

# 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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## **Give a little, get a lot**

Fitting in, finding friends, 'the student experience'. There is no one way to be a student, but 4<sup>th</sup> year History (MA Hons) student Georgia-Taygeti shares her experience and how volunteering made the difference for her.

In my first year I didn't really feel like I was doing the student thing right. I made my closest friends during a Film Soc screening but they were not studying History and so when I would attend lectures and tutorials, I felt pretty lonely. Every afternoon, I would head off to my part-time job so couldn't attend most Society events. And while it was a great first year, I



wanted to make an effort to feel more at home within the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA).

When I came back for my 2nd year I joined the Peer Support Group for History and Classics as a volunteer. I hoped that by supporting 1st year students with their own transition into university life, I would find ways to also feel more integrated into the HCA community. And it worked! I still had a part-time job but most of our meetings were during lunch at the Rosalind Mitchison Room, the undergraduate 'common room', so this was finally something I could attend! I got to know the other volunteers – mostly 3rd and 4th years – most of whom I wouldn't have had the chance to meet if I hadn't joined the group and I was able to learn from their own experiences within HCA. So, in a way, I was the one being peer-supported without realising it but I also made close friends who then made me feel more at home within HCA.

I continued volunteering with Peer Support in my 3rd and 4th year. Now, I get to work with mentees from the years below me, but also spend time with other 4th years that I don't necessarily share seminars with. When I look back on my 1st year, I remember how uncertain I was about the choices I was making, how overwhelming it felt at times to have to balance work, study, adjusting to a new city, making new friends, cooking for myself. When I decided to join Peer Support in my second year I felt that maybe it was 'too late'. It was definitely not. We all come here with different expectations and different responsibilities. I was only able to join Peer Support because it is so flexible in the times we met and I was only able to stay because I was surrounded by people who understood that sometimes I couldn't be there for our events or meetings because I had to be at work.

I'm not at the end of my student experience in Edinburgh and it did not look like what I thought it would when I was a teenager applying to University! I have loved my time here, though, but did it look like a coming-of-age film filled with

wild nights out, heartbreak, and fancy balls? Not as much as I expected it to. My university experience has been more about potlucks, Sunday visits to the Stockbridge market, trying to figure out how to budget and pay for gas and electricity, and always missing the family Skype calls (and then getting yelled at by my mum for missing the family skype calls!), but because I volunteer for Peer Support, I feel like I belong to HCA. I recognize faces when I walk to class, I have people to chat to before the seminar starts. I didn't expect this to be such a big part of my student experience in Edinburgh, but it has! And I am really, really glad I joined up.

Find out more about peer support within the School of History, Classics and Archaeology