Experience the unique and integrative undergraduate geography course at a university leading the way in geographical teaching and research

BA in Geography

www.geog.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate
Geography has never been more relevant, as the world faces increasing challenges, and solutions to human and environmental problems are urgently being sought. Our course here at Oxford provides undergraduate students with a wide range of experience and skills across the breadth of geography, taught through tutorials and lectures by academic staff who are at the forefront of the discipline.

Why study Geography at Oxford?

"Oxford provides a holistic approach to geography, instead of focusing on purely human or physical geography. Each week you have a tutorial with a leading academic – it is a challenging and rewarding experience that can’t be found in many universities."

As the oldest Geography department in the UK, Oxford has an outstanding tradition in geographical teaching and research and is currently ranked top (with Bristol, Cambridge and Durham) for research. Students studying for the undergraduate course will become part of a dynamic department, which includes up to 100 postgraduate students studying for the department’s four MSc courses, and a large postgraduate research community.

At the heart of the Oxford Geography course is an integrated view of the discipline, and in the first year you will study both human and physical geography. You will be taught to think independently and critically about the geographical literature and each week you will have a chance to explore theories and concepts in a tutorial with a tutor and one or two other students. The tutors are experts in their field and will be using their own research to illustrate both lectures and tutorial discussions.

The department offers excellent facilities for undergraduates including the Geography Research and Teaching Laboratories, the Oxford Luminescence Dating Laboratory and the Oxford Rock Breakdown Laboratory. Students are welcome to use the labs for their own research during the course, and also have access to the Radcliffe Science Library (RSL) and the Bodleian Library, which house over 11 million volumes. In the RSL there is a specialist librarian for Geography, who is available to help and train undergraduates in their search for, and use of, bibliographical and data sources.
How is the course structured?

The broad first year will provide you with a strong grounding in the key principles underpinning human and physical geography, alongside training in relevant study skills and practical techniques. There are four papers in the first year, each of which is compulsory to ensure that all students have the same foundation on which to build in the second year. The course is delivered through lectures, a weekly practical class on Geographical Techniques and tutorials for which you write essays which you will discuss with a tutor. Practical techniques in social and physical sciences will also be taught through field days in the local area, and a residential fieldtrip to Dorset.

After the Preliminary Examination at the end of the first year you will start work on what is known as the ‘Final Honour School’. The work for the Honour School is spread over the second and third years and, since there are no examinations at the end of the second year, you will be able to develop your knowledge and skills over two years.

In the second year you will begin to specialise by choosing two of the three Foundational Courses to build your knowledge of key concepts in physical, human and environmental geography. You will then choose three specialist options to study in detail. During the second year you will also start planning for your dissertation, a 12,000 word independent research project which you will undertake in the vacation at the end of your second year. Underpinning the Honour School course is the compulsory course in Geographical Research which explores the relationship between conceptual and methodological issues in the practice of research.

### YEAR 1 (Prelims)

**Courses**

- **Four papers** (all compulsory):
  - Earth System Processes
    - Climatology
    - Geomorphology
    - Ecology of the Biosphere
  - Human Geography
    - Space and Place
    - Networks and Mobilities
    - Power, Identity and Inequality
  - Geographical Controversies
  - Geographical Techniques
    - Statistics for Geographers
    - Methods in Physical Geography
    - Methods in Human Geography
    - Fieldwork

**Assessment**

- Written exams: 4
- Submitted work:
  - Geographical Controversies essay (1,500 words)
  - Fieldwork report (4,000 words)

### YEARS 2 & 3 (Final Honour School)

**Courses**

- **Geographical Research** (core course)
- **Foundational Courses** (choose two)
  - Earth System Dynamics
  - Environmental Geography
  - Space, Place and Society
- **Optional Subjects** (choose three)
  - African Societies
  - Biogeography, Biodiversity and Conservation
  - Climate Change and Variability
  - Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation
  - Complexity
  - Cultural Spaces: Geographies of affective experience
  - Desert Landscapes and Dynamics
  - European Integration
  - Forensic Geography
  - Geographies of Finance
  - Geographies of Nature
  - Geopolitics in the Margins
  - Heritage Science and Conservation
  - Island Life
  - New Approaches in Urban Geography
  - The Quaternary Period: Natural and human systems
  - Transport and Mobilities

**Fieldwork (Spring, Year 2)**

- Current destinations: Copenhagen or Tenerife
  - Note: Destinations may be subject to change

**Dissertation**

**Assessment**

- Written exams: 6
- Submitted work:
  - 3 extended essays (each 4,500 words)
  - Fieldwork report (4,500 words)
  - Dissertation (12,000 words)

Please note: All information in the prospectus is correct at the time of printing.
Training in research skills

Training in a broad range of research skills is an important part of a geography degree course and these transferable skills make geographers particularly employable. In the first year you will attend lectures and practical classes on qualitative and quantitative techniques. These skills are then further developed through day and half-day field exercises in Oxford and the surrounding area. A residential fieldtrip to Dorset introduces you to geographical techniques. In the second year you will have lectures on research design and generating data, and may attend some advanced skills workshops on topics including climate modelling and laboratory methods. In the spring of the second year you will participate in a week-long fieldtrip (currently to Copenhagen or Tenerife) during which you will put these skills into practice.

The dissertation involves independent research using primary data sources. You will have a free choice about the kind of project you choose. Some students travel overseas and collect data in the field, other students choose projects based in archives or undertake laboratory based modelling. Most students say that completing this independent research is the most rewarding part of their whole degree course.

What do the colleges do?

College life is one of the University of Oxford’s greatest assets, since a close college community provides a friendly and welcoming home for students. Tutors get to know students individually, enabling them to respond to their particular academic needs. You therefore receive all the benefits of being educated at a large university while living and studying in a small, friendly community. The geography course is organised and co-ordinated centrally by the department and is the same for all students, so in terms of the quality of teaching you will receive, all colleges are identical.

The Oxford system combines the best of one-to-one teaching in college with the wealth and resources in the University and its departments. The tutorial system means that you are likely to receive much more personal tuition and greater pastoral support than other universities can offer.

Tutorials are weekly meetings with a tutor and typically two or three students, to discuss an essay or other written work. These complement lectures and practical classes delivered in the department which all students attend, irrespective of their college.

You can choose a college at the application stage, or alternatively submit an Open Application and a college will be selected for you. There are 14 colleges at Oxford which admit Geography students and you must apply to one of these, as follows:

- Brasenose, Christ Church, Hertford, Jesus, Keble, Mansfield, St. Anne’s, St. Catherine’s, St. Edmund Hall, St. Hilda’s, St. John’s, St. Peter’s, Regent’s Park, Worcester.

For further information on these colleges please visit their individual websites.

“For my dissertation I investigated the impacts of a motorway on the surrounding vegetation. My fieldwork consisted of taking cores and samples, and measuring nitrogen levels. I learned to use the specialised instruments in the department’s Rock Breakdown Lab and as a result have developed new transferable skills.”
What are the tutors looking for?

We are looking for able and well-motivated students. In our selection criteria we are looking for your potential for independent thinking, ability to follow an argument, comprehension, problem-solving and a spirit of enquiry.

Competition for a place for Geography at Oxford is expected to be very strong. You should have achieved, or be predicted to achieve, A*AA at A-level or 39 points with 7,6,6 at higher level in the IB. There are no required subjects you must have studied, although nearly all applicants have studied Geography.

Applicants will need to display evidence of a strong academic record and an ability to deploy their knowledge in ways that show initiative and enthusiasm. Interviews are not a test of knowledge but give candidates the opportunity to respond in a thoughtful way to unpredictable questions and ideas.

In addition to the interview, all candidates applying for geography must take the Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) in November. Details of this can be found at www.geog.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate/tsa/

What can I do after a Geography degree?

Geography students are highly employable, whether in careers directly related to their geographical knowledge (such as planning, development work and environmental management), or those which use the range of transferable skills, including IT, data interpretation and communications skills, which a geography course provides. Many geography students go on to postgraduate study, for example, in development studies, environmental management or politics.

Rachel Hughes
While studying geography at Oxford I particularly enjoyed the climatology option and became interested in climate change mitigation and how it applies to business. I then studied for an MSc in Carbon Management at Edinburgh University which provided me with high-level interdisciplinary skills and training in the business, economics and science of carbon management. After graduating from Edinburgh I joined a specialist company in ecological foot printing and carbon accounting and am now a sustainability consultant working for ADAS, who provide environmental consultancy, rural development services and policy advice.

Chris Kyriacou
After finishing my degree in Geography I decided I wanted to pursue a career in international affairs and went to the London School of Economics to study for the MSc in International Relations. I now work for AMAR International Charitable Foundation which is a not-for-profit organisation that helps people in areas of conflict, civil disorder and disruption, rebuilding lives within communities under stress by creating services in medicine, public health, education and basic need provision. I started as a Projects Officer in London and am now CEO in Washington.

Tom Cebula
After completing the BA in Geography and an MSc in the School of Geography and Environment, I became a freelance researcher, working mostly at the BBC, but also for American channels and Channel 4, on ‘specialist factual’ documentaries – essentially history and science. I have learnt a huge amount about a lot of different things, from astrophysics to anthropology, I have spoken to world experts in disciplines from cancer treatment to forensic investigation and I have even managed to revisit my Geography lectures with a series on the history of maps. It’s a great job for the curious.

Please visit our webpage for more alumni profiles: www.geog.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate/course/careers.html
Find out more

If you are interested in finding out more, we recommend that you visit the department’s website which provides more details about the course, as well as podcasts of taster lectures and some suggested reading linked to the course. The website also provides details about the current research being undertaken by members of the department.

For more information on applying to Oxford, please visit www.admissions.ox.ac.uk.

Open Days

The best way to find out what Oxford is really like is to visit the School and the University on one of our Open Days. We have a Departmental Open Day in May or early June each year (booking required) and there are three University Open Days in June/July and September. At these events you will get a chance to talk directly to tutors and students and also sit in on taster lectures to give you an idea what studying Geography at Oxford would be like.

Get in touch

If you have any further questions regarding studying Geography at Oxford, please contact us at:

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