

Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

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Example Timetable

In first year, your timetable is dominated by language classes. For Middle Eastern Studies, this will usually be 5 or 6 hours a week, but for East Asian Studies it can be much more. One language is mandatory, but Arabic for example counts as two modules (Standard and Colloquial). Each language will have a weekly one hour supervision. This leaves the option of two or three modules out of four. Lecture papers have one hour of content per week. Over the course these increasingly function as seminars, more an opportunity for students to discuss the set reading than to be taught. Lecture papers only schedule supervisions regarding submissions of work which are two or three a term at a maximum, for Middle Eastern Studies at least.

What are Supervisions Like?

Language supervisions accompany and complement the classes. The main focus will be going through homework, submitted before the supervision. These supervisions give students an opportunity to go into greater detail, either into topics they are struggling with, or to advance at a faster pace. Supervisions

usually consist of 2 or 3 students. I benefited a lot from these as it gave me a chance to really work through questions I had more directly and at my own pace.

Lecture paper supervisions will generally involve two or three students. Sometimes you will have answered the same essay question or similar questions, to enable discussion between you. The supervisor will go through your feedback, other advice, criticism and comments, and then open the floor for wider discussion of the topic, often suggesting further reading or avenues for research. Like language supervisions, these are very much what you make of them. In less subscribed modules they can even be one-on-one which gives you an invaluable opportunity to explore your interests.

What is unique about the Cambridge course?

The Cambridge course, at least regarding Middle Eastern Studies, is most notable for having the Year Abroad in the third year. Many unis do this in the second year, which can be overwhelming. Meanwhile, we had covered all the grammar practically by that point, and so the Year Abroad was really an opportunity to immerse yourself in the colloquial language and culture with confidence. Cambridge also offers Hindi in second year and Sanskrit in fourth year which are increasingly rare in British universities.

What did you wish you knew when applying?

Nothing particularly caught me unaware but I would say to all Muslim applicants to bear in mind this is a course taught from a secular Western perspective. Many papers I took dealt with early and pre-Islamic history, and though dealt with sensitively by and large, I would encourage applicants to be sure of their intentions and aqida. In fact, I found studying this period and these topics, even from this perspective, actually increased my faith as, unlike outdated hyper-scepticism among some academics, the field increasingly supports the general Islamic account. Nevertheless, I would suggest self-awareness and caution as some students may find this challenging, even if only initially.

Favourite and worst thing about your subject?

My favourite thing about the subject was the chance to study some truly amazing and beautiful languages. I will treasure them till my final breath and thank God for the opportunity. As an area studies course, it really allows a breadth of interests to flourish, be it literature, history, anthropology, linguistics, politics or religious studies, and though a small department, the lecturers are excellent by and large.

The worst thing personally for me was aspects of the Year Abroad, but I would attribute this to being poorly prepared. It is a challenging and sometimes isolating experience, to be away for 8 months and I would highly encourage any students to return home at least every two months and establish their connections and plans for the year well in advance so they can make the best use of the time.

Application Timeline

The application timeline for AMES follows the same and usual timeline as most other subjects. Personal statement for the 15th of October, then an entrance exam at some point before being notified about interviews in November. Then of course the interview in December.

Personal Statement Tips

My best advice for personal statements is make it as academic as possible. This might sound like a given but a lot of students feel like they have to add extracurricular activities to show a well roundedness as an applicant but Cambridge interviewers assessing your application would already assume that this is most likely the case already.

They want to see what it is that draws you to the subject. Show your curiosity and what you have learnt/ experienced that eventually led to your applying to the degree. At the end of every paragraph conclude by reminding the assessor why this means you would be a good candidate- not in those words but hopefully you get the idea. Essentially, you want to show the assessor why undertaking this specific degree will facilitate your chosen career path or

future contributions to the field, what is it that Cambridge can do for you? Speaking about life beyond university will demonstrate your passion for it and highlight to the interviewer that you've actually considered this.

Entrance Test Tips

Not so much to say on this, except don't stress. It isn't an exam you can prepare for and is more like a thinking skills assessment. You will most likely be answering questions on very random things. I remember I had to write a mini essay on the beauty of maths! You just have to learn to be an expert waffler haha.

I really don't think the entrance test holds a lot of weight, particularly for AMES. Just do your best, it is only an hour long and the time flies by. I believe the personal statement and interview are the most important parts of the application.

Interview Tips

The interview is a crucial part of the application process. This is quite literally your time to shine! The best advice I received prior to my interview is that it is NOT a trick. The interviewers are not sitting there trying to work out if you're smart or capable enough, they (like with the extracurricular component) will assume you already are. What the interviewer is really trying to see is whether you are the type of student they can teach. So, with that being said, a piece of advice I would give you is to be humble!

A common misconception with Oxbridge interviews is that you have to be super confident and show them why you know everything about the subject you're applying to. I've actually heard an interviewer say that this comes across as both cocky and arrogant; If you already know everything then why sign up for 3 or 4 years to learn about the subject and what more could they possibly teach you?

Instead, show why AMES overtakes you with curiosity and excitement! You yearn to learn more- this is what would make you a brilliant candidate they would want to accept!

I was so nervous! I felt like I could cry, die, stress eat pie (just kidding I don't like pie... but I do stress eat) before my interview. Recently I learnt that your body physiologically experiences both nerves and excitement in the same way. If you

are feeling super anxious, tell yourself you're actually super excited. Rather than throwing yourself into the depths of despair, thank Allah for the opportunity, ask Him SWT to keep you calm and feel content that He decreed this for you. I've tried this and it does help, it's also a skill you can build on with time.

Also remind yourself of what an amazing blessing it really is. Regardless of whether you get in or not. You have altogether around an hour with world experts in the field you're passionate about. How many people in your age group are given that opportunity?! I remember despite being as nervous as I was at the beginning, I really actually ended up enjoying and learning from my interviews. It's quite reflective of how supervisions can feel once you begin as an undergraduate.

Give it your all and remain hopeful regarding the will of Allah. If you get in, it's a huge blessing and if you don't, it's also a huge blessing and wherever else you go, have no doubt that it is better for you. We plan and Allah plans!

