

# Vertebrae? We've got your back!

Students on our MSc in Human Osteoarchaeology spend a lot of time looking at bones, funnily enough. But recently, they got the chance to make them... in felt. Why? We're glad you asked!

Felting is an ancient technique which, traditionally, created a textile by matting together wool using only heat, moisture and agitation. Examples of clothing, rugs and decoration have been found in graves, famously in Scythian Iron Age tombs in the Pazyryk Valley and Ukok plateau in the Altai Mountains of Siberia. Most recently, though, its creation has become a popular craft – sometimes called 'fibre art' – using felting needles, a mat and wool.

"I first encountered anatomy felting through 'I've got yer back', a community collaborative art/science project led by Janet Philp (Head of Administration in the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences) and artist Joan Smith." said Dr Linda Fibiger, Programme Co-Director MSc in Human Osteoarchaeology. "I created a C2 vertebrae, right at the top of the spine."

"Joan has, for a number of years, been doing a drawing session with my students, and I thought the felting with Janet would be another, art/craft-science crossover way to approach anatomy, to emphasise to students of Human Osteoarchaeology how important it is to really look at and feel the bone to understand form and function."

Students selected a plastic cast vertebrae from different areas of the spine as a model. Feedback on the session was

very positive, with students commenting that the process really made them look at the structure and different features of the bone casts.

## Felting bones, from start to finish



Students working on felting vertebrae.



A vertebrae takes shape.



A felt vertebrae with its model.



Finished felt vertebrae.

## Find out more:

- “I’ve got yer back”: A community art and anatomy project
- Article on the “I’ve got your back” project
- MSc Human Osteoarchaeology
- Dr Linda Fibiger’s staff profile

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# Archaeology Fieldtrip around

# East Lothian

Dr Henry (Indiana) Jones Jr once said, "If you wanna be a good archaeologist you gotta get out of the library!", which is exactly what some of our first year archaeology students did recently.

The School of History, Classics and Archaeology is lucky enough to have a wealth of archaeological sites on its doorstep. A group of first year archaeology students led by Dr Guillaume Robin (Archaeology Teaching Director) and Dr Tanja Romankiewicz (Lecturer in Prehistoric and Roman Archaeology) recently toured East Lothian, taking in a range of sites covering thousands of years.

The group first visited Chesters Hill Fort, an Iron Age hill fort, probably built in the first millennium BC, and which was occupied into the Roman occupation of Britain in the early centuries of the first millennium AD. The site has never been excavated but the remains of several houses are still visible.



Professor Ian Ralston (baseball cap at left) describes Doon Hill, to students

Next on the itinerary was Doon Hill, an Early Neolithic settlement site (c. 3700 BC). In the 1960s the site was excavated but was thought to be Early Medieval! Further research and new radiocarbon dating have recently demonstrated

its Neolithic date. A special guest joined the group at Doon Hill, Professor Ian Ralston (Abercromby Emeritus Professor of Archaeology). Professor Ralston – an expert in hillforts – has a history with Doon Hill, having first excavated there a schoolboy and returned to it following his retirement, being instrumental in uncovering the evidence of the true date of the site.



Archaeologists assemble!

And last, but definitely not least, was a trip to Tantallon Castle, a grand Medieval castle built on a sea cliff edge. Built in the mid-14th century, it was besieged several times over the centuries, finally by Oliver's Cromwell's invasion of Scotland in 1651. It's a popular filming location, featuring in everything from sci-fi movie 'Under the Skin', starring Scarlett Johansson, to 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai', a Bollywood romantic comedy.

You can find out more about our archaeology degrees, Drs Robin and Romankiewicz, as well as Professor Ralston's work at the links below.

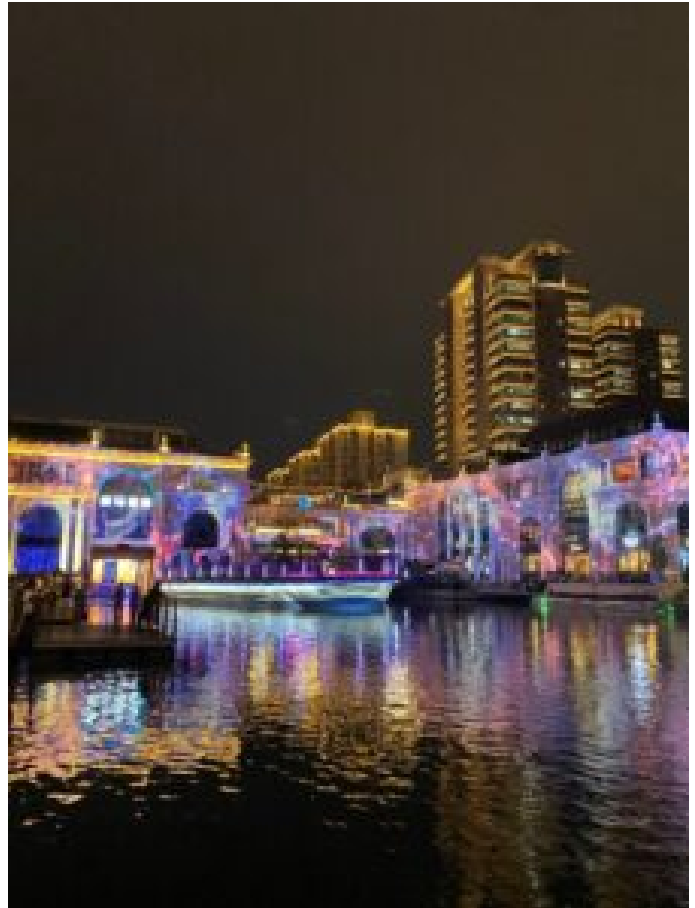
- Undergraduate Archaeology degrees at the University of Edinburgh
  - Dr Guillaume Robin's staff profile
  - Dr Tanja Romankiewicz's staff profile
  - Professor Ian Ralston's staff profile
  - Site visited – Historic Environment Scotland
  - Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland – Ian Ralston
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## **Studying abroad for a year – Aalish in Beijing**

Joint honours student Aalish is spending her year abroad at Peking University. She studies Chinese and History with the School of Literatures, Languages & Cultures.

The opportunity to combine both of my interests in History and Languages was something I knew I wanted to pursue at university and Edinburgh offered me not only that, but also the chance to study abroad in the world's most up and coming capital, Beijing. My degree is in Chinese and History and this year I am undertaking my year abroad at Peking University, China's number one university.

### **Why study a language and history at the University of Edinburgh?**



Beijing lit up to celebrate the mid-autumn festival.

The four-year degree programme offered by the University of Edinburgh really drew me to choose to study here. Not only does Edinburgh have amazing connections across the world with leading universities providing you with the opportunity to study at the very highest level, it also provides you with the opportunity to delve into both passions and does not limit you to only one field of study. Another perk of studying at Edinburgh, is that everyone partakes in a four-year degree, so once I return from my year abroad, I will be able to study history alongside my classmates once amore. On top of this, I still get the opportunity to continue my studies of history through the University of Edinburgh while I am studying in Beijing.

**What does my year abroad in Beijing look**

## like?

While studying at Peking University, I have 18 hours of contact with my Chinese language teachers, which is quite a lot! On top of this I am studying historiography and historical research methods through the University of Edinburgh online. Currently I have just started my historiography module, and I have been assigned a personal tutor to mentor me and help me through the topic. This has been extremely helpful, and my tutor is incredibly knowledgeable and quick at responding to any queries I have, despite the time difference. During my time here, I am most looking forward to exploring the living history around Beijing and the rest of China. Beijing is a very historical city with many museums and historical sites to explore.

## The history of Beijing I have explored so far



The Old Summer Palace.

Peking University is the first national university in China established in 1898 and the campus is on the former site of the Qing dynasties imperial gardens and encompasses traditional Chinese buildings alongside a pagoda and many lakes. Peking University campus borders the Summer Palace and Old Summer Palace, two incredible historical sites I have been lucky enough to visit. On top of this, there is Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City, next to which is a man-made hill made with all the earth dug out from creating the moat in the Forbidden City. It serves as a wonderful viewpoint as well as being a feng shui shield for those located in the centre of the city! There is also the Temple of Heaven, which I hope to visit soon.

In terms of more modern history, the 2008 Olympic games were hosted within Beijing and some marvellous architecture came out of this, from the Bird's Nest (the Chinese National Stadium) to the 'trouser' building (the China Central Television headquarters).

While there is still so much to explore in Beijing, China is also rich in history. I plan to visit the great wall next month as this can be done as a day trip from Beijing. Additionally, I will get the opportunity to travel around China in my winter break and can travel to other cities within China. Top of my list is to visit Xi'an to see the terracotta warriors!

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# What is burnout and what does it feel like?

In this blog post, Tessa Warinner, wellbeing adviser at the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology, discusses 'Burnout' – a rising concern in academia. Tessa discusses what it feels like, its prevalence, impact, and signposts helpful resources for managing it. This post belongs to the **Hot Topic theme: Critical insights into contemporary issues in Higher Education.**

I'm sure you've come across the term 'burnout' while scrolling through your social media and news feeds. I've personally noticed an increase in public conversation about it since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Like many psychological terms, the actual meaning of it can get lost in the chatter. The World Health Organisation (WHO) characterises burnout as 'an occupational phenomenon'. They define it as

*"a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."*

They said that the three main dimensions are as follows:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- reduced professional efficacy.

In my experience as a wellbeing adviser, I've frequently had both students and staff tell me they're feeling burnt out. They usually tell me about experiencing symptoms that closely resemble the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which is the go-to questionnaire for measuring if a person is experiencing this phenomenon. Some of the symptoms are:

- **Exhaustion:** feeling emotionally drained, frequently

frustrated with your work, feeling at the end of your rope, and feeling like it's too much effort to directly interact with people at work.

- **Depersonalisation (or a loss of empathy for others):** feeling afraid that your job has made you more callous towards others, you are out of patience by the end of the work day, and you feel like you are too tired to get up to face another day at work.
- **Personal achievement:** feeling like you haven't accomplished anything worthwhile, you don't feel you're positively influencing others, and you struggle to create a relaxed work environment for yourself and others.

If any of these resonate with your personal experience, you are far from alone. Mental Health UK released a 2024 report about the YouGov poll they ran about burnout. They found that 91% of workers reported feeling extremely stressed out in the past year. One in five workers reported needing to take time off work for burnout symptoms in the past year. It's safe to say that at least one person in your inner circle has felt burned out at some point in their lives. I guess that means you're in good company, right?

### **Can students experience burnout?**

The current definitions of burnout are worded for people working in jobs. In my experience, I have found that students frequently report burnout symptoms while completing their degree. Going to lectures, working on assessments, and attending exams can involve as much energy as someone working a full-time job. Coupled with the rigorous academic expectations that come with attending the University of Edinburgh, it's natural to feel worn down by it. Academic burnout appears to be under-studied, but a 2023 study found that out of the 22,983 students they included in the sample, over half of them were currently experiencing it. They also found that certain factors such as being male, having higher

marks than the class average, and smoking cigarettes led to higher levels of academic burnout.

This study highlights the importance of understanding how burnout does not occur in a vacuum. I tell students (and my co-workers) that it is a very stressful time to work and study. We're collectively doing our best to cope with trying to see our friends and family, exercise, do chores, drink enough water, get eight hours of sleep, keep our screen times low, not get Covid-19, manage our money while we deal with the cost-of-living crisis, and watch our government deal with global geopolitical instability. In my professional opinion, experiencing at least some burnout symptoms is a normal response to these abnormal circumstances.

### **What can be done if you feel burnt out?**

If anything from this post resonates with your experience, it's worth taking this burnout quiz by HealthCentral. This is not a diagnostic tool, but it can help you organise your thoughts around how you're feeling. It can help structure further conversations with medical and mental health professionals. There is also a great book called *Burnout: Solve Your Stress Cycle* by Emily and Amelia Nagoski, which does a deep dive into the phenomenon and has practical tips to help you feel better.

If you are a current University of Edinburgh student and don't know where to start addressing burnout, it's worth referring into Student Wellbeing Services using our referral form. A wellbeing adviser can meet with you to discuss your situation and come up with a bespoke support plan for you. Personally, I usually recommend taking time to rest and getting clinical help to help alleviate burnout. I would put them in touch with their student adviser to discuss the logistics around taking a leave of absence or an authorised interruption of studies, if this is what the student would like. I'm very mindful that students are typically reluctant to take any significant time

off as they would like to graduate within four years, so I would usually find ways to build in more time for rest in their busy schedules. I would also help them find ways they can access therapy to talk more about their feelings. This can be through the University Student Counselling Service or external services located around the city.

If you are a staff member, time and clinical help are also the way to go. I would recommend speaking with your line manager first to discuss your current workload and obligations. There is also the University Occupational Health Service if you don't feel comfortable speaking with them. They will be able to point you in the direction of appropriate services.

*All in all, burnout is a very common phenomenon that at least one person in your inner circle has experienced. Having it is no reflection on your character, or your ability to withstand stressful circumstances. No matter what, you're going to get through it. You're going to be okay.*



**Tessa Warinner**

Tessa Warinner is a wellbeing adviser aligned with the University of Edinburgh's School of History, Classics, and Archaeology.

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# **Why I chose a Joint Honours Degree: Combining my passions...**

**...by Sophia / from the UK / studying History and Economics (MA)**

One of the most challenging dilemmas many prospective university students face is deciding which subject to study. When I began my university application journey I faced this dilemma. I had studied varied subjects during 6th form had two distinct subjects that fascinated me greatly, History and Economics. On one hand, history interested me because it offers rich narratives, diverse cultures, and profound lessons from the past, helping us understand the complexities of human civilisation and the forces that have shaped our world. However, economics also captivated me with its analysis of how societies function and the impact of financial systems on our daily lives. Faced with the challenge of choosing between these two compelling fields, I found the perfect solution: pursuing a joint honours degree in History and Economics.

This decision has allowed me to explore both passions in depth, providing a comprehensive and enriching academic experience. In this blog post I will share some of the benefits of pursuing a joint honours degree and highlight why I think the decision to study two very different subjects offers unique opportunities for growth and learning.

## **1) Interdisciplinary Learning: Embracing the Intersection**

One of the most significant benefits of pursuing a joint honours degree is the opportunity for interdisciplinary

learning. By studying two distinct subjects simultaneously, I've had the chance to explore the intersection of history and economics, gaining insights into how these disciplines inform and complement each other. This interdisciplinary approach has enriched my understanding of complex issues, allowing me to analyse historical events through an economic lens and vice versa.

## **2) Flexibility: Tailoring My Degree**

Another advantage of studying a joint honours degree is the flexibility it offers. Rather than being confined to a single field of study, I've had the freedom to tailor my degree to my interests and career aspirations. Whether exploring the impact of the economy on the environment and the formation of cities or exploring culture and the arts in 1960s Scotland, I've been able to explore diverse topics that captivate my curiosity and shape my academic journey. Additionally it gave me choice with my dissertation as I could do a history, economics, or economic history dissertation, further highlighting the flexibility of some joint honours degrees.

## **3) Diverse Skill Development: Fostering Versatility and Adaptability**

My journey studying two distinct subjects simultaneously has given me a wide range of skills that are valuable in today's job market. From honing analytical thinking and research abilities in history to refining communication and problem-solving skills in economics, I have developed a more versatile skill set. Additionally, by balancing the demands of two distinct subjects, I've honed my time management, organisation, and prioritisation skills, preparing me for life after my studies.

## **4) Networking Opportunities: Building Connection Across Disciplines**

Engaging with faculty members, peers, and professionals from

two different disciplines has provided me with invaluable networking opportunities. By building connections within two different schools at the University I have gained access to diverse perspectives, resources, and mentorship opportunities, enriching my academic experience and expanding my professional horizons. Whether collaborating on projects or participating in extracurricular activities, these networking opportunities have expanded my network and enhanced my overall university experience.

In conclusion, pursuing a joint honours degree in History and Economics has been a rewarding journey that has allowed me to combine my passions and develop a versatile skill set. From interdisciplinary learning to flexible tailoring of my education, this experience has prepared me for success in both academic and professional pursuits. Through networking opportunities and diverse skill development, I've enhanced my overall university experience and look forward to applying what I've learned in the future. If you would like to ask any questions about studying a joint honour degree please send me a message on Unibuddy and I would be more than happy to answer!

Originally published on the student Stories blog

**Want to find out more?**

Chat with Sophia


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**How to get stuff done when you have a disability...**

# ...by Kit / from Belgium / studying History (MA) / 3rd year All Posts

Being at university, there's always a time when we struggle to get work done. As a disabled student, this can be doubly true. Whether that's due to ADHD goblin brain or bad health days, the tips and tricks below can help you stay on track.

## Getting a schedule of adjustments

First things first. If you have a disability, get in touch with the Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS) as soon as possible to talk about how they can support you. This could potentially be assistive software, proofreading services, a study skill tutor, additional time to complete assignments, etc. This is all individually based on your needs and the list above is just a few examples of what help I personally have gotten. 

## Break down tasks into smaller tasks



Seeing the list of assignments pile up at the beginning of each semester can be overwhelming. 'Write 2000 word essay' is a very vague

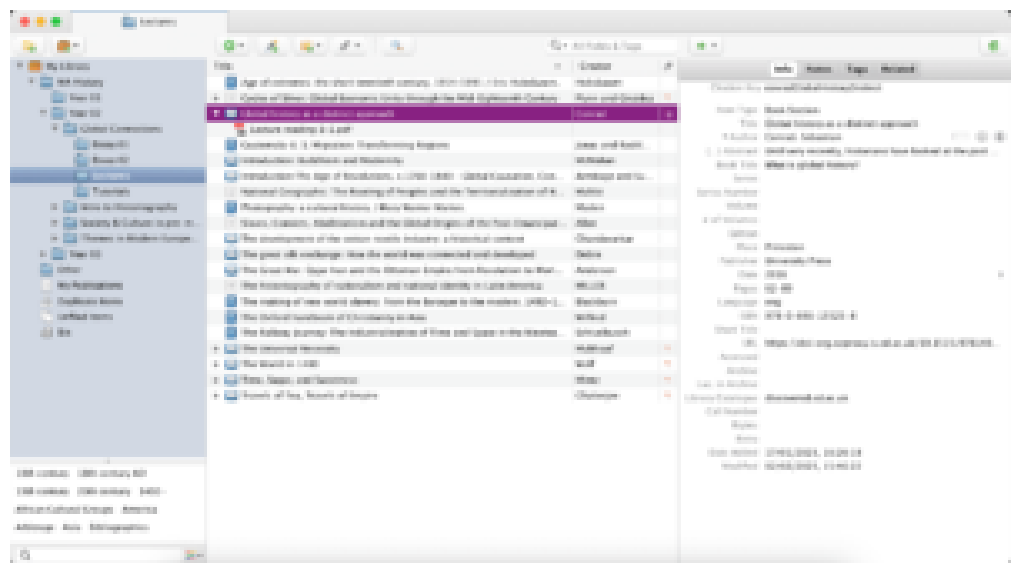
task and it'll be multiplied by however many assignments you have. Where do you even start? My advice? Break. It. Down. And be as precise as is useful for you. For example:

1. chose a topic/question



2. look for sources
3. read the sources (break it down by individual source)
4. take notes on sources
5. ...

I recently discovered a free online tool that does that for you and you can even choose how in detail it'll break the tasks down and even break down subtasks afterwards. It's called [goblin.tools](http://goblin.tools) and is an absolute life saver, especially when you're just starting out and are not sure what steps you need to complete your tasks.

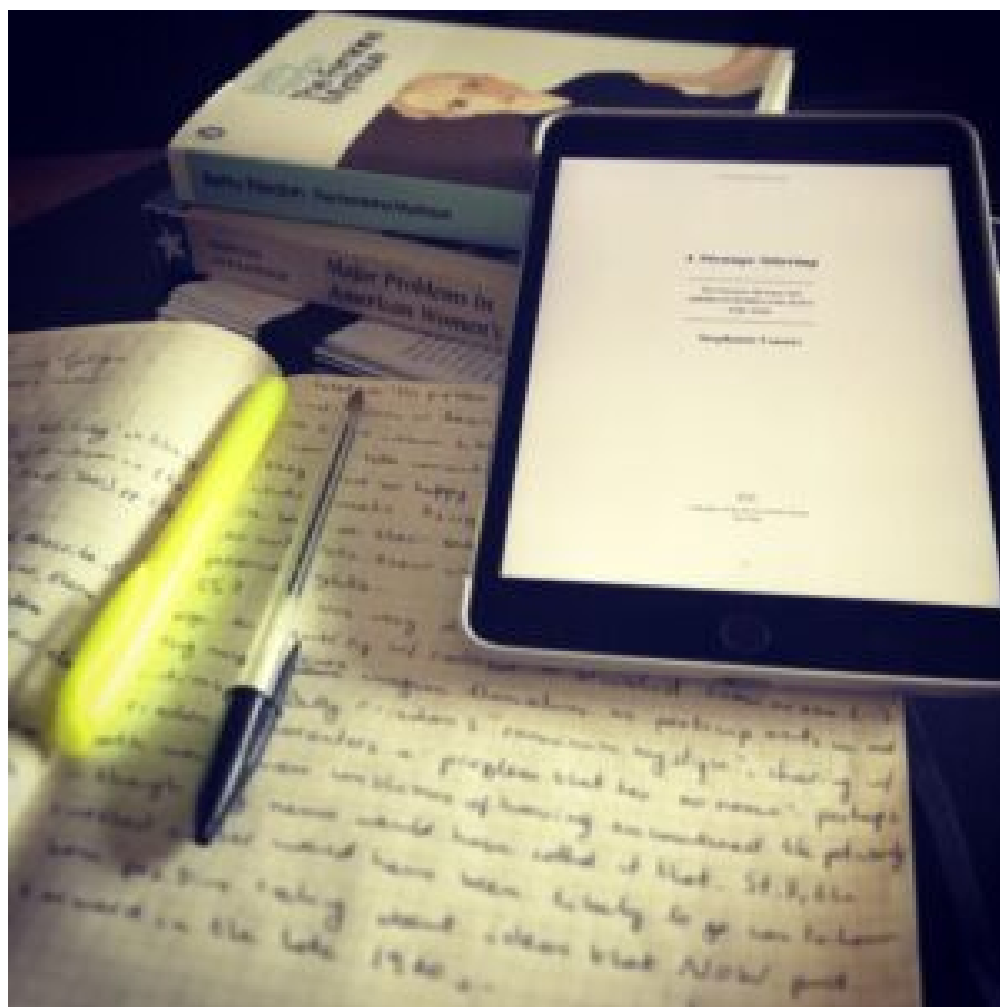


## Use all the tools at your disposal to make your life easier

When you tend to get easily distracted or only have that much energy to spare in a day or have to account for bad days where you can't do anything, it means you need to use your time wisely and as such any tool that saves you time will be welcome.

At uni, you'll spend the majority of your time reading sources and referencing back to them. A great time saver is Zotero. It's a free research tool that helps you organise your sources. To get the most out of it, combine it with it's browser extension and Word plugin. With these, it'll let you

automatically add a source to your Zotero database directly for any library catalogue or archive and then cite them back in the proper format in your Word document, saving you a great amount of time on doing this manually. You can also add PDFs of your sources directly into Zotero and use it's great annotation function and potentially link it to note taking apps like Obsidian.md or Notion.io to collate your notes when it's time to write that essay.



## **Read with purpose**

Similarly to the above, to use your time wisely you need to read with a specific purpose. You'll be tempted to read all of it and read it in depth. Don't. Generally, for tutorials and seminars you'll have guided questions. Use those to first skim the readings and find relevant passage to answer those questions, look for key words you think you add to those, and if you already know your essay question look for anything that might stand out as useful. For essay readings or anythings

where you'll need to do more reading and/or more in depth start by reading the introduction & conclusion of the book/chapter/article. If it doesn't mention things that are relevant then discard it. If it does, then continue by reading the first and last paragraph and so forth. It's a great way to weed out irrelevant sources and to only read in depth what you'll actually use/find useful, thus saving you a lot of time.

## **Don't forget self-care and to manage your expectations**

Finally, it's really important that you don't forget to look after yourself. It can be tempting to do as much as you can when you can, but if you over do it, it'll just potentially push you back and leave you less time to do the work at a manageable pace. Do your best, within your capabilities and ask for help when you need it. Your Student Adviser and the DLSS are there to help and will point you in the correct direction if they aren't the ones that can help in your particular case.

## **Want to find out more?**

Chat with Kit

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## **What makes HCA so special?**

Tanvi shares her experience of being an international student, and the supportive community of School of History, Classics and Archaeology.

Student life in Edinburgh is colourful and multifaceted, and this is something that the University has continued to provide throughout my time as a student here. My experience at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) started during Covid so my entire first year was online. I found that as an international student this eased the transition from home to university for me, somewhat. However, at the same time it sometimes made engagement difficult. I found, though, that the University – and especially HCA – strived to remedy this lack of in-person learning. And now, as a third-year student studying full-time in person, I find that the same opinion of student life here holds up.

## Academic rigour



The School of History, Classics, and Archaeology provides not only a large variety of degree options, but also an allowance for flexibility and diversity

within those degrees. In addition to a wide range of course options, HCA implements a balanced but academically challenging environment – something that is put in place from day one.

From my personal experience as a student from the USA, schools don't have an A-level system and the courses offered are general and broad, with no opportunity for Classics or Archaeology backgrounds. I found that even with no prior knowledge of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History –

although I was surrounded by peers who had the opportunity to take a Classics A-level – HCA has ensured an all-round and in-depth introduction to the subject. Overall, the class structure, assessment style, and myriad of course opportunities have allowed me to garner the same proficiency in my chosen degree as someone who had prior knowledge of some of the course material. I have found that other international students with a similar background have shared this experience in other degrees.

In addition to literal content, HCA implements an academic system with additional external support from faculty and such tools as the HCA writing centre and peer mentors that result in a higher output of quality of academic work. Three years at HCA have taught me – besides academic content – the professional qualities associated with research, writing, and presentation in regard to my academic work and external projects.

## **Faculty**

The academic opportunities that University of Edinburgh students have are a product of the faculty. The School ensures a broad panel of faculty spanning multiple historical, classical, and archaeological specialties. This not only allows the greater variety of choice for incoming and prospective students in pre-honours, it also allows honours students to choose from a large pool of academics to determine their postgraduate pathways and dissertation topics/guidance. In this way, the HCA faculty pushes students to explore various topics that allow them to experience a very varied subject area.

## **Societies**



By far some of the most influential engagement among students in HCA comes from the History, Classics and Archaeology societies. As a member of the Archaeology Society, I have found myself not only meeting other students in my course subject, but also other HCA students in HCA through joint society events. By meeting other people in the same subject as me my academic life has improved, which encourages me in my studies. And by gaining access to the wider HCA student network, this has created and sustained an even more warm and welcoming environment in the School.

In addition to the social aspect of the society programs, the academic and professional opportunities awarded to members and attendees is immensely helpful. Through opportunities like conferences and lectures by experts in various fields, the students of HCA have a wonderful chance to widen their academic horizons while also networking amongst academic professionals. And it allows them to browse and gain familiarity with future career opportunities. The Archaeology Fieldwork Fair instituted by the Archaeology Society provides multiple career and fieldwork opportunities annually in addition to other opportunities offered within HCA. The University also has a number of heritage and collections internship positions for students in the relevant fields, providing valuable experience for the future.

## **The wider University community**

The resources and support available in HCA are supplemented by the environment of the rest of the University, and its faculty and students. The multicultural and diverse surroundings of the University and the wider Edinburgh area is truly something that not only influenced my decision to attend the University, but has deeply affected my current experience here as a student. As an international student, and a person of colour, the University of Edinburgh has created a central community in which students of all backgrounds, interests, and identities can collectively explore the beauty that the city has to offer.

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## **In with the bricks, or how a building can make a difference**

Lockdown taught us that you don't really need to be somewhere physically to get the work done, right? History student Olivia might disagree.

When I started university, I didn't really spend much time in the William Robertson Wing – the home of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, or HCA as it's usually known. In the beginning I got lost one too many times, and gave up on it because the Undergraduate Common Room intimidated me, and the lift was out of service when I wanted to go to the research room and didn't want to climb the stairs. So I found myself mostly in the main library feeling entirely anonymous. But now, almost all my time is spent in the HCA building, and I see and interact with the same people

every day. A degree as large as history can be a little daunting, but the HCA building provides a small, tight-knit community within the larger University community which makes that a little easier.

## A typical day, untypical places

I usually start my days early. I wake up around 6 or 6:30am and go for a run around the Meadows or around Holyrood Park (though in reality, it's pretty stop and go because there are lots of very friendly dogs out in the morning and I miss my dog at home a lot). When I get back, I take a quick shower, get myself ready for the day, eat some breakfast, and head off to HCA where I will inevitably realise I'd left a book I needed for class in the ever-growing pile of books on my desk at my flat. C'est la vie!

I usually get to HCA around 9am and head to the Student Research Room on the third floor for the first part of my day. When I get there, I wave at my friend Josh, and get settled in at my favourite desk (second from the door on the left). I usually



like to make a list on Monday of everything that I need to get done for the week and then set in on everything that I have to do. Inevitably, I will have a lot of thoughts and feelings about whatever it is that I'm reading for whichever seminar, and I will drag Josh into the hallway to gesticulate wildly about female poets in the *Gàidhealtachd* (an article by Anne Frater), or about a Medieval Islamic medical case study (an article by Cristina Alvarez-Millan), or Lidl being out of my favourite pasta shape (it can be a very hard life).

At around 1pm, unless I've had a seminar, I'll head down to the common room which is usually just picking up as everyone else comes down for their lunch break as well. I'll generally



set my things down at the best desk in the common room (in front of the window second from the left) and settle in for about an hour with a group of my friends. Generally, I don't get into the lunch debate that plagues every University of Edinburgh student, but sometimes I dabble and will get a wrap from Nile Valley (not African Wrap because they don't marinate their aubergines the same way). I usually take about an hour for lunch, but my friend Ellie and I often have some kind of shenanigan going on that we loop the other in on (and very often get complained about on The Tab).



After lunch, I bid my friends in the common room farewell and I put my headphones on and face the window. I'll usually do my more intense work in the morning in the quiet of the research room and save my less intense work for the common room, so I often end up writing my dissertation in the afternoons or catching up on some work.

In the evenings, I try to take it easy. I generally leave HCA around 5 or 6pm, and I usually spend the evening making dinner and watching something dumb on television or reading. But on Mondays I have History Society meetings (a society I've been involved with since my first year and which has really helped me get to know my peers), once a month I have 'girls night' with my neighbours (who I only got the chance to meet because they're also in the History Society), and every so often I'll stay late in the building to finish my dissertation work (with the help of friends who are actually largely distracting though there's no one I'd rather be distracted by).

# The HCA Community



Being an HCA student and having these spaces reserved specifically for HCA people is really special and I cannot imagine my university experience without it. With the amount of time I spend in the building, I've gotten to know my degree much more intimately than I think I would have had I not spent so much time here. I've been able to make lasting connections with faculty because I am just always around. Whether it's been that I often ride the lift up with the same people, or I'm closer to office hours, I have really valued my time hanging out with lecturers and getting to know them more personally than we really get to in seminars.

I have also made lasting friendships through HCA. There is a definite group of us who spend every day at HCA doing the same things with the same people, and by virtue of proximity, we've been able to build these connections that have lasted years. It is a lovely thing to know that your space is a space you can share with your friends and with people who are just as excited about their degrees as you are about yours.

Being in HCA and being part of the little HCA community who spends all their time in the HCA building means that I know my friends are perfectly willing to have me gesticulate wildly at

them about whatever I'm currently reading, and be frustrated alongside me that a text I need isn't available in English, and stay late with me in the common room for moral support while I struggle through my dissertation. Having access to the HCA building has made my degree feel much smaller, despite being a huge programme, and it has made me feel much more at home in the space I spend so much of my time in.

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## **So, you've decided to study a joint honours degree ...**

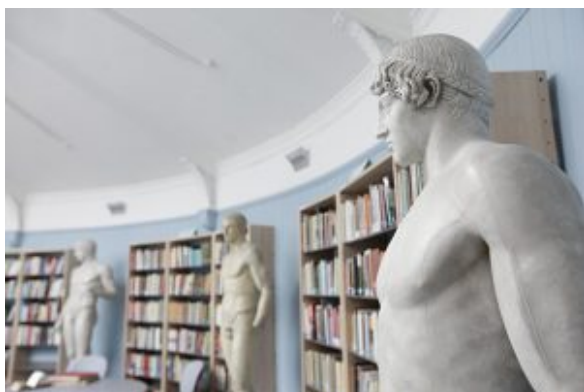
**Twice the fun or double the trouble? Student Ambassador Aalish is studying a joint honours degree.**

I made the choice to study Chinese and History simply because I love learning a language and history has always had a soft spot in my heart. Studying a language alongside history presents its own unique challenges, not only from each subject itself, but also when they are combined together. But what is it actually like to study a joint honour degree at the University of Edinburgh? I'm going to talk you through what a general day in my life looks like as well as talking about the how your degree could be structured and what your classes could be like!

### **The practical stuff**

Most days my classes start at 10am. It is very rare that I start much later (apart from a Tuesday where for some reason I have one class at 4pm!). Usually, I have around three or four classes a day, which I like to point out is a lot, but this is

because I am studying a non-European language. Generally, at the University of Edinburgh, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic have a lot more contact hours than European languages because they are just so different to English. If you choose to study a European language you will likely have more classes than your peers who study a straight history degree, but not to the extent where you have 15 hours of class a week like me!



The student research rooms.

Starting at 10am I don't usually leave the university campus until 5pm most days. I like to do the majority of my work at University so I can relax at home with my flatmates. My day mainly consists of language classes with the odd history class thrown in. I spend three hours at classes across the campus and for the rest of the time I prefer to study in either the School of Literatures, Languages & Cultures or in the Student Research Rooms in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology. This is a small library that only those who study history, classics or archaeology courses can access and it has little marble Greek statues around it!

Studying history mainly involves a lot of reading. For each history course you generally get two hours of lecture and a one-hour tutorial. The lectures will have a lot of people in them and you will all be listening to a lecturer talk about the topic you are studying. It goes without saying that you should be taking notes as the lecturers can say a lot about each of the topics as this is often their area of special

interest and study, and so you have to develop the skill of notetaking. This involves actively listening and deciding what is important or relevant information, and generally does not involve copying from the presentation as you will be able to access this information throughout the duration of your course.

Tutorials are smaller groups of about twelve students where you discuss the topics you have been learning about in your lectures. Most tutorials require you to do pre-reading and so you discuss these readings in the tutorials with your peers and instructor (who is usually either a PhD student or a lecturer) alongside discussing any proposed questions that were suggested on the tutorial worksheet. Doing these readings is really important as it is good practice for writing your essays. When it comes to writing an essay, you need to have done a lot of academic reading in order to back up your claims and argument – this means you need to know what is useful and what is not, which you can practice in doing the readings for your tutorials. The most important thing I would like to tell you is to learn to read well – it will really help you in your studies of history!

## **The good bit**

Studying a language is quite different to studying history. First off there is much less reading which can prove to be a nice break from all the reading surrounding history. In Chinese, Russian, Japanese and Arabic you tend to get more classes than the European languages but you will definitely have quite a few classes ranging from grammar, reading and writing to listening to lectures and, of course, oral classes. Oral classes are usually around six people, with a tutor who is a native to the language. These are my personal favourite classes because you get to apply what you know into practicing speaking with your peers, which I always find fun, plus, often you get to make up fun stories with your classmates!

Generally, I prefer tutorials in either History or in Chinese because I like to have a more of a classroom type setting like you have during high school. Saying this, I have had some really interesting lectures that I wished went on for much longer than their allotted time because it was just so interesting. The most recent one being a lecture on photography and its global influence. It really challenged a lot of my perceptions about the use of photography in history and I thoroughly enjoyed it! At university you get a wide choice in the courses you do so if there is something that interests you, I recommend choosing a course that covers this. But if you think this would be the most boring lecture to ever exist, make sure not to choose a course that covers this! Choose anything you think will really interest you and I am sure you will enjoy most, if not all, of the course.

Perhaps the best part of doing a history degree with a language, though, is the guaranteed year abroad in the country of the language you are studying. This is something I am really looking forward to as a day in my life next year will look a little different when I am studying Chinese and History in China.

## **All work and no play?**



A view of Edinburgh from Calton Hill at sunset

Now you've probably gathered that I really like my degree and

I probably sound like a little bit of a nerd, but I promise I do other things outside of studying! Most evenings, I spend time with my flatmates and friends across the city, sometimes going out into the pubs and clubs of the city, sometimes out to the cinema, or even sometimes on a walk around the city. Don't knock it! Edinburgh is a beautiful city both during the day and the night and one evening I happened to see the northern lights from Calton Hill!

On top of this I am involved in a few societies. The History society is a big society for everyone who studies history or has an interest in history, and through this I play football at the weekend with the Edinburgh Woman's History Football Club. I really love this and it is such a fun way to get to know others who like to play this sport but also study history and also one of the cheapest ways to play football! I am also a committee member on another society and frequently attend other societies such as the salsa society.

If you are thinking about doing joint honours History with a language, I would highly recommend it! Overall, I would say a day in my life can be very busy, but dividing my time between history and Chinese helps to keep me interested and motivated.