

## **CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PROGRAM PARTICIPANT COMMENTS LENT 2019**

### **Nikhil Gupta '19, Computer Science/Computer Science Part IB & II, Cambridge Lent Term/St. Catharine's College**

When I first attended Study Abroad informational meetings, I was amazed at the opportunity to spend 2-3 months in another country. Thinking that this would be one of my only chances to spend such a long period of time in another country, I jumped at the opportunity to study abroad. As I looked more into it, I asked my friends who had previously studied abroad and all of them said it was one of their best experiences in college. I also realized I would get the opportunity to study at the birthplace of many of the things that I was studying at Caltech. As such, I could not pass up the opportunity.

After spending some time looking at the courses offered at Cambridge, I decided that Lent term would be a better fit for me than Michaelmas term. It meant that I could finish my last season on the soccer team. Additionally, I found that the courses offered were a better fit with my interests. In particular, I was able to take courses that Caltech does not offer in order to round out my CS education. Another fun part of Lent term was that all Cambridge CS students are working on a group project which is basically a 1 month research project in partnership with a corporate sponsor. Since this ended during Lent term, I was able to watch all of the presentations on their work and learn about many cool and interesting projects.

Academically, I found that lectures were very similar to Caltech lectures, both in style and quality. This meant that I was able to jump right in, despite joining Cambridge in the middle of the year. While there were moments lectures did reference courses that all the other students had taken but I had not, I did not feel like I was lacking any background for the courses I was taking. Students are (mostly) evaluated on exams that are given during Easter term. However, there is still work for them to do during other terms in the form of supervisions. I quite enjoyed supervisions and found that they really helped me to learn the material. The personal interaction during supervisions meant that I could quickly resolve any questions I had as well as find out if I misunderstood anything.

There was definitely some adjustment socially given that I joined in the middle of the academic year. This meant that there were no events where I could meet other new students. However, after joining a few clubs (societies) and attending events, I quickly found a few people that I got along with and continued to meet throughout the term. Additionally, I met with Cambridge students from St. Catharine's who were in exchange programs to Caltech and they were very helpful in getting me oriented throughout the college.

One of my favorite parts about this whole experience was getting to attend a school that is so diverse. With students coming from so many different backgrounds because of the EU and students majoring in so many different subjects, it was enlightening to get to talk to students majoring in subjects that you cannot find at Caltech. I also found that there was a society for

everything. I attended talks put on by many different societies, including in subjects I knew nothing about before attending. I also got to attend formal dinners at a few different colleges so got to explore around Cambridge quite a bit. Each college has a different feeling to it so getting to visit a few of them was very fun.

### **Dana He '20, Bioengineering/Engineering Part IIA, Corpus Christi College**

As cliché as it sounds, studying abroad at Cambridge University is one of the best decisions I could have made. Every morning, I wake up to the distant sound of street musicians singing, the town always buzzing with energy. Walking along the cobblestone streets to get to class is always a combination of admiring the gorgeous architecture, peering through the windows of charming shops, and trying not to get run over by students on bikes. The city of Cambridge somehow manages to feel both quaint and picturesque, but also vibrant and alive.

As beautiful as the surroundings are, the best part about coming to Cambridge is being able to experience a completely different lifestyle. The social scene here is a lot busier and more active than at Caltech—On a typical day, I'll have dinner with friends in the dining hall, head to the Corpus bar to hang out and play pool, and then often go out to enjoy the nightlife. The Eagle Pub and Wednesday Cindies are two Corpus favorites. There are also formal dinners in which everyone gets dressed up in Harry Potter-style robes and a college fellow mumbles something in Latin; and college slacks, which are somewhat corny (but still fun) themed disco parties. I would also highly recommend two events that are unique to Lent term: Lent Bumps and the Corpus Challenge. Lent Bumps is a multi-day rowing competition between colleges, which is a huge Cambridge tradition and very enjoyable to watch. For the Corpus Challenge, about 100 Corpus students travelled to Corpus Christi in Oxford to compete in various events. The events were mostly sports, but also included things like trivia and board games. Afterwards, there was a really fun formal dinner and bop (essentially the same thing as a slack). There is a lot of fun to be had during Lent term, though you really do need to be willing to put yourself out there in order to make friends and meet new people. For the first week or two, I went to hall every day and introduced myself to a table full of random strangers. People here were very receptive, friendly, and curious to know about my experience as an exchange student. Eventually I sat down with a group of friends who I really clicked with and began hanging out with them on a regular basis. At this point, I feel like I know most of the people at Corpus.

Academically, adjusting to Cambridge did take some getting used to. I took five Part IIA classes in the Engineering department, two of which were more business courses than engineering courses. On average, I found the lectures here to be more engaging and organized than what I'm used to. At Cambridge, engineers don't specialize into bioengineering, mechanical engineering, etc. until Part IIA (their third year), so I personally struggled a bit with math and physics topics but excelled in biology and chemistry topics. I would also say that the workload is heavier than what I had expected, though still lighter than a normal term at Caltech. Each of the classes had three or four supervisions, in which you discuss a problem set in small groups. The problem sets can vary quite a bit in difficulty, though the business classes were a lot easier

than the rest. The non-business classes also had a lab report to complete, which also varied a lot in difficulty.

Overall, I would highly recommend studying abroad at Cambridge, and don't be deterred by Lent term—The weather is actually quite beautiful, and it's easy to meet new people if you're willing to make an effort!

**Dana He '19, ACM/Mathematics Part II, Cambridge Lent Term/Pembroke College**

At the start of my junior year, I did not plan on studying abroad. Having lived near Pasadena my entire life, I saw Caltech as a familiar place and felt comfortable there. The idea of being tossed into a foreign environment and knowing hardly anyone was daunting; plus, I was extremely hesitant to leave my friends during my last year of college. Ultimately, I made a last minute decision to step outside my comfort zone by applying, and I am so glad that I did. Studying abroad not only opened my eyes to see more of the world but also challenged me both academically and socially. In a just few months, I have grown into a more independent individual as well as experienced a completely different system of education.

Prior to arriving at Cambridge, I was worried about settling in. Coming during the middle of their school year, I would not be having a formal orientation, a club fair, or a clear opportunity to meet and befriend other students. However, looking back, I have realized that these challenges are what make studying during the Lent term special. First off, since all the first years have already been on campus for a term, you are one of the few new faces in college. As a result, the administration is much more attentive and focused on making you feel at home. This was also true with the students. Throughout the term, I would have people on my floor or in my classes approach me to introduce themselves simply because they knew I was a newcomer. Another advantage of the Lent term is that you have the opportunity to quickly expand your social circle. By the middle of the year, friend groups will have formed, so it is likely that befriending one Cambridge student will allow you to easily meet a lot more. Additionally, societies are no longer in their initial stages, which gives you a better sense of what activities are actually committed and worth getting involved in. It was super exciting to be surrounded by students who actively pursued interests outside of academics; on any day of the week, there would be always something to do, from theater shows to wine tastings to formal halls. There is also a benefit of the Lent term that is specific to Pembroke; the college offers a spring semester exchange program with other American universities (Lent & Easter Terms so they take exams & only HSS oriented), so there were forty-five other exchange students arriving at Pembroke during Lent. Meeting people in the same situation as I was in made adjusting to the new campus much easier.

But the best part about the Lent term was that it forced me to take the initiative in meeting new people, finding opportunities to get involved, and fully integrating myself with the Cambridge community. With only two Caltech students abroad and none staying in Pembroke, I truly had to escape the Caltech bubble and actively introduce myself to other students on my

own. This allowed me to work on my social skills, and now I have become much more comfortable and confident when speaking to new people. Furthermore, simply living in an environment so different from my home has inspired me to be more adventurous and open to new experiences.

To my surprise, the most difficult part of studying abroad for me was adjusting to the academics. Caltech ACM students generally take one or two classes outside of mathematics a term whereas Cambridge students can only take classes within the mathematics tripos. It took some time for me to get accustomed to only learning about math. The Part II math courses also moved at a fast pace and built off of topics from previous years, and the example sheets were quite long. Fortunately, the supervision system and the absence of exams allowed me to really focus on understanding the big picture behind the course concepts rather than simply learning how to solve specific problems on sets. In addition, my peers were absolutely brilliant, and I really enjoyed having the chance to interact with and learn from them; it was clear that the specialized curriculum at Cambridge had given them a very thorough understanding of the different fields in mathematics.

I am very grateful to have studied at Cambridge during Lent. The change of scenery was incredibly refreshing, and I had an unforgettable experience. In nine weeks, I explored the surrounding shops, saw snow falling for the first time, learned an enormous amount of academic material, and most importantly, made great friends. By the end, I truly felt like a part of this quaint, magical town.