Welcome to Balliol!

Choosing an Oxford College can often be a difficult task, and this guide is here to show you what life at Balliol is like from a student perspective. Balliol students have always been proud of the welcoming and friendly environment which exists here. It is our community which makes Balliol such a great place to live and study. Our vibrant student body is open and inclusive and does everything from raising money for charity to running our own café and bar, with a whole host of other things in between!

Balliol prides itself at being at the heart of both the city and the university. Our students have traditionally been among the most active and engaged within the university, whether that is through music, politics, sport, drama or journalism! The College is an incredibly welcoming environment, and studying at Balliol allows you to be part of both a rich academic tradition and a lively community of students which will allow you to get what you want out of your time at university. Academic work is a big part of life here but this guide aims to show you a selection of what students get up to in their spare time and display the wealth of opportunities that studying at Balliol provides.

If you have questions after reading this prospectus then we encourage you to come and look around! The University runs several open days throughout the year and there will always be students who will be willing to answer your questions. Feel free to get in contact with the student Access and Admissions Officers at jcr.admissions@balliol.ox.ac.uk or the College's Outreach and Student Support Officer at outreach@balliol.ox.ac.uk with any questions or to arrange tours of the College.

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Every Oxford college has a Junior Common Room (JCR). This means two things. Firstly it refers to a physical space in the college buildings that is available for everyone to use. It’s like a living room that everyone shares with comfy sofas, tables, computers and Pantry (you’ll read more about that later!). There is always something going on in the JCR- whether that’s people sat around eating their lunch, reading the newspapers and chatting to one another, or an event such as a bop (see page 4), a film night or a live stream of a big sports match.

But the JCR is more than a room- it’s also the word we use to describe the body of undergraduates at the college. By studying at Balliol you’ll automatically be a member of the JCR. We have fortnightly General Meetings (GMs) where we decide lots of things as a whole community such as which charities to donate to that term, or whether to support striking university workers, or whether we should get Sky for the TV room. These meetings aren’t compulsory but are well attended and Balliol is famous among the colleges for having a really active JCR community.

The JCR Committee

As well as GMs, once a year we elect a committee from the JCR members. People run for office, alone or for some roles in pairs, and after an evening of hustings everyone can cast a vote. These committee positions vary enormously but are all about improving the day to day lives of the students in the college. You’ll read about some of them further on in the prospectus. Being on JCR committee is a lot of fun and is a great way to get involved in student representation and politics. Even if you aren’t interested in being on committee, it’s really useful to know that there are certain people you can speak to about Charities, Careers or Access schemes.
Pantry

Balliol’s greasy heart is its student run café, called ‘Pantry’. Serving food all day, it’s a great place to grab a cheap, tasty snack, meet with friends, and relax. Moreover, it’s the only student run café in Oxford, making it extremely welcoming and friendly. Pantry opens at half eight to serve breakfast. Its speciality is a full fried breakfast (highlight: legendary hash browns) with tea and coffee, but you can also get toast or cereal. Often people read the free newspapers provided by the JCR, or chat about the revelries of the previous night. At lunchtime pantry sells sandwiches and toasties, snacks and drinks, all much cheaper than anywhere else in Oxford. Most people eat in Pantry for lunch, meaning that you can always find someone you know to catch up, or meet someone new. Each evening, Pantry sells a home-cooked meal, often chilli, curry or burgers, with a vegetarian option. This is a great, and cheaper, alternative to the also-popular hall. Because the prices are low, and it’s in the JCR, lots of students eat in pantry. This means that there are always people in the JCR, and you quickly get to know pretty much everyone in the college.

But as well as providing good quality, cheap food, and acting as the social centre of the JCR, Pantry provides jobs for students. One of the reasons that it is so cheap is that it is run and owned by JCR members, and therefore it doesn’t make a profit, and all food is subsidised. Any JCR member can choose to work one or two shifts each week, providing some valuable extra income, and an enjoyable job. And Pantry is managed by two ‘Foodies’ who are elected from the JCR. This means that you’ll generally see a friendly, familiar face of a student behind the counter over dinner.

The Lindsay Bar

As one of the last student run bars in the whole of Oxford, Balliol’s bar is always a lively hub of activity. With cheap prices and a friendly atmosphere, the Lindsay bar provides a place for the whole student community to come together and socialise. Alongside the wide range of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks the bar has its own dukebox, giving you the chance to dance to your heart’s content! There are also a wide range of games and bar sports available- have your general knowledge tested by the quiz machine or compete with other students at pool, table football or darts.

Perhaps the best thing about the bar is that it’s owned and run by students. Each year we elect a team of students to manage the bar, and during term time it provides part time work for students so you can earn money whilst you study. This means that there’s always a friendly face behind the bar, and that all the money made goes back to the student body. The Lindsay bar is a welcoming space for everybody and an enjoyable evening break from your studies.
‘Entz’ (Entertainment)

Entertainment at Balliol is aimed to include everyone, to ensure there is something on that appeals to people across the large range of students here. The Entz Officers are in charge of the copious amount of fun had at Balliol and they try hard to make sure that no-one feels left out or excluded from anything they do. Arguably their most important responsibility is the organisation of bops. Bops are effectively big, themed, fancy dress parties held at all colleges to which all members of the JCR are invited. Students do questionable ‘bop sets’ (DJ sets), Entz sells questionable ‘boptails’ (cheap cocktails) and everyone wears ridiculous costumes made predominantly from cardboard. Bops are really quite relaxed and a great opportunity for all the different year groups in college to come together. You can have a chat and a pint in the bar or dance to your hearts content in the JCR and for those who make it, we all head to some sort of cheap club night at midnight.

There are also loads of other events organised by Entz, ranging from relaxed nights in the JCR to big nights out. Film nights happen roughly once a fortnight, sometimes with the added temptation of takeaway pizza. We play a range of films like cartoons, comedies, action films, etc. and people are free to wander in and out as they please. Random events are also screened in the JCR such as the Super Bowl final or election night and Pantry often sells delicious, greasy food. Quiz nights are organised by the bar social secretaries once a week or once a fortnight and people take part in groups of varying sizes and abilities. Entz also sells club tickets or wristbands in the bar for certain events which means we often have a great college night out. At Balliol, we try hard to make sure there are plenty of events that bring together a range of different friendship groups and year groups. There’s something going on every week which helps to create a close college atmosphere. And fun. Lots of fun.
Sport

Balliol has a wide-ranging sporting pedigree, and prides itself on its sporting excellence. In recent years there has been notable success in men’s football, as well as strong cup performances from the men’s cricket and mixed athletics teams. Balliol also has a long history of rowing triumph, with both the men’s and women’s 1st VIII regularly finishing in the top 10 at the summer regatta. There are also strong teams for both men and women in a range of other sports including hockey, rugby, squash, netball and cricket. Most of the teams compete in inter-college leagues weekly throughout the first two terms of the year, and there is also a knockout cup (‘cupper’s’) in each sport.

Balliol also greatly encourages inclusivity in sport at any level. The college second teams operate on a casual basis where everyone gets a game, as well as allowing people to get noticed for the first team if they wish. The last few years have also seen the foundation of new teams in mixed lacrosse and Ultimate Frisbee by students, supported financially by the college with the intention of getting as many people playing as many sports as possible. The college also financially assists any sportsperson who competes at a Blues level for the university, and Balliol boasts a strong history of university-level sporting alumni.

The home of sport in Balliol is the Jowett Walk annexe, which is one of the closest sports grounds to the centre of the city of any college in Oxford. This is where the football pitch is located, along with two squash courts, a basketball/netball court and both an artificial and a grass tennis court. In the summer term this is also where the college’s cricket matches are played, complimented by a recently refurbished pavilion. College rugby matches are played in the University Parks, while hockey takes place on the astro turf pitch at the Iffley Road sports complex. Other college sports facilities include two gyms, one on the college main site and one at the Holywell Manor postgraduate site, both of which are open to all college members.
Drama

Balliol students are often involved in dramatic productions all over Oxford, and one of the Drama Society's main aims is to fund and support any theatrical ventures that include Balliol students in any fashion. There are opportunities to get involved in many different areas: performing on stage, lighting and technical work, costume design, producing and directing. One of the main events for Freshers is the Drama Cuppers in Michaelmas (first term). This is a large intercollegiate festival where groups of Freshers from different colleges compete against each other by producing, directing and performing short plays. It's a wonderful opportunity to experience Oxford's dramatic side and have a lot of fun!

Balliol also has its own performance space - the Michael Pilch Theatre at Jowett Walk, which is an excellent rehearsal space and performance area. Every year Balliol puts on a Charity Musical in Hilary (second term). This is usually performed in the Pilch Theatre and is a great chance to be involved in a relaxed and very enjoyable production which supports charitable causes.

Music

The Balliol College Chapel Choir is a relaxed and informal choir that normally sings in chapel once a week. Although, they mainly sing religious music, they occasionally try to branch out and sing other styles. The choir is run by the Senior Organ Scholar, and is accompanied by the Junior Organ Scholar, who are both students at the college. When the Senior Organ Scholar graduates, the Junior becomes the Senior and takes over the running of the choir.

The choir goes on tour every other year. These tours are heavily subsidised by college and previous tours have been to Venice, Prague and Florence. These events are always really enjoyable and normally involve lots of fun, tourist visits, culture and, tasting the local food as all as singing! The choir is open to anyone that wants to sing and rehearsals on Friday evenings are pretty relaxed and fun. And even though we ding an evensong service on Sundays you don’t have to be religious to join the choir, its all about enjoying singing.

Balliol also has a music society that organise fortnightly concerts in the hall which are well attended by undergraduates and graduate students alike. These feature performances of a variety of instrumental and vocal chamber music and provide a pleasant evening’s entertainment. There is also a music room on the Balliol main site which is free to use for music society members, which contains a piano and ample space for musical and theatrical rehearsals.

Societies

Across the University there are numerous different clubs and societies, but there are a number of societies which are exclusive to Balliol. Every student is automatically a member of their subject society. These societies organise a range of activities such dinners in the hall, socials and speaker events! The Arnold and Brackenbury Society is also worth a mention. It's a comedy debating society, which is is part hilarious parody of all things Oxford; part all-round laughing stock.

Then there is the famous Balliol Left Caucus. The Left Caucus is an informal, comradely gathering of students from both the JCR and the MCR, which gathers to discuss broadly left wing issues and activities. Meeting places include the bar and under the tree in the back quad! The Poetry Society is another interesting group which meets a couple of times a term. Nowhere near as formal as the name would suggest; there’s no fixed membership and anyone is welcome. People are encouraged to bring along poetry to discuss, and ample wine and cheese is provided by the organisers.
Women

Although relatively late arriving, (the college only admitted women from 1979), Balliol can boast female alumni in a huge variety of impressive and exciting jobs, including one in Obama’s government, and another leading an advisory board for the London Olympics. Clearly, female students have benefited from the phenomenal opportunities that Balliol College can offer. Whether taking part in any of the all-female or mixed sports (with the women’s Netball, Cricket and Football teams, as well as the women’s rowing crews, all playing a strong part of sporting life in Balliol) or attending events with inspirational female speakers who lead their academic field, there is plenty to take part in which celebrates the contribution that women make to Balliol life. Part of the role of the Women’s Officers at Balliol is organising some fantastic events for the JCR highlighting this proud history of Women at Balliol.

Beyond the college setting, female students can join countless a cappella groups, more obscure team sports (Quidditch, anyone?!) and write for a number of student newspapers, along with their male counterparts, allowing female students to explore any hobbies and interests they have- and maybe take up new ones! The role of Women’s Officers also includes a Welfare aspect- this means providing care and help for any women that need it. They are able to provide anonymous, free contraception and sanitary products. They are also available at all times to talk through any gender related worries or queries, as well as running ‘Welfare Teas’ (which involve plenty of free hot drinks and biscuits!). They are generally always on the lookout for new ways to look after women in Balliol. Balliol is an exciting, vibrant and caring place to be a student, and being a woman here is no exception!

LGBTQ

Balliol is one of the friendliest colleges in Oxford, so as you’d expect, everyone here is really accepting of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning. In college, we have two elected LGBTQ officers, who represent the views of LGBTQ people in college. It’s always possible to talk to them if you need any advice, support or encouragement, whether you are LGBTQ or not. They also put on social events such as drinks events, bops and crew dates, where you can get together with LGBTQ people from other colleges. We’re constantly looking to improve the range of events we have on offer, and your ideas will always be welcome.

If you’re interested on LGBTQ events on a wider scale, the university LGBTQ society runs lots of great things to do, such as weekly drinks socials, film screenings, tea evenings, and meals, with particular highlights including the termly society dinner and out-of-town trips to LGBTQ hotspots such as London and Manchester. The university’s student union, OUSU, organises many political events such as marches, rallies and talks on important issues like homophobia, gay parenting and social equality. Balliol is a college where you can feel safe and free from prejudice, whatever your gender or sexuality which means that all students have the opportunity to flourish here.
Ethnic Minorities

Balliol is one of the most diverse Oxford colleges and prides itself on being incredibly open and progressive. We are, historically, one of the first colleges to have admitted black and Asian students and of course continue to welcome applicants from these backgrounds. The JCR elects two students each year to serve as Ethnic Minorities and International Students (EMIS) Officers, who ensure that students from all backgrounds are represented and they are there to respond to any complaints of harassment or discrimination experienced by students, which thankfully rarely occur within Balliol.

Within the university as a whole there are also a wide range of societies set up specifically for ethnic minority students such as The African and Caribbean Society (ACS); The Oxford Majlis Asian Society and The Oxford University Chinese Society to name but a few. Even though most of these societies don’t exist within Balliol itself, you are bound to find someone else from college wanting to attend them with you. Despite the under-representation of ethnic minority students in the University as a whole, Balliol is a relaxed and friendly college with plenty of support to ensure that everyone is happy and feels part of the college whatever their background.

International Students

It can be very daunting coming to another country as an international student. At Balliol and Oxford, we are fortunate to have amazing support facilities for international students. As well as the two dedicated EMIS Officers, there is a large number of international students from all around the world. Balliol’s reputation as a close-knit, friendly college helps too, it means that it is easy to fit into college life and make new friends.

The University also provides a range of services to international students, such as the International Students representative in OUSU (Oxford University Student Union), a dedicated international support office, and dozens of societies for students from every corner of the globe, ranging from the Australia and New Zealand Club to the Ukrainian Society. There are also extra English-language classes provided by the University Language Centre for those who need assistance with written or spoken English. Wherever you come from, Oxford is a diverse, welcoming, and multicultural place with a huge range of systems in place to help international students acclimatise to living and studying in the UK.

Students with Disabilities

Balliol is definitely one of the most friendly and tolerant colleges within the university and is constantly striving to cater for all members of the college. An important part of Balliol’s welfare provisions is the support for disabled students. Along with the practicalities of providing individual support, Balliol is also involved in raising awareness of learning, physical and mental disabilities, both within the college and across the university as a whole. Mental health discussion groups are just one of the ways that Balliol is attempting to combat societal stereotypes and stigmas. Equally important is the college’s focus on individual well being with a port of call for every need, either within the JCR committee itself or the wider collegiate facilities.

There are lots of different ways the college can provide help, from financial aid to counselling. If you are disabled or have any concerns regarding disability Balliol has the facilities to provide you with all the help and support you might need. Feel free to ask any questions either via email, at jcr.disabilities@balliol.ox.ac.uk, or at the open day - we’re ready to answer them.
“Tutorials, especially in Humanities subjects, are not what they are often made out to be. They are not some weekly exercise in gladiatorial combat, where prizes are given for the highest number of references to Nietzsche; but nor are they an un-challenging conversation between a tutor and docile students. They are structured discussions of an intellectual problem, in which students get the chance to try out their ideas, where tutors challenge students to think beyond the reading they have done, and where concepts, ideas and arguments can be tested. They are also above all events out of which everybody learns.

There is of course no strict format, but at the heart of tutorials is the model that students read, write and reflect, and then come to the tutorial ready and equipped to discuss what they think about a subject. This means that students spend a week reading from a reading list before writing an essay on a subject. That essay will be read by the tutor before the tutorial and this is where the discussion starts from. But it certainly isn’t where it ends, tutorial discussions can take surprising directions but always feel like a fantastic learning experience and a brilliant culmination to a week’s hard work in the library.”

“As a tutor, there is nothing more rewarding than finding someone addicted to their subject, keen to study it in depth, and willing to put in the hours to improve their understanding of even the most difficult concepts. There are moments in tutorials when you can visibly see the potential being fulfilled, as students learn to think with increasing clarity and precision. There's plenty to do, though that doesn't seem to stop our science students from taking part in virtually all college activities and many university clubs, while having thriving social lives.

Alongside lectures and labs, Every week you will have a tutorial with one of the Balliol tutors and one or more fellow students. It's a 1-2 hour period discussing work you have prepared through 20-25 hours of independent study on a topic set by us. We'll challenge your assumptions, making you explain theories and phenomena in your own words, encouraging you to test your newly acquired comprehension and knowledge by applying it to fresh problems. Discussing ideas with classmates and tutors can bring the science alive, and give the satisfaction of stretching your brain.”
College Officers and Staff

Here at Balliol we have a dedicated team of staff who are always on hand to help students, whether that’s in an academic or a non-academic capacity. They work throughout the year to ensure that students get the most out of their time at Balliol.

The Porters

The Balliol porters are the first port of call for anything you need help with. The lodge, located in the College entrance, is fully staffed 24/7 and the porters are always on hand to assist students. All the porters are first aid trained, and know who to call if there is a problem. They’re also there to deal with day-to-day student needs: if you’ve booked a squash court or want to go to the gym, they are the people with the keys. They also sort the post, and let you know if there is a parcel for you to come and pick up. The porters are a dedicated, friendly team who are always willing and able to support Balliol students, making our lives a lot easier.

The Chaplain

The Chaplain oversees the College Chapel and the Chapel Programme and also oversees the two Organ Scholars and the Chapel Choir. The Chaplain is a Church of England priest but the ethos of the College includes all faiths and none, and the College has always appointed a Chaplain who is enthusiastic to work in this environment and to be there for everyone. The Chaplain is part of a network of welfare support in Balliol and works with the student Peer Supporters, the University Counselling Service and College Doctors, chairing the College Welfare Committee and the Student Finance Committee. They like to see people individually and function as a ‘first port of call’ to refer students to the person or resources that they need.

The Dean

The Dean has a broad pastoral role in the College and works closely with the Chaplain (and occasionally with Counselling Services) on matters of common concern (pastoral care, behavioural difficulties, financial matters). The Dean is also responsible for Discipline and the general health and safety of members of the College. The Dean is responsible for the implementation of University Health policy and also for security. The Dean works with the JCR Officers and other College Officers to help make Balliol function well as a community of support for all its members.

The Junior Deans

The College has two Junior Deans, who are there to assist the Dean and provide assistance to students. They live on the main site, and can be contacted through the porters lodge at any time of the day.

The College Nurse

Balliol has its own nurse, who is here to treat students who are unwell. She provides confidential consultations and runs a number of surgeries throughout the week in the Balliol main site, our graduate centre at Holywell Manor and neighbouring Trinity College. She can also be contacted separately, and if you are too ill to leave your room she will come and treat you there!
Accommodation

Overview

Accommodation at Balliol differs slightly from other universities and Oxford colleges— in a good way! The College provides rooms for its students on the main Balliol site for two years of their degree, typically their first year and then either their third or fourth year (students on four year courses get to choose which year they return to college.) When students are not living in College, there are two options for them to choose, both of which have their own advantages. Students either live in Jowett Walk, the College-owned flats five minutes walk away, or 'live out' in a house with their friends in one of the student areas of the city. There's a wide range of choice to suit all price ranges and if you find yourself struggling with the cost then the College has a generous programme of financial support.

Living in College

In their first year, all students are guaranteed a room on the Balliol main site. This provides a fantastic opportunity to get to know everyone else in your year and helps foster a real sense of community. All of the rooms in College are nice ones, and there are both en-suite rooms and those with shared facilities. Wherever you end up living, you'll have a great time— the question of which staircase is the best has been the subject of many heated discussions!

When students move back into College in their third or fourth year they get to choose their own room, which is different from in the first year where you are assigned a room before coming to Oxford. All of the rooms are lovely, but compared to first year rooms there is quite a large variation in room size. However, the benefit of this is that it is reflected in their prices. This means that you can always get a room to suit your budget and the College has a significant programme of financial support (more on page 15).

There are a range of catering options for students living in College. We have a hall that serves lunch and an evening meal every day (12.30-13.30 and 18.30-19.30 respectively), with a wide range of both meat and vegetarian options. Going to hall provides a great opportunity to meet people when you first arrive, and later to catch up with your friends. Alternatively, pantry is open throughout the day and many students eat there both at lunch and in the evening (see page 3). A number of the staircases also have their own kitchenettes, with a variety of facilities such as fridges, hobs and microwaves for those who want to self-cater. Balliol is located right next to a Tesco and Sainsbury's which makes shopping really convenient, and there are a number of restaurants and takeaways just a few minutes walk away.
Jowett Walk

When not living in College, there are a number of options for students. A popular option is Jowett Walk, which is a complex of flats five minutes walk from Balliol. The flats are either five, six or seven person, and everyone gets their own individual room with en-suite shower and toilet facilities, and there is a shared kitchen in each flat. The main advantage of living in Jowett Walk is convenience- it's located right in the centre of the city, near to Balliol and also closer to many subject libraries than if you were living out. Another benefit is that you can choose the length of your lease- either you can get a 27 week lease (meaning you have to move out over the holidays), or a 36 week lease which is more expensive but means you can use your room throughout the academic year.

‘Living Out’

As an alternative to Jowett Walk, many people choose to live out in a house with their friends in one of the 'student' areas of Oxford. People choose to live out for a number of different reasons. It generally means you have a bit more freedom than living in College-owned accommodation, because the leases tend to be for a whole year meaning that you can come and go as you please throughout the vacations. Another benefit is that most student houses have communal living areas, which means that when you're free it's good fun just to sit around and chat or watch TV. It also gives you an experience of the 'real' world- having to deal with landlords, contracts, broken freezers and the occasional neighbour- which you don't get living in College accommodation. Most of all it's a great opportunity to spend a year living with your friends and having fun! Everyone's experiences of living out are different but it's something which lots of Balliol students do, meaning that there's always a large community of students living out to socialise with!
Financial Support

The most important thing to take away from reading this section is that finances will never be a barrier to someone studying at Oxford. If you get accepted the university is committed to making sure that you get any financial help you need to study and thrive here. Oxford University has the most generous support package of any University in the country for students from the lowest-income backgrounds. This package includes both fee waivers and bursaries, details of which can be found at www.ox.ac.uk/fundingupdate.

In addition to this there are lots of funds available from the college too. The main ones are the Balliol Access Bursary and the Junior Maintenance Grant. You don't have to qualify for government financial aid to receive these, they're designed for anyone with money worries no matter how big or small. Whether that's to generally help with living costs or for extraordinary costs, like travel for research, or new equipment for keen sports people, the college is here to make sure that everyone gets the best out of their university experience.

See www.balliol.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate-admissions/finance-and-support for more information.

Thanks for reading!