

# Studying an MA in History at the University of Edinburgh

Kit is a third-year MA History student. In this blog, Kit discusses the courses they studied so far.

I started my MA in History at the University of Edinburgh in the autumn of 2021. I am now in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year (after having to take a one year interruption of study) and looking forward to the winter holidays after this first semester at honours level.

All has not been smooth sailing, as my interruption of studies hints at, but I don't ever regret deciding to go back to school in my 30s to do an undergraduate at University of Edinburgh.

Due to my circumstances, my experience studying at the university is a bit different than that of a typical student, but here are a few things that I've enjoyed studying that would be relatable regardless.



A lecturer in History, Classics and Archaeology

During my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year, the pre-honours level, I had a lot of fun with the outside courses we got to choose. At the time you had three mandatory courses in 1<sup>st</sup> year and one in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, leaving you to choose three and five courses respectively, in history and/or outside subjects.

[For up to date information on degree structures please see the relevant Degree Programme Table.]

Personally, when it came to choose my courses, I went with those that were of a subject I thought interesting within a history perspective and so stayed within mostly the History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) or Language, Literature and Culture (LLC) schools.

## 1st Year

In 1<sup>st</sup> year, my three choices were '*The History of Edinburgh: From Din Eidyn to Festival City*', '*Popular Religion, Women and witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*' and a foundation Japanese language course. That year, most courses were still primarily offered online due to Covid, except for the small group

tutorials. It was daunting, but my favourite course was the one on witchcraft. It was such an interesting topic, and you could feel that the lecturer, Dr Kirsty Murray, was really passionate about the topic. Though to be fair, that can be said of all the lecturers, which makes it all so interesting and engaging.

## 2nd Year

For my 2<sup>nd</sup> year, I went with '*Global Connections since 1450*' and '*Themes in Modern European History*' for my history choices and '*Scandinavian Civilisation A: Vikings, Sagas and the Road to Enlightenment*', '*Pre-modern East Asian history and the forces that shaped it*' and '*Society and culture in pre-modern East Asia*' as my outside courses. I really enjoyed all three of these outside courses, and as you can see, even though there were offered by LLC, they were history focused.

It's worth noting, that these courses might not be available when it comes time to choose your courses, as some courses don't run every year or are cancelled, etc.. And since those outside options are open to all students regardless of their degree, it's not a guarantee that even if they do run that year, that you'll be able to get a space. Have back up courses ready, and have backups to your backups! For example, in both my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year I chose '*Supernatural Japan: Doing Japanology through Yokai*' as one of my first outside courses choice, but as it is a very popular course, never managed to get a space.

The fact that, as a Scottish university, the University of Edinburgh offers a four years undergrad instead of the usual three you find in the rest of the UK, lets you really spread your wings and explore any subject outside your degree with

more freedom and ability to discover new interests.

## 3rd Year

Now that I've started my 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and passed to honours level, things are getting narrower in scope. And generally, you don't really get to choose courses offered by other schools (there are a few exceptions, but that changes and is at the discretion of each school). This year, I only had one mandatory course each semester and got to choose four more. Obviously, though you still have a vast choice of options, it will be smaller than before, as they are restricted to those available to your specific degree. Since I am studying an MA in History, and have specific time periods and areas of interests, my course choice reflects that. My two choices this semester were '*Revolutionary America, 1763-1815*' and '*The End of an Empire: The Fall of Constantinople in 1453*'. I will freely admit that neither of them were my first choices and were my backups, but as we near the end of semester 1, I can also truthfully say that I have enjoyed them immensely and even discovered a love for a topic that until now hadn't really held my attention in the case of the Ottoman Empire, and rekindled an interest in American First Nations' history that I have had since I was a 10! Dr Mike Carr and Prof Frank Cogliano are both extremely passionate and knowledgeable about their subjects, and it shows.

So as you can see, lots of options in what to study, even when you stay within your own degree and why two students studying the same degree won't have the same experience, as the chances of them choosing the same courses throughout all your years are slim.



One advice I would give you, when it comes to selecting which course you want to take, and which to get as backups, look at what type of assignments are used to grade you. Me for example, I'm rubbish at exams. I know that no matter how much I study or know my subject, I will not get a good grade. So, instead of shooting myself in the foot, as it were, I purposefully only chose courses that did not have any kind of written exam. That whittles down the options and makes it easier to narrow down your options. There is no reason that you have to go through exams if you don't have to. Of course, maybe you're one of the lucky ones that does well in exams, and so the point is moot, but it can still give you an idea of what to expect.

I mentioned it above, but I think it bears repeating, as it surprised me every time at first, but the professors and lectures really enjoy the subjects they are teaching, and that reflects back to you. It is no lie to say that enthusiasm is contagious and can make you enjoy even courses that you were not really looking forward to. It also means that they are always happy to discuss the course with you outside of the lecture halls or tutorial and seminar rooms. There are no silly questions and they will always appreciate you asking them and showing your interest. Every professor should have office hours, where you can just drop in if you need to (some ask that you book in advance, they will mention it if that is the case). You shouldn't hesitate to use these.



The exterior of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology in the snow

Now I will be hankering down to write my final essays of the semester, before enjoying some quiet time during the winter holidays and looking forward to the start of semester 2 and other interesting courses. I hope that you decide to study history at Edinburgh and we will see you next September!

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