Hey guys!

My name is Victor and I’m a second year Land Economist at Downing. The aim of this letter is to give you a taste of the life of a first year student and address your worries about your time here.

I feel like I am the most appropriate person to write this as I came first at the top of the Downing Land Economist of my year (the main reason being that I am the only one reading this course in my year in our college). This leads me to my first point: Land Economy is a relatively small course for Cambridge with roughly 55 students per year, meaning you’ll get to know more or less everyone in your year. This is a great advantage because you will be able to develop a strong relationship with the academic staff as well as with students from other colleges. I believe this is very important because it makes you part of a tiny community of really cool people who share the common passion of farming (jk).

My second point is that you chose the best program here in Cambridge. Land Economy combines the study of economics and law in order to analyse key environmental and urban issues. You do not even have to focus on these areas if you do not desire to. You may decide to follow the path of a lawyer or an investment banker. The main point is that Land Economy offers you a broad variety of subjects and will enable you to choose whatever career you wish to pursue. I thought the first year was really captivating and intellectually challenging and I am sure that you will enjoy it as much as I did.

Downing.

Downing is undeniably the best college, offering everything from academic to extra-curricular support to help you gain the most out of your time here at Cambridge. You will soon experience what a close family and home Downing becomes to every person involved in the college. Moreover, it is located very close to the Land Economy department on Mill Lane. During my first year I lived in Kenny B and I could comfortably get to the department in a 15-minute walk. If you ever need help or advice, feel free to ask me. The other advantage of Land Economy is that you can seek help from either lawyers or economists from your year or above.

Lectures and supervisions.

With regard to lectures and supervisions, first year comprises of eight hours of lectures per week (two hours per paper) and generally four (hour-long) supervisions per fortnight i.e. one hour per paper. One of Cambridge's quirky traditions is that the term starts on Thursdays and ends on Wednesdays. However, this gives you a little bit of time to settle in before you need to think about lectures. Supervisions are to start with probably one of the more daunting parts of studying at Cambridge, however I cannot reassure you enough that so long as you do the preparatory work, and have tidy notes to discuss & recount in the supervisions, there’s nothing to worry about. The supervisions provide the opportunity for many insightful discussions and even debates.

Coursework and readings.

During the first year, alongside later years, you will prepare a written coursework project for a paper. This provides a great opportunity to focus on your interests and show your flare, but do not leave this to the last minute. Make the most of the fact that this is usually set at the end of term or over the term breaks. Reading lists can be found on the faculty website, which is worth a thorough look, but do not try and read everything. For buying books, your lecturer will recommend key text books in the Land Economy Handbook, available on the department website (once you have set-up your login). You can purchase them new but they can be quite pricey – so look out for anyone selling theirs on the Land Economy Facebook group. I know I will likely be selling most of mine, so please don’t hesitate to contact me. Mill Lane and Downing libraries also have a good stock of the reading list material, as well as many complementary readings.

Key Points:

- **You’re awesome and you should know it.** When you will arrive here, one of your first reactions will be to think that you do not belong in Cambridge, that you got lucky during your interviews and that after all satisfying your offer was not that difficult. You’ll feel like everyone is super smart but you. That is wrong. You got here because some of the best academics in the world
have spotted that you have potential and they were not mistaken. **You have earned your place** at Cambridge, so be confident.

- **Do not stress!** Before arriving, there is no subject preparation to be done. Part 1A is designed to bring everyone to the same level, so no matter what subjects you have studied before, you will not be at a disadvantage. However, the first year has a considerably steep learning curve, especially for subjects that you may have not covered before (e.g. Law). Just remember, so long as you stay on top of things, regularly revisiting material, you will be fine.

- **Setting up your Raven and Hermes login:** Your Raven account is your main university online portal login. For any intra-university source online you will need your Raven Login. This will be the same login as for your Hermes (email), Camsis (your student database/info) and Camcors (Report system). My advice is to set this up once you have received your confirmation so that you are able to deal asap with admin from the beginning of term. Do pay attention to incoming mails! Every email at the beginning of term in particular will be very important in terms of setting up supervisions and where to be when etc.

- **Work smart:** First year is undoubtedly very daunting, the challenge is to filter out and learn the key components, instead trying to copy out entire textbooks. This is unrealistic to say the least! In formulating revision notes during Christmas and Easter breaks, I often found myself revisiting topics to make sure I understood everything. My advice for lectures, is not to frantically write down notes from the lecturers slides, as these are accessible online the day before the lecture.

- **Appreciate Cambridge as a city:** it is not all about work! Allow yourself some time to settle into the city, enjoy meeting a wide variety of new people (the older years are a sociable bunch and love meeting new faces). There is undoubtedly an equilibrium for work/life balance, which is different for each individual, so find what is comfortable for you. Give a try to new sports, join Cambridge’s awesome societies or experience the nightlife in the city’s pubs and clubs (you will be surprised). Keep a balance.

- **It is up to you:** Whether you need support in the academic, medical, social or extra curricular, there is always someone there to reach out to. Your DoS, your tutor and the entire group of Land Ec’s at Downing will always make time for you. Speak with your Land Ec friends, be it for testing and teaching each other, as this can only be more effective in consolidating knowledge, as well as making studying more enjoyable.

Please feel free to add me (Victor Bessis) on Facebook and I will be happy to answer any of your questions, as well as get to know you.

Enjoy the rest of your summer and come to Cambridge fit and ready for a great new chapter and experience. I look forward to seeing you all in October!

**Until then, all the best!**

Victor.