

Psychological and Behavioural Sciences (PBS)

Written by:

Maria Zaman (mz491@cam.ac.uk)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Example Timetable

First year consists of two compulsory and two optional modules. The optional modules can be borrowed from the associated triposes; these include natural science, archeology and HSPS (Human Social Political Sciences). PBS1 and PBS2 are the compulsory modules, and each consists of two lectures per week. PBS2 does include practical classes on top of this every other week, but in first year majority of them are not assessed. Contact hours for optional modules vary, as some natural science papers do have labs, though generally you will have two to three lectures per module. A typical day would probably look like:

11am-12pm : lecture

2pm-3pm : lecture

4pm-5pm : supervision

What are supervisions like?

You will have a different supervisor for each module. They will vary in terms of how much work they assign, the number of supervisions they hold in a term, and the number of people within the supervision. Half of my supervisions were weekly, the other half I had around three times a term. Supervisors will often set essays, that may usually be assigned around 2 weeks in advance, with the intention to discuss them within the supervision. I found that within a week I would write between 2-3 essays; though this may seem like a lot initially, with good time management this workload can be easily managed. Supervisions are not as intimidating as they seem, they are there to help you understand content and further consolidate your learning, so don't be scared to ask questions!

What are labs like?

Understanding how to conduct an experiment, perform statistical tests, or use coding programs are all things that can take place within a PBS2 practical. For those of you who will choose the natural sciences module, the practicals are assessed, but don't worry, the write ups are fairly easy. These labs not only include instructions on how to conduct experiments but also guidance on how to read and write scientific papers, as well as demonstrating how theoretical knowledge from lectures can be practically applied.

What is unique about the Cambridge course?

The PBS course gives you the opportunity to choose from a variety of different modules. This allows you to delve into a wide range of topics which you might not typically encounter in a traditional psychology course. For example, I took the modules 'evolution and behaviour' and 'humans in biological perspective' which gave my first year a strong focus on biology. Similarly, you can design your course to fit around your interests.

What did you wish you knew when applying?

One thing I wish I had known when applying was the differences among colleges. In terms of the course itself, there isn't much variation; the main difference lies in the supervisors you might be assigned, as each college has its own Director of Studies (DoS) who makes these assignments. However, it's essential to be aware of how accommodating colleges are when it comes to religious requirements. For example, some colleges offer en-suite accommodations or girls-only housing, while others may be less accommodating in this regard.

Favourite and worst thing about your subject?

Favourite thing: that we can cater the degree to our interests by being able to pick modules. Also, the psychology classroom is pretty nice (free coffee between 11am-12pm).

Worst thing: Learning coding, which you can either love or hate. Also, Saturday lectures if you take Natural Science papers.

Personal Statement Tips

Your personal statement is the best place to showcase your interest for the subject. Mention articles or books you've read and show knowledge of current research within psychology. Make sure that you can talk confidently about any sources that you name.

Entrance Test Tips

No entrance test, though some colleges might require written work before the interview.

Interview Tips

It is not important that you do not know the correct answer to specific questions, as the interviewers do not expect you to have knowledge on everything; rather, they want to see how you apply logic and reasoning to arrive at an answer. It is good to show that you have an interest in the subject by demonstrating extra-curricular knowledge gained from additional reading, but again they are not looking for an expert. Each college will have differences in the types of questions they ask; some maybe more abstract than others. I

would suggest getting a general understanding of the principles within psychology, how research is conducted, and engaging in further reading on topics you're interested in is a good start to preparing for interviews.

Recommended reading/activities

Cracked: Why psychiatry is doing more harm than good by James Davies -

A very good insight into some of the current problems within psychology and psychiatry.

The man who mistook his wife for a hat by Oliver Sacks

Blueprint by Robert Plomin

Other

There is a Cambridge university twitter account for PBS, @cambtweetPBS. Keep up with the account to follow the ups and downs of a current Cambridge psychology student!

