ENGINEERING

Welcome first year engineers,

Firstly, congratulations on making your offer, and welcome to the best college in Cambridge! My name is Isla and I’m a third year engineer, as well as your welfare officer, so you should be seeing a lot of me around college. So here is a brief overview of first year...

What is engineering like at Cambridge?
Engineering has a reputation for being hard, but do not worry, there are loads of things that make your life easier. Firstly, STANDARD CREDIT, trust me when I say you will love this! Standard credit is the mark you get out of 6 for going to labs and writing lab reports, BUT the beautiful thing is, if you arrive on time, and do a “minimal acceptance” job you will pass.

Secondly you will have example sheets to complete for supervisions, that come out on a Wednesday for first years. These are usually 10-15 questions and you complete them gradually as you learn the material in lectures. These can be quite challenging... but unlike most subjects we get answers at the back, and also... CRIBS! Cribs are the written out answers, and should be used as a last resort. We are the only subject to have cribs, so don’t brag about them to others...

What will my typical day be like?
You will have 2 - 4 lectures each day, and 2 – 3 labs each week. If you don’t understand everything (or anything!) in lectures, it’s completely normal, as they are there to be a foundation to build on, and a lot of your learning will be done by reading over lecture notes and in supervisions. Lecture notes will be handed to you at the start of a lecture series, so you only have to fill in the gaps. So far so good, right?

Lastly you might be wondering how much time off you will have, and that depends on how efficiently you work. I realised that setting myself a limit for how long I work made me work more productively and I would have more time off. I would advise to keep up sport, it’s a misconception that you won’t have enough time, and sport is so important in not only keeping fit but also reducing stress and boosting your mood as well as meeting new people.

How is engineering Tripos structured?
As you may know by now, the course is 4 years long, and the first two years are general, giving you a good foundation. You will do 4 papers in first year, and 8 papers in second year. The topics are the same in both year, but second year is more in depth. Doing general engineering is good because you will soon get to know what you enjoy most and what you don’t care for, and also as an engineer it is important to know a bit about everything. In third year you pick your topic, which is a combination of modules you pick from a list, so you are not only restricted to the topic you picked as you can do modules from other topics too.

What should I do before coming to Cambridge?
I believe they give you prep problems to do and some sort of computing simulation exercise. The computing up until now no one checks, and the prep problem you hand in to your director of studies (DoS for short) at the start of term, but don’t stress if you find them hard, they are meant to be challenging.

What happens in first term?
In the first week or two of term you will be doing a “Lego mindstorm” project, you can youtube it to see what it is. My group made a cake slicing machine and it didn’t work... but we still got full marks
because it was standard credit! One thing I was worried about before starting the course was the practical side, because I preferred theory rather than hands on stuff. But in the end it’s what I enjoyed the most, and it’s a nice break from lectures and supervisions. Another thing that you will do in first term is computing, and it’s a big divide between engineers who know how to program and those like me who were completely clueless. What I would say is try your best, ask for help from the demonstrators, work together and you can always message me.

**Enough about engineering, what is Downing like?**
As I’ve said before, Downing is obviously the best college! It may not be the richest but it has the best/most popular college bar, and best accommodation (hotel standard). When you arrive in Downing you will be greeted by the Freshers’ Reps who will help you settle in, and have loads of fun activities organised. Other than that, dinner and lunch (known as slops in Downing) are on everyday and brunch on Saturdays and Sundays, so don’t stress if your cooking is not up to scratch.

**What can I do outside of engineering?**
Downing has many sports teams and societies you can find on the jcr website (jcr.dow.cam.ac.uk) and the University itself has hundreds more, so you will be spoilt for choice. A lot of students start rowing, and Downing has been doing really well in the recent years (women’s have come first two years in a row!) Other than that, there are loads of interesting things to do in Cambridge, from museums, outdoor swimming pools, rooftop bars, punting and more.

I hope I have giving you a good insight into the world of engineering in Cambridge, and I look forward to meeting you all when you arrive. In the meantime, feel free to email me if you have any questions.

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