Hi PBS Freshers!

First of all, massive congratulations for making your offers and well done for choosing to study the best course offered by Cambridge (...and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise)! Just to introduce myself, my name’s Jason, I’ll be going into 3rd year, and I am one of only four PBS-ers (between 2nd and 3rd years) at Downing – although rumour has it that you guys will be a big group... Anyways, this letter is intended to inform you on what’s to come in the following weeks and to address some of the concerns you may have.

If you weren’t already aware, your 1st year consists of two core papers and two optional papers. The core papers introduce psychology as a subject, as well as the experimental approaches we use. As for the optional papers, you get to pick from a wide range of psychology-related papers offered by other Tripos’ (subjects) including Education, Computer Science (CompSci), Economics, HSPS, Philosophy and the Natural Sciences (NatSci). Some papers will require more commitment (i.e. lectures/supervisions per week) than others, but don’t let that affect your decision! Pick the two that interest you most. You will receive an email with a booklet attached containing details of each paper sometime during the summer.

Your first few weeks will be quite chilled, so don’t feel the need to pressure yourself or over-stress. You’ll very quickly find out the sort of standards you’ll need to be working at, and supervisors aren’t expecting perfect essays. So use the first few weeks to ease yourself into the Cambridge life and don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Also, make sure you try to get involved with some extracurricular activities because these can really ‘lift’ the whole Cambridge experience. Your Freshers’ Handbook will list some of the societies and sports that Downing offers. As for the university-wide societies, make sure you go to the Freshers’ Fair during the first weekend of Freshers – you get free slices of Domino’s pizza!

Now to address some common questions and concerns:

- **Will I be disadvantaged if I haven’t done GCSE/A-Level Psychology?** From personal experience, no. There may be some advantages for those who have a Psychology background throughout the year, but by the time exams arrive, there’ll be basically no advantages/disadvantages whatsoever.

- **Is Cambridge all work and no play?** No...I mean, sure there’s a lot of work, but there is definitely enough time for you to fit in a few extracurricular activities. So yeah, go join a sport or a society! It’s a great way to meet new people or try something new. Plus, if you’re in need of any help, Downing has a great support network for you. Your supervisors, tutor, Director of Studies (DoS), JCR Committee, college parents (you’ll hear more about this) and 2nd/3rd year PBS-ers are more than happy to help you with anything!

- **How ‘on top’ of work should I be during term time?** Try to be on top of work, but if you struggle, you can consolidate stuff over the Christmas and Easter holidays. At this point, don’t worry about work – you’ll figure out what’s required, and what’s best for you in the first few weeks of Michaelmas.

- **Should I be buying any textbooks, and if so, which ones?** I mean, it’s up to you. Your lecturers will include a list of recommended reading for each topic. For the core papers, I wouldn’t recommend buying them because most textbooks are so expensive, and the relevant chapters don’t really cover enough detail (at least for 1st year topics). Plus, different lecturers might recommend chapters from different textbooks, and you definitely do not want to buy all of them. I personally read reviews online. Having said that, textbooks might be useful for some of the optional papers. If you’re unsure, just borrow them from the library!

- **Can I switch optional papers if I don’t like one of them?** Of course you can! The earlier you do so, the better so you don’t fall behind!

Anyways, that’s it from me! If you’ve got any questions, feel free to drop me an email (jlkl35@cam.ac.uk). Otherwise, enjoy the rest of your break and we look forward to seeing you here in October for Freshers’ Week so get hyped!

Jason