestly say that there is no other place quite like it. It’s become my home away from home.

But if you are moving here for the first time it can be daunting, so I’ve compiled a list of things about living in Edinburgh which might help. Some are things that I wish I’d known before I came here, while others are simply things that I love about the city.

The Weather

At the Botanic Gardens during their Christmas Lights show, wearing the cosy coat my family bought me!

As a naïve 18-year-old from South Wales, I was blissfully
unaware of how cold Edinburgh (and Scotland more generally) gets in winter. Little did I know that snow in February is par for the course and how much a bitingly cold wind can cut you to the bone! From November through to February of that first year, a scarf was permanently attached to me and I had a hot water bottle in bed every night, in a vain attempt to stay warm. Thankfully that Christmas, my family gave me a huge duvet-style coat that has kept me warm every winter since!

The Variety of Things to Do

The city is always full of things to do, so if you’re looking for something you can definitely find it! I love going to the theatre as a treat, and the wealth of performance spaces that Edinburgh has makes this really easy. It’s also quite straightforward to find tickets for a good price, as most places offer student rates or sell last-minute tickets at a discounted rate.

Green Spaces

The view of the city and Arthur’s Seat from Blackford Hill.

As a country girl, I really appreciate the amount of easily accessible green space there is in the city. First and foremost, there is Arthur’s Seat, the ex-volcano in Holyrood Park. However, there’s also the Royal Botanic Gardens,
Blackford Hill and the Pentland Hills. Indeed, I’d argue that you get a better view of the city (especially at sunset) from Blackford Hill than Arthur’s Seat (controversial, I know). If I ever feel homesick, or just want to clear my head, I know I can go for a walk and be surrounded by nature within 30 minutes. This has definitely made city living much easier for me.

A Compact City

Despite there being so much to see and do, Edinburgh is actually a relatively compact city. You can get to most places in both Old and New Town on foot. Because of this, it didn’t take long for me to feel comfortable and familiar with the city. However, if you want to go further afield, say to Newhaven or Portobello, Lothian Buses are great.

Carys Flew

Presenting a paper

Student Ambassador reports back from presenting her paper.

In late February 2020, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to present a paper at ‘From Margins to Centre? An Undergraduate Conference on BAME, LGBTQ+, Women’s and Disability History’ at The University of York. I had never attended a conference before and had no idea how to write and
present a paper, so this was a really valuable experience for me to learn a lot of new skills!

[Image: York Minster.]

I decided to travel to York the day before and stay overnight in a hostel so I could see the city, as I heard that it’s very beautiful. The rumours were certainly true! I had a fabulous time at the York Castle Museum, which seemed to go on forever (perfect for a museum enthusiast like me) with exhibitions on the history of the body, life in the trenches during the First World War, and Britain in the 1960s, to name a few. I particularly enjoyed the body exhibition because it reminded me of a course called ‘The Making of the Modern Body’ which I studied in my second year, and I found the fashion history exhibit very interesting because it showed how ideals of beauty have changed over time.

I arrived at the University of York campus early in the morning to listen to the many panel discussions taking place, which included papers from undergraduate students from all over the UK. Some of the topics presented included the role of West Africans in the French Resistance during the Second World War, attitudes towards the disabled poor in 16th Century Norwich and the problems with the terminology ‘Islamic Art’
within the field of History of Art.

Lola Moutel-Davesne’s poster on ‘Is gangsta rap a form of radical resistance?’

The talent of the panellists and the breadth of interesting topics that were presented were amazing, many of which I had never explored in my own research! During the lunch break, many undergraduate students also presented posters on their research, including another of Edinburgh’s history students, Lola Moutel-Davesne, who presented a poster on her dissertation research relating to gangsta rap and black activism in the US.
At the end of the day, it was time for me to present my paper. My panel discussion was all about how history can inform us about the identities of marginalised groups, and my talk in particular was about the history of bioengineering (the industry which designs and constructs artificial limbs) and the experiences of those who used artificial limbs in Edinburgh since the First World War. I had learned about bioengineering history through my summer internship at the Lothian Health Services Archive which is part of the University of Edinburgh’s Centre for Research Collections. This role had made me realise my passion for disability history and why I am now studying the history of HIV and AIDS in Scotland as part of my undergraduate dissertation.

I’d be lying if I said that presenting my paper was not a terrifying experience, but I am so proud of myself for doing it and hopefully raising awareness for further research into the field of disability history. Here’s hoping I can be involved in other conferences in the near future!
Summer in the city

The rules and regs of summer in Edinburgh by Student Ambassador Ruby.

I’ve always argued that Edinburgh is a city designed for ‘bad’ weather. The Old Town looks even more Gothic in the gloom, and no student’s Instagram would be complete without a photo of Arthur’s Seat surrounded by atmospheric sea mist called ‘haar’. However, I’m also an advocate for staying in Edinburgh over the summer months so I’ve always chosen to take a summer job here, rather than head back to my family home, once exams are finished.

Over the past 3 years I think I’ve made every summer mistake possible, from getting sunburnt on the Meadows to promising myself I’ll still revise if I go and sit outside. Some of these mistakes could be avoided with a bit more common sense, admittedly, but others you can only learn to avoid through trial and error. To give you a head start, I’ve decided to compile some of my hard-earned wisdom into some dos and don’ts. Enjoy!

The Meadows in bloom.
DO make the most of every sunny day

Summer in Edinburgh seems to always begin just as you’re having to revise for exams or work to a deadline. “That’s okay”, you tell yourself, gazing wistfully out of the library window, “I’ll work hard today and then I’ll enjoy the sun at the weekend.” Sensible, right? WRONG. What you’ll quickly realise during your first summer in Edinburgh is that sunny days are glorious, but fleeting. The second the sun comes out you need to make the most of it, as it won’t be there long!

DON’T burn the grass on the Meadows!

The Meadows is a large public park, located behind the University’s Main Library. During the summer months it becomes the city’s shared back garden and the epicentre of most students’ social lives. Trying (and failing) to grill sausages over a disposable barbeque is a Meadows rite of passage and on a sunny day you’ll see plenty of others doing the same. However, just as essential to this ritual as ketchup or hotdog buns are bricks to prop up your barbeque. Edinburgh residents are very fond of the Meadows and, therefore, very protective of it. A single blade of singed grass is enough to get you dirty looks …

Sun, sea and sand at Dunbar.
DO head outside of town

By the time it gets to your first summer, you’ll be feeling settled in Edinburgh. You’ll have your preferred floor of the Main Library, a favourite coffee shop, and a fierce loyalty to a particular late-night chip shop. You’ll be feeling more confident and at home, and exploration will probably have taken a back seat in favour of studying.

However, summer is the perfect time to recapture that spirit of adventure you had in Welcome Week! With no more deadlines to hold you back, consider heading outside of the city centre. Portobello Beach is just a bus ride away and has a wonderfully retro amusement arcade to enjoy if the weather starts to turn. Alternatively, Dunbar has stunning views and is easy to reach on the train.

DON’T try to get anywhere in a rush …

It is often said that the city’s population doubles in August thanks to tourism. Whether this is true or not, it certainly feels true as previously quiet streets become bustling. Not only is there more people, the crowds also move slowly. Whilst you’ve had weeks to admire Edinburgh, everyone else wants to stop and take photos every few steps. Unfortunately, I’ve never found a way to get around this problem — you just have to relax and add an extra half hour onto every journey time.

MAYBE get involved in the Fringe?
Fringe Festival.

I finish on a controversial one here — the Fringe seems to divide opinions. If you haven’t heard of it, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is an arts festival which lasts for almost the entirety of August. There are thousands of shows and practically every spare room in Edinburgh becomes a temporary performance space. Fringe-haters complain about the crowds and the cost of a pint of beer being hiked, whilst Fringe-lovers can be found rushing from show to show and taking every flyer they are offered on the street.

I fall somewhere between the two. Yes, the Fringe is expensive but it’s very easy for students to find part-time work. And, whilst the hours can be long and unsociable, working the Fringe is a great way to meet new people. The city does become very busy, but there’s also the chance you’ll spot a celebrity. Give it a go — it’s right on your doorstep — then make up your own mind.

What I wish I’d known before starting university

Student Ambassador Scarlett looks back at the things she wished she’d know before starting her studies.

With 2 years of university completed, I’ve had a bit of time to reflect on my experience so far. As a History and Politics student I’ve gained several writing, studying, and analytical skills, but there is so much more to coming to university than just lectures and learning.
Take advantage of the City you’re in

You’re at university to study, of course, but you just moved to a new city as well! Edinburgh as a city has so much to offer outside of George Square and the immediate Old Town that surrounds it. It’s so easy to get caught up travelling around the Nicolson Street area but you do not want to miss seeing the Castle, Holyrood Palace, Botanic Gardens and more. The rest of Scotland is easily accessible and it can be really helpful, some days, to travel out of the city and see the beautiful views available. You don’t want to go all four years not taking advantage of what an amazing city Edinburgh is.

Don’t beat yourself up if it’s not amazing all the time

University is some of the best times of your life! But don’t worry if it’s not like that all the time. It can be easy to feel lonely and hard to be away from your parents sometimes, it also can be really difficult to go from school into university. You’re making the transition from just focusing on your academic and personal life to having to constantly juggle academics, cooking, personal life, health, etc. all at once. It’s exciting in the beginning but as the term progresses and you get more of a workload it can be difficult to balance. It’s a big change so don’t worry if you find it difficult. Also, don’t worry if your friends you find in freshers’ week aren’t the same later on. Everyone is still trying to find their group of people and you won’t always end your year with
the same people you started with. Take everything at your own pace!

**Take care of your physical and mental health**

Your health is super important so make sure that you take care of yourself! One of the hardest parts in the first year of university is adjusting to living by yourself. You don’t have someone there to remind you to eat properly or take a break. Try to keep on top of things and learn how to deal with stress and time management. In my first year I struggled to balance cooking, gym, classes, personal life, breaks, and seeing family. Now I’ve realised it helps me to make a list of goals at the beginning of each week and think on it. It’s helped me keep my balance and work ethic sustained! And if you need any help, it’s okay to ask for it.

**It’s okay to have alone time**

In my first year I felt like I always had to be around people and always had to have plans on the weekends. It is important to take a breather, though! There’s nothing wrong with having a night in to recharge. It’s okay to say no to going out sometimes and just spend time with yourself. You have four years here and those club nights, parties and plans aren’t going anywhere! Take everything one step at a time. Not everything needs to be done in the first semester of the first year.

**First year does count**

Yes, there is the safety net that first year technically does not count towards your degree, but because of this there are always some students who may not show up to every class. However, first year is incredibly important in giving you the tools you need to get you through second, third, and fourth year. Get into the habit of doing regular work, making relationships with your tutors and spending time studying. Just because it doesn’t count doesn’t mean it’s not important!
Trust me on this one.

The library is your BFF

Going along with number 5, take first year seriously and learn how to utilise the library and use the time there wisely. Edinburgh has an amazing library with every single book on the reading list. Some classes even make use of the research collections on the 6th floor. Learn how to use the systems and online journals and save yourself a lot of time. I promise this will come in handy! Nothing like a fourth-floor library session to crack out the final bits of your essay.

Join societies and make connections

You have nothing to lose, so join as many societies that interest you! This is the perfect time to try something new. On the activity side Edinburgh has cheer-leading, horse riding, and dancing as well as academic ones like Model UN, History Society, Classics Society and so many more. Edinburgh has an abundance of societies and you’re bound to find one you like! Even if you’re nervous and you’ve never done it before, I promise there are a thousand other new students in exactly the same position. Try new things and take some risks! I’ve met some of my closest friends through joining these societies and have just got back from a fun trip to Prague with the History Society. It’s a great way to get involved and create a community in your School and you never know what fun
experiences you’ll get! Also, making sure to network and take advantage of the cool events the School and these societies offer. When opportunities come to meet professionals or graduate scheme recruiters, take advantage of them. You never know when it can come in handy!

You don’t have to do what everyone else is doing
Take everything at your own pace. Everyone learns differently, everyone has different preferences, etc. Don’t let the student stereotype of stress culture pressure you into acting a certain way.

Don’t over pack
Your room in your halls does not have the capacity for your entire wardrobe. You can leave a couple shoes or random bits and pieces behind. The top you haven’t worn in 5 years can stay behind. Please learn from my mistake.

Enjoy every moment
Everyone is in the same boat, navigating this roller coaster of a time. There’s so many opportunities to take advantage of, new friends, and new experiences to enjoy! Just relax and don’t overthink things. You’ll be great.

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Essay writing

Everything you ever wanted to know about essays but were afraid to ask by Student Ambassador Constance.

Essay writing, love it or hate it, it is the metric by which we students are measured. Figuring out your ‘style’ is something of a journey and will inevitably include some
painful marks to grow as a writer. However, there are some tips I can offer, distilled from my four years of successes and failures, to help demystify the approach to essay writing.

Picking a topic – Don’t go for the obvious and easy. This can be hard, especially if you are pressed for time. But the reality is a lot of people are going to go for the obvious and easy, especially if you are in a big course. It will only make it harder for you to stand out amidst the fifty other people who picked the same question.

Picking a topic Part 2 – Pick a topic you like. If you like a subject more, chances are you are going to try harder and, dare I say, enjoy the process of researching more. Better yet, if you have the opportunity to pick a question, go for it. It is a perfect opportunity to focus on what you enjoy.

Research – Get your ducks in a row. Do not cut corners, I repeat, do not cut corners. This is when you want to be organized and systematic. Make sure you are clear when you take notes and have noted who said what. I still get cold sweats thinking about running to the library at 3 am because I could not figure out which book I had taken a quote from.

Research – Be one with the source. If you are using primary sources, it is best to have a direct quotation so that you ensure you have not lost any of the original source’s meaning, especially if it is literary in nature.

Writing – (When you can) Take bite size pieces. Inevitably, there will be a time where you write an essay in a day. Afterwards, you will feel groggy, gross and your brain’s IQ will have depreciated to the value of a guinea pig until you have had a full 8 hours of rest. Some people can function perfectly under these circumstances – if you are one of them, Godspeed my friend – but most are not. My best essays were slow burners where I took time to make a really pretty and detailed outline and only wrote a maximum of 500-1000 words
per day.

Editing – Take some time and then go for it. Essays are like boyfriends or girlfriends; sometimes you just need a little space. Give yourself a day or two to avoid your essay and then go to a printer, print that baby out, grab a pen and read it aloud. Yep, read it like it is the Queen’s Speech and cringe at the sound of your own voice. It the most useful tip a lecturer from first year gave me, and by far the most surefire way to catch grammar mistakes.

Submit – Get the receipts. Chances are you will be submitting your essay online via Turnitin. For all that is good and holy, no matter how tired you may be, check your email to make sure you got a receipt confirming your submission. Nothing is worse than losing marks for an essay you thought you submitted on time.

What is perhaps the most important thing is not to be dismayed if you do not get the mark you want. Read the feedback and take it to heart when you go to write the next one.

Find out more about what Constance thought of studying at Edinburgh.

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Working as a student
All work and no play? Student Ambassador Jack looks at working as a student.

At times, it can be a tricky balancing act but I’ve benefited greatly from getting a glimpse into the world of work; from stepping into a completely different environment to University study, doing something I enjoy whilst gaining different skills from those I might develop at University.

I think I am in an incredibly fortunate position. I’m able to study full-time at a thriving, diverse university, with all the extracurricular and social opportunities that offers, but also work at one of Edinburgh’s busiest tourist attractions.

I work at the Royal Yacht Britannia as a Sales Assistant overseeing ticket sales and working in the gift shop. Every week during term I’m able to work just one day and then work practically full-time over summer, so from that point of view I’ve been very lucky to have a supportive and flexible employer who has been able to offer me this contract.

It’s fantastic to work with the public alongside a highly engaged customer service team, and it’s also widened my social group outwith University. I love representing my city – of which I am extraordinarily proud – by working in the tourist
industry.

To any student who is thinking about what it is like working and studying, I would say it is certainly testing. There have been weeks when I have found it tough, juggling deadlines and shifts – University is hard enough and any job is a big commitment. But I think it’s challenged me to be more prepared and organised, not least when it comes to good time management – a vital skill in any workplace – and I’ve become a more rounded and experienced individual for it. I would very much encourage you to consider whether a wee job on the side could be beneficial to you – if nothing else, it’s some extra cash for us poor students!

Read more from Jack on being a student at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology.

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A visit to Rosslyn Chapel
Edinburgh is a tourist hotspot but students can enjoy its attractions all year round. Ossana, a Student Ambassador, went to Rosslyn Chapel.

The end of exams put me into a touristy mood. It is during these times, even more than usual, that I feel immensely glad that I chose to study in Edinburgh. The city offers endless beautiful spots and close proximity to other unbelievable sites.

I decided to take a trip to Rosslyn Chapel, only an hour bus ride outside of the city. It received many great reviews, and is renowned for its intricate carvings, and is considered one of the finest churches in Scotland. Built in 1446, the chapel has played critical roles in Scottish history, and continues to be a place of worship and an important site in Scotland.

The chapel was everything one could expect and more. Unfortunately, photographs were not allowed within the building, so you can be assured that the following is spoiler free. The church is rather small, but every wall, ceiling, and column is covered in intricate carvings and sculptures. The themes carved include Christian themes, as one would expect, such as the Seven Sins, angels playing instruments (including the bagpipe!), and the face of the Christ (hidden among the
stars on the ceiling). But there are also more obscure themes which even experts are still baffled about. Among the decorations are ‘Green Men’ faces, that may have to do with paganism. Also among the carvings are ears of corn, monkeys, and the face of a frustrated master-smith staring angrily upon the superior work of his apprentice (there is a humorous story that goes with it, but I shall not ruin if for you).

My experience in the church consisted of repeatedly saying “Wow!” and playing a game of Medieval ‘Where’s Wally?’ (“Where’s the angel with the bagpipe? No. Not that one, that one is holding a harp! How many Green Men have you found? I’ve only found three. Oh wait, there’s a fourth!”).

In 2003, Rosslyn Chapel was featured in the bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code*. Subsequently, the 2006 movie adaption, starring Tom Hanks, was filmed in part in the chapel.

Perhaps slightly to my disappointment, the local guide told us that the Star of David which was featured in the movie was nothing more than a prop, a sticker stuck on the wall. The sticker has since been removed, but it left a green mark which you can still easily find if you know where to look. Some think it damages the church, but it is undeniable that that mark has attracted many keen Hollywood worshippers there.

If you are still not convinced to make the trip, let me assure
you that just outside the chapel is a beautiful visitors’ center and a café that overlooks the best of nature. Coffee, views, and Medieval treasures: What more can one ask for?

While one cannot necessarily trust what one reads in books (especially one written by Dan Brown), you can be assured that Rosslyn Chapel is truly as beautiful as they claim, if not more. And while it may not contain the Holy Grail, there are secrets and unsolved mysteries hidden on every wall, column, and in its mysterious crypt, just waiting for someone to solve them...

Address: Rosslyn Chapel, Chapel Loan, Roslin, Midlothian, EH25 9PU

Opening times: Seasonal differences (please refer to website – https://www.rosslynchapel.com/)

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

We have some impressive neighbours, including the National Museum of Scotland. Student Ambassador Carlotta visits an exhibition there.

Last week I visited the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland. The exhibition shows the hundred finalists and two overall winners of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards, run by the Natural History Museum in London. The exhibited works have been chosen from among 48,000 entries, taken by photographers from 92 different counties. The exhibition’s location at the National Museum, a short 5-minute walk from the William Robertson Wing,
made it a perfect study break, and the £6 student price made it even more appealing. The exhibition is presented in a darkened room, with the images illuminated, making their colours stand out, and the focus of the images even more striking for the observer. Alongside the photographs was a description of how they were captured, as well as information about the animals and environments portrayed. This gave the exhibition an important educational function, rather than just being visually impressive.

Many of the works also aimed to highlight conservation and environmental issues affecting the animals and environments they captured. This was particularly true of one of the overall winners, ‘Memorial to a Species’ by Brent Stirton. Taken as part of an undercover investigation into the illegal trade in rhino horn, the photo shows a black rhino bull who had recently been shot and its horn cut off. The image was part of Brett’s documentary series, several more photos from which were also shown at the exhibition, entitled ‘Rhino Horn: The Ongoing Atrocity’. The series shows people on all sides of the story, from those involved in conservation efforts and taking care of injured rhino, to those fighting to overturn bans on rhino hunting, and those who use the rhino horn for medicinal purposes. The most striking image of this series was that of the world’s last male northern white rhino and his armed guard, who keeps a 24-hour watch over the male rhino and his female companions. This sanctuary has recently featured in the news, following the tragic death of the last male, and thus the certain extinction of the species. The other winning image, ‘The Good Life’ by Daniël Nelson, depicting Caco, a 9-year-old gorilla in the Odzala- Kokoua National Park in the Republic of Congo, also had a conservation message. In the image description, the photographer said that he wished to raise awareness through the image of the endangered nature of such gorillas.

My favourite photographs as I walked through the exhibition
were those which depicted interactions between animals, particularly parents and their offspring. I found that oftentimes these interactions revealed the similarities in facial expressions and body language between animals and humans. One of these was ‘Bear Hug’, by Ashleigh Scully, depicting a mother brown bear and her cub. In the image description was a comment from Scully herself, about how from her time observing these bears in the Yosemite national park she was struck by how much their actions mirrored those of humans.

One area of the exhibition that I was particularly impressed by was the Young Photographers section, exhibiting entries by photographers of 17 years old and under. This included works by photographers as young as 5. One of the winners, Daniël Nelson, was in fact only 16 when he took his winning image. While the adult photographers tended to have travelled for their shots, and known what they were looking for, the young photographers demonstrated a natural connection to their subject matter. Many of the young photographers’ photos were of the nature that surrounded where they lived, and most of them had captured their photos on a whim.

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition is on at the National Museum of Scotland until the 29th April 2018, and I would heavily recommend it to anyone who is interested in animals and conservation, but also anyone who has an afternoon to spare. See some of the photos and find out more about the exhibition at the Wildlife Photographer of the Year website on the National Museums Scotland website.
History Society trip to Prague and Vienna, 2018

As one of the Trip Officers for the Edinburgh University History Society, Student Ambassador Carmen was responsible for organising a trip to Budapest and Vienna for 40 society members during Innovative Learning Week.

While we were only away for 5 days, it felt like ages because we did so much in both cities! – Carmen

Day 1: Monday, 19th of February

Our flight to Budapest was extremely early – but this meant we got there really early too, giving us plenty of time to get our bearings! While the sky was blue, it was freezing cold as we walked around streets on the Pest side of the city, taking in the amazing views of Liberty Square & Parliament Square.

After giving everyone a few hours to have dinner (and a nap after a long day of travelling!), we met up again to see the iconic Hungarian Parliament building light up at night. Here, we were able to get a big group photo, before running off to take some night shots of the stunning view over the River
Day 2: Tuesday, 20th of February

On our second day, we walked along the Széchenyi Chain Bridge (covered in snow!) to go across the Danube to Buda Castle. Using our trusty Budapest Cards, we were able to get a free Castle bus that took us outside the building – a lifesaver considering it was a very uphill walk!

Some of our group were lucky enough to see the changing of the guard at the Sándor Palace, the residence of the Hungarian President. Others visited The Budapest History Museum and The Hungarian National Gallery. I particularly enjoyed the third and final floor of the Hungarian National Gallery, as it had some really interesting Hungarian modern art.

Later that afternoon, we had a private tour of Hospital in the Rock. This is a museum located in an underground cave system near Buda Castle, which was previously used as a hospital during World War II and The Hungarian Revolution of 1956. During the Cold War, it was also used as a nuclear shelter and remained a top-secret operation until 2002. We were not permitted to take any photos during this museum tour, but everyone loved the tour. During our visit, there were items on loan from museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, giving us the chance to see objects that were destroyed during the blast in 1945.
Afterwards, some members of the History Society committee and myself (with a giftshop bag from Hospital in the Rock in hand) went to visit Fisherman’s Bastion, a beautiful terrace giving us some panoramic views of the city.

**Day 3: Wednesday, 21st of February**

Early on Wednesday morning, I took a large group of people on the trip to Memento Park (also known as Memorial Park). Located on the outskirts of Budapest, this open-air museum houses over 40 statues that would been placed throughout towns and cities in Hungary during the Communist era.
Later that afternoon, we went to House of Terror, a museum dedicated to the fascist and communist regimes in Hungary during the 20th century. We were also not allowed to take photographs in this museum, but it was fascinating being able to see how Hungary exhibits its horrific past. Afterwards we went to Lukacs Thermal Baths. This is one fo the local baths in the city and allowed us to relax before getting ready to pack our things and leave for Vienna the next day.

**Day 4: Thursday, 22\textsuperscript{nd} of February**

Early in the afternoon, we set out from Budapest via private coach and made our way to Vienna! Here, we checked into our hostel and had a wander around the city before eating at the Naschmarkt, home to many fantastic restaurants. That night, I was so tired after a long day of travelling and sightseeing I went straight to bed! However, some very dedicated tourists in our group went to the prestigious Vienna State Opera.

**Day 5: Friday, the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of February**

On our last full day of our trip, we got up early to go and visit the Hofburg Palace. This was the former imperial palace and winter residence of the Habsburg Dynasty, who previously ruled the Holy Roman Empire. The building was built in the 13\textsuperscript{th}
century and today serves as the residence and the workplace for the President of Austria.

The Palace has many interesting exhibitions. We got to see The Imperial Silver Collection, which was fascinating because it showed how complex and ornate having dinner was for the Habsburg family; we got to find out about the life of Empress Elisabeth of Austria, commonly known as Sisi, who had struggled with the fame and social expectations of royalty before being assassinated; and we got to see The Imperial Apartments, which gave us a glimpse of how the Austrian royal family really lived. We were not allowed to take photos in most of these exhibitions, but I definitely took a lot from this visit and learned so much about Austrian history that I did not know about before!

Afterwards, we all went to lunch and then reconvened later in the afternoon to go to the Imperial Crypts. This is the burial vault of the Habsburg Dynasty, where the bones of 145 royals are kept, and it is astonishing to see how extravagant their
coffins are! Here, we also saw Sisi’s coffin, as well as that of her husband, Franz Joseph.

For the rest of the day, everyone had free time to get as much sightseeing as possible of Vienna! I went to Mumok, a world-renowned modern art museum located in the famous MuseumsQuartier. It was really great fun, especially the interactive exhibition when we were allowed to wear aluminium foil jackets!

Later that evening, we had our final dinner of the trip as one big group in an authentic Austrian tavern. This gave us time to reflect on our busy and fun-filled week that we’d had, as well as the opportunity to eat some pork schnitzel and kaiserschmarrn, a fluffy shredded pancake traditionally served with plum jam.

**Day 6: Saturday, 24th of February**

Home time!

I thoroughly enjoyed being responsible for organising an international trip with the Edinburgh University History Society. While certainly stressful at times, I learned a lot about myself and played a key role as part of a team; developed so many new skills that I would not have been able to otherwise; and made long lasting friendships along the way. I believe that societies truly enhance student life here at Edinburgh, and I am so glad that I made the decision to become
involved in the student community in this way. Hopefully I’ll get a place on the very popular History Society trip next year, as they are such a fantastic way to go abroad with new people at an affordable price!

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**LGBT+ History Month and Time Warp, 2018**

Student Ambassador Ruby reports on a busy February for the School’s Societies.

February has been a busy month here at the University – particularly for History, Classics and Archaeology students! Not only have we had the Staff-Student Pub Quiz and the History and Classics Society trips, but it’s also been LGBT+ History Month and RAG (“Raising And Giving”) Week!

A lot has been going on across campus this LGBT+ History
Month; our student’s association has been running everything from film screenings, to LGBT+ self-defence classes. The History Society has also managed to get involved and organise some events of our own. We collaborated with PrideSoc (the University’s LGBT+ society) to write a pub quiz, we designed historical Valentine’s cards, and we led a walking tour of Edinburgh’s LGBT+ history. Did you know that the 1974 International Congress on Homosexual Rights took place on our campus?

Our Valentine Cards.

RAG Week takes place in the last week of February and is an opportunity for societies to host fundraising events for worthwhile causes. This year, History, Classics, Archaeology, and Retrospect (our School’s student journal) decided to combine RAG week with LGBT+ History Month and host the event Time Warp. Time Warp was billed as a “party for people of all sexualities, genders and degrees”, and all profits went to the Scottish charity LGBT+ Health and Wellbeing

Time Warp was held in Teviot Underground – one of the many bars and live music venues on campus – and was DJ-ed by volunteers from FreshAir, Edinburgh’s student radio station. There were glowsticks, glitter aplenty and a slideshow of historic LGBT+ photos.
(because who said parties can’t also be educational?!) 

The Time Warp raised over £100 for charity and we had a blast!

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The Royal Yacht Britannia

![Image of the Royal Yacht Britannia](image)

The city is full of historical sites, and Student Ambassador Francesca visits one of the most popular.

Edinburgh is home to a wealth of tourist attractions, such as Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Palace, the National Museum and National Galleries, Dynamic Earth, Camera Obscura and the Scotch Whisky Experience. There’s something for all tastes and interests but the Royal Yacht Britannia is easily the best. Tucked away at Ocean Terminal, 15 minutes from the city centre, it’s also one of Edinburgh’s best-kept secrets. The Royal Yacht, which you might know from Netflix’s ‘The Crown’, was the Queen’s home-away-home for over forty years. It was launched from Clydebank in 1953 and sailed over a million miles before being decommissioned in 1997.

Britannia carried the Royal Family across the world on numerous tours and state visits, and has hosted glittering
receptions for world leaders, including Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher Nelson Mandela and Ronald Reagan. It was also used for family holidays off the coast of Scotland and several Royal couples have honeymooned aboard, most famously Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1981. Recently, it was the dramatic setting for Zara’s wedding reception to Mike Tindall. The Royal Yacht today is a beautifully maintained vessel and presented with its original furnishings.

The Royal Apartments (from top left): the sitting room, the Queen’s bedroom, the state dining room and the sun deck.

Except for maintenance hatches and the like, you can roam freely around the entire ship. The Royal Apartments, including the bedrooms, offices and sitting rooms, are where the Royal Family lived. There’s certainly a very 50s décor feel to these rooms, which are more functional than plush. There’s also a beautiful sun deck (once equipped with a water slide!), complete with a tea room serving delicious cakes and snacks.

A few levels below are the sailors’ quarters and social spaces. Yachtsmen on Britannia were known as ‘Yotties’. These
spaces are probably some of the most interesting parts of the ship. Tiered according to rank, sleeping quarters range from private cabins to bunking shelves (!) and while the officers’ dining room is nicely furnished with trinkets from the ship’s travels, the general mess hall looks more like a school canteen. What surprised me was the mini-pubs on board, where yotties and officers could grab a pint and settle down for games or entertainment. There’s also a fudge shop on this level, where you can try some truly bizarre flavours.

The Junior Officers’ pub onboard.

The lowest levels of the ship have been turned into more of a museum-like exhibition. The engine room has been opened up to showcase the original machinery, while the racing yacht, Bloodhound, has also been put on display. This yacht has raced at the Cowes Week Regatta and has been sailed by Prince Philip, Prince Charles and Princess Anne.

Britannia is an exceptional tourist attraction, steeped in history. She is an excellent example of heritage and conservation work in the sector. Visiting Britannia offers a glimpse of life at sea and a flashback into a bygone age. The Royal Yacht is also a remarkable symbol of British cultural diplomacy in the twentieth century and ‘soft power’. I’ve visited Britannia four times since coming to Edinburgh, and really can’t recommend it enough for showing family and
friends around the city, or an afternoon away from the Library.

The Talbot Rice Gallery: A hidden gem

How many Universities can claim to have a world-class gallery as part of their campus? Student Ambassador Osanna visits Edinburgh’s, the Talbot Rice Gallery.

I cannot remember which I fell in love with first: classical art or contemporary art. Though I have chosen to study Classics, I have maintained a great interest in contemporary art. After all, contemporary art often draws on historical themes and artistic styles, and challenges how we see and study them.

Barely two minutes away from the HCA building (the William Robertson Wing) is the hidden gem that is Talbot Rice Gallery, the University’s contemporary art gallery. Part of the University’s famed picturesque Old College, the gallery includes its own Georgian hall, which has been transformed into a cinema for the current exhibition.
I had recently begun volunteering at the gallery as an Information Assistant, and I was exceptionally excited about the new exhibition, displaying the works of video artists Rachel Maclean and David Claerbout.

I believe myself destined for this post, as I have happened upon Rachel Maclean’s exhibitions not once, nor twice, but THREE times in three different cities (Edinburgh, Manchester, and Venice). Edinburgh-born Maclean is a graduate at our University and had recently represented Scotland at the Venice Biennale. It is an understatement to say I admire her deeply. Her work currently on display is titled Spite Your Face. It is based on the 19th century tale of Pinocchio, yet its message is evidently modern, reflecting on the questionable reliability of politicians, consumerism, and the media. Placed in the context of Brexit, controversial presidential issues in America, and ongoing battles for rights around the world, Maclean’s work is an honest, if brutal portrayal of the darker sides of society. It is vivid, dynamic, and begs reflection, and viewers are unlikely to forget it in a hurry.

I had never before encountered David Claerbout’s work, and I was indeed in for a pleasant discovery. The pieces on display were very different from Maclean’s work, but compliment it wonderfully. Claerbout’s work centers around exploring space and time. One particular piece which caught my attention is named Radio Piece (Hong Kong). I do not wish to ruin the piece for you, as I believe one should be able to experience it however they wish. But as someone from Hong Kong, I believe it reflects the feeling of being entrapped within a clustered space, both physically and mentally, and reflects consciousness of Hong Kong’s colonial history and how it still affects us today.

I volunteered at the exhibition on its preview night and was overwhelmed by the influx of eager viewers. I was initially nervous, but quickly found my feet with help from a fantastic team of volunteers, who are also mostly students from the
University, and a group of helpful gallery staff. It was truly a rewarding experience, and I was very glad to be been able to witness it.

But the best was yet to come! After the preview, I recognized, swarmed by enthusiastic viewers, the artist Rachel Maclean herself! Like any fangirl, I could barely contain myself, but was too shy to approach her. After much chickening out and a lot of encouragement from my new friends at the gallery, I finally managed to greet her. She turned out to be the nicest, most approachable person one could possibly meet. I shook her hand, and muttered something unintelligible, which she somehow responded positively to. I managed to get a photo with her, which concluded perfectly a fantastic and fulfilling evening.

Osanna and artist Rachel Maclean

The opportunities for cultural enrichment and volunteering at the University of Edinburgh are fantastic and I cannot recommend them enough.

(The exhibition runs from 24 February 2018 – 5 May 2018)
Centre for South Asian Studies seminar series

Lecture by Dr Krishna Menon

The University and School offer a fantastic range of seminars throughout the year. Student Ambassador Frances attends one in our sister School, Social and Political Science.

I recently attended a lecture by gender studies expert Dr Krishna Menon. The lecture, titled ‘Feminist Explorations of Contemporary South Asia: Possibilities and Challenges,’ was part of the Chrystal Macmillan Seminar Series (named after the first female graduate of Edinburgh University, who later became a famous suffragist and politician). The lecture was part of a project which aims to increase connections between British and Indian universities. Menon’s lecture was a 45-minute magisterial tour of the history and politics of feminism within South Asia from the early twentieth-century.

As a final-year History & Politics student, I was thrilled by the opportunity to hear such a renowned speaker discuss issues resonating with my dissertation, which I am currently working on. The lecture did not disappoint. Menon touched on multiple
themes within contemporary South Asian political thought using a feminist lens. She demonstrated how the increasing militarisation of South Asia was gendered in so far as it disproportionately affects women who lose more freedoms than men. The ‘war on terror’ is used as a justification for this. Menon then shed light on the ‘abducted women’ of Partition (1947) whose families had to conceive of ways to restore ‘honour’ to their homes given India’s cultural code. Menon also drew attention to the uneasy positioning of feminism within the modern conception of the nation-state. The nation-state not only defines borders along, often, arbitrary lines but also draws borders between otherwise naturally aligned women’s movements. Menon also discussed the development of what are termed ‘femocracies,’ in which gender experts are included within governments in South Asia to try to implement emancipatory measures. These ‘measures’ do not, however, always address the structural causes which inhibit women’s development.

The picture, however, is not all bleak. Menon’s concluding remarks were a positive round-off to a fascinating lecture. Despite continued difficulties facing women in South Asia, transnational feminism, both as a feminist paradigm and activist movement, is on the rise. This form of feminism employs modern technologies to create new ways of cross-national collaboration which benefit all of society. The lecture was itself an example of this.

Menon’s lecture was one of a series of lectures by the Centre for South Asian Studies which was founded at The University of Edinburgh in 1998. This interdisciplinary academic unit offers new perspectives which continuously inspire people from within the University body, namely students, and from outside, namely politicians. I myself was inspired by this event, which is an example of how the many extra-curricular experiences on offer at Edinburgh have supplemented and diversified my degree.
First Annual Staff-Student Cup

The School, its Societies and students organise regular events and this was the inaugural event in the Staff-Student Cup (which is a shield, it’s a long story). Senior Student Ambassador Francesca was there!

This semester the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) is launching an annual Staff-Student Cup. This is a series of three challenges, pitting academics against students. Last night was our first event: a quiz, held at the Villager pub. With over 50 people, and nine teams, we had a great turnout.

We started out with an anagram challenge on the theme of buildings around George Square campus while people chatted, bought their snacks and drinks and found a seat. Anagram solutions included the Old Medical School (home to HCA), the Playfair Library (the beautiful library at Old College), Potterrow and Teviot (where most of the Student Union activities take place) and Buccleuch Street (pronounced Bukloo).

The first two rounds were on general knowledge and films. Questions included: Where was the 1966 World Cup final held? Who played Don Corleone in ‘The Godfather’? Then we got on to the third round – a little more competitive – on trivia about the city of Edinburgh. We had to answer questions on the name
of the fire festival held each spring (the Beltane Fire Festival), the population of the city (the 7th most populous in the UK), famous writers (Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of detective Sherlock Holmes), the Edinburgh Capitals (an ice hockey team) and where you would find works of art by Eduardo Paolozzi (the National Museum of Scotland).

The final round – on History, Classics and Archaeology trivia – was the most interesting, especially as it pitted students against experts in their fields. Some questions weren’t too difficult: What British city was called Acquae Sulis by the Romans? Bath! What is the name of the School of HCA’s quad? The Elsie Inglis Quad! But some were fiendishly difficult, even for specialists. We were quizzed on the name of the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated (Spencer Perceval), what US President Benjamin Harrison installed in the White House but was too afraid to use (electricity), and the names and order of Henry VIII’s six wives (my team failed this question, so you’ll have to Google it). Then came the two bonus questions. When was the Old Medical School – our building – completed? 1886. And when was the University founded? 1582.

The quiz master disappeared to count the scores and the results were revealed… in first place… ‘The 7 Sisters’ – the staff team!

Francesca Morphakis