

Balliol College: Tutors talk about undergraduate study - video transcript

Each tutor is seated, facing the camera. The two Modern Languages tutors sit together, side by side; all the other tutors are alone. The tutors' names and course subject are shown the first time they appear. The tutors answer questions that are displayed on screen.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What qualities do you look for and seek to develop in students?

>> PROFESSOR JAMES KWAN, ENGINEERING SCIENCE: One of them is the willingness to learn, to really explore new ideas and take guidance when it's given and really listen in and quickly adapt.

>>>DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ, MODERN LANGUAGES: Mainly it's passion for literature, that they engage with text.

>>> DR HELEN GITTOS, HISTORY AND JOINT SCHOOLS: Students who want to work hard, who are genuinely committed and interested in doing history. We're looking for students who are willing to - to take risks, to be adventurous, to not say the obvious, and we're looking for students who are interested in developing their own voice.

>>> DR LISA WALKER, MEDICAL SCIENCES: They need to be able to undertake a sustained amount of academic work. I think you also need to be somebody who you can see the qualities of a doctor in.

>>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI, MODERN LANGUAGES: Curiosity, potential, passion.

>>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH, POLITICS: As wide-ranging an interest as possible in what's happening in the world.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What work do you give to students to prepare for the tutorials?

>>>DR ADRIAN KELLY: The way that I like to do it is to give them a topic sheet with a series of relatively clear questions at the top, and then a list of journal articles and book chapters that they need to read in order to get ready to answer the question.

>>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: Well, typically in Modern Languages we work with one text, one literary text, that's prose or poetry or it could also be a film, and over two weeks. So, over these two weeks either in a seminar or a tutorial setting we will discuss first orally the text and then we will have typically an essay.

>>> DR HELEN GITTOS: The whole week's work is organised around an essay which the student writes, and we would sit down at the beginning of term and talk about the kinds of things they're interested in and design the work of the term around that and I would then give them a reading list for one of those topics each week and that would include things which were introductory ways into a new topic, but also brand-new pieces of evidence that have just been discovered or debates that are exciting and current, and the student would then spend probably about two-thirds of the week reading for that, listening to lectures, going to lectures that are related to that topic, and perhaps a third

of the week writing their essay and they would then hand the essay in maybe the day before.

[Question displayed on screen]

How are the tutorials structured?

>>> PROFESSOR JAMES KWAN: We will go through the problems - maybe not every single one of them, maybe not in any order. For example, what I typically do is I'll ask the students immediately coming in which problems they had the most trouble with. Oftentimes I've actually already had a chance to look at their work beforehand, so I already have a sense of what they are going to be having difficulty in and I kind of prepare a little bit more on those topics.

>>>DR ADRIAN KELLY: In the very best tutorials you get two students talking to one another and you're not saying a word, and that does happen, and when it does happen it's amazing - that's just brilliant!

>>>DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: Along with literature we also teach language and translation, more specifically translation into English and translation into Spanish or French or Italian, and in those particular tutorials what we do is to set a translation. They do it at home and then we comment on the day of the tutorial, while also providing them with a set of tools for them to work on translations.

>>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: The point of the conversation is really to sharpen people's analytical and critical abilities.

>>> DR LISA WALKER: Next week we're doing tutorials with the first-year students on cancer genetics, and what we're going to do in that tutorial is that we have several family trees that are ideal for teaching, and we analyse these family trees within the tutorial in terms of what the molecular mechanisms might be, what the genes might be that are mutated within these families, and then we can kind of discuss what you do for the patients.

>>> DR HELEN GITTO: I usually try and start off with whatever is in the student's mind. Sometimes we'll look at pieces of evidence, so we might look at, you know, images of maps, or archaeological evidence, or some source or something brand new, and think about what does this add to or change whatever the student has been arguing.

[Question displayed on screen:]

How do you explore ideas with students?

>>> PROFESSOR JAMES KWAN: I tend to ask questions, rather open-ended questions rather than specific ones, and so I let them get a chance to think about the problem and really probe the question by asking their own questions. These aren't very set structured quantitative answers. It's really more about how they think a problem might or system might behave.

>>> DR LISA WALKER: We've been doing sex determination as part of genetics and we had a really interesting discussion about sex and gender and about the differences between all of those things.

>>>DR ADRIAN KELLY: Some of the time it's by questioning them and seeing where their arguments have fallen down and then trying to challenge them to make those arguments stronger, but it's always about question and answer.

>>>DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: Starting from the text they zoom out and they bring their own ideas.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What do you enjoy about conversations with students?

>>> DR HELEN GITTOS: You never know what's going to happen. You don't know where it's going to end up.

>>>DR ADRIAN KELLY: What I love is when students go off that script and they just start to make connections that I haven't seen.

>>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: Seeing how students make that material their own.

>>>DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: The way they change my understanding of the text we analyse.

>>> DR LISA WALKER: I love the fact that they ask questions that we don't know the answer to.

>>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: I enjoy the fact that there is no tutorial that is similar to the other.

[Question displayed on screen:]

How do students inform your own understanding of your subject?

>>> DR HELEN GITTOS: It's genuinely a partnership. At the moment I'm supposed to be writing about the 13th century and finishing a book chapter, but because I've been teaching early Anglo-Saxon England I've ended up writing an article about the 6th century, and that's absolutely informed by, related to, coming out of things that I've been talking with students, both undergraduates and graduate students - really doing history, not just pretending to be historians.

>>> PROFESSOR JAMES KWAN: It's odd because sometimes their most basic questions are the ones that push me the hardest, to actually have a deep understanding.

>>> DR SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH: It's interesting to me as an observer of politics to find out from them how they think about the political world and how their views about politics shape their own decisions.

>>>DR ADRIAN KELLY: When I'm coming up with something which I feel is an answer to a problem in the scholarship I can try it out on my students. Every single thing that I've published I had first tried on students in Balliol.

[Question displayed on screen:]

What is the best thing about teaching at Balliol?

>>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: A happy inclusive community, because Balliol is a happy and inclusive community, international, very open to dialogue and to exchange, so our students and our staff together make a group of very unconventional, very diverse and very inclusive people.

>>>DR ADRIAN KELLY: The very best sort of teaching environment, because the teacher gets out of it as much as the students do. It's the diversity and the quality of the people here that I really like.

>>> DR HELEN GITTO: The students are extraordinary. They are such interesting, diverse, surprising, splendid people, and being able to share some of that time with them is very special.

>>> DR LISA WALKER: Seeing those students grow and develop over the course of six years, as it is in the medical course, and pop out the other end as doctors is totally brilliant.

[Final page:]

You can see longer videos with each tutor on the relevant subject page at www.balliol.ox.ac.uk/courses

With thanks to:

Dr Diana Berruezo-Sánchez - Career Development Fellow in Modern Languages

Dr Helen Gittos - Associate Professor, Colyer-Fergusson Fellow and Tutor in Early Medieval History

Dr Sudhir Hazareesingh - CUF Lecturer in Politics and Tutorial Fellow in Politics

Dr Adrian Kelly - Associate Professor, Clarendon University Lecturer, Fellow and Tutor in Ancient Greek Language and Literature

Professor James Kwan - Tutorial Fellow in Engineering Science

Professor Elena Lombardi - Professor of Italian Literature, Paget Toynbee Lecturer in Italian Medieval Studies, Fellow and Tutor in Italian

Dr Lisa Walker - Fellow in Medical Sciences