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The Oxford Experience: A Tutorial Versus a Modular System

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The Oxford Experience: A Tutorial Versus a Modular System

the steps waiting for faculty. Alumni, we hope you will return to the campus of IWU and visit our new facilities!

Stumph to Bring Great Ideas to Department

Nathan Taulbee

“I hope to round out your outstanding Economics Department by interesting students in macroeconomics as a field of interest and research.”

Those are the words of IWU’s newest Economics professor, Dr. Carolyn Stumph. Having received a Bachelor of Science degree in Finance and a Ph.D in Economics from Lehigh University, along with an MBA from Oklahoma City University Stumph brings a great variety of knowledge to IWU.

In addition to having three degrees, Stumph also served as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Field Artillery Corps in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. While there, Stumph worked primarily with intermediate range nuclear missiles, which today are no longer in service.

After leaving the service Stumph worked as a sales representative for the Johnson & Johnson Co. pharmaceutical division. She then served as a financial consultant for Merrill Lynch, where she discovered her desire to further explore the economics field. This caused Stumph to return to Lehigh to obtain her Ph.D.

As a recent graduate student, Dr. Stumph has many great ideas for the Economics Department and its students. Some new courses that Stumph would like to see added to the curriculum include “Economics of Technological Change”, “Business Cycles and Forecasting”, and “Monetary and Fiscal Policy.” In the classroom, Stumph plans to involve students by establishing “mini-economies” that will increase insight into a particular theory, along with increasing student interaction. In addition, she believes that student interest can be raised through examining current events and real world problems.

Stumph enjoys macroeconomics and believes it is an important field because, as part of a free mar-

ket economy, informed consumers and voters can contribute to their own prosperity. In addition she feels macroeconomics is needed to better understand local, state, and federal decision-making. Besides macroeconomics, Stumph also has a great interest in game theory and the problems facing developing countries.

Several things attracted Stumph to IWU. First of all, she appreciates our philosophy that students come first. She also likes the students and faculty she met while visiting campus. “I thought it was wonderful that so many of you attended my seminar in order to have a say in the hiring process. The congeniality among the departments across campus is also quite unique in my experience.”

Dr. Stumph has great advice for all IWU students. For those who remain undecided on whether or not to attend graduate school directly after undergraduate studies, she recommends getting a job first. “I was not always driven to get my Ph.D. and I found my work experience to be invaluable. It enabled me to get more out of my education because I knew which questions to ask.”

Stumph also recommends getting involved in many activities. She believes the activities will improve a resume and increase the leadership, teamwork, and communication skills necessary in the business field.

Though Stumph has spent much time studying supply and demand, economics is not her entire life. She enjoys spending time with her husband Timothy, whether it be skiing, mountain biking, or running marathons.

Stumph’s arrival at IWU is anxiously anticipated by both students and faculty. Her broad background and great ideas give students something to look forward to. Let’s just hope that she does not include running a marathon as a course requirement!

The Oxford Experience: A Tutorial Versus a Modular System

Jaynanne Calaway

Upon stepping out of my coach at the Gloucester Green bus station in downtown Oxford, I

knew my year abroad as a Visiting Student at Pembroke College would be the experience of a lifetime. I am now well into Hilary Term, the second of three terms in the year, and taking a moment to reflect on my experiences thus far. An Oxford education certainly centers around the tutorial system, as opposed to the modular system found in the States. And yet, the “Oxford experience” entails so much more. Before focusing on the backbone of Oxford’s reputation, academics, I would like to clarify that a year spent in Oxford holed up in libraries by day and writing essays by night would be a travesty.

Oxford is known as “The City of Dreaming Spires.” There are more cathedrals and bell towers than I could possibly count. In fact, every night at 9:05, the Christ Church Tower rings 101 times. It rings 101 times to commemorate the first graduating class, which had 101 members. It rings at 9:05 because that was the original curfew in Oxford hundreds of years ago. I often stop in the middle of Carfax intersection in City Central and turn a full circle just to take in the atmosphere and remind myself of the history. My room, which happens to be up five flights of rickety, old, wooden stairs, is well over 300 years old. Some parts of Oxford date back to the 11th Century. I was very excited the first time I ate at The Eagle and the Child, the pub C.S. Lewis frequented. I was in awe the first time I walked through the meadows of Christ Church at dusk. I reveled in the beauty of my first morning to see daybreak while rowing on the Isis River. Oxford may well be the most beautiful place on earth.

Yet the heart of Oxford remains in its 35 colleges. Much to my surprise, I quickly learned that no Briton studies more than eight hours a day, unless he is having what is commonly known as an “essay crisis.” This is when one has not planned one’s time well and ends up doing all the reading and writing for an essay within the 12-24 hours before a “tute” (short for tutorial). Otherwise, most of my colleagues awaken in time for breakfast and work through most of the day, perhaps taking time to hang out in the afternoon or attend one of many sports practices. Many charge that Pembroke College revolves around two things: rowing crew and nightlife. Clubbing and pubbing are the two main nightly activities. Some people, though, prefer to take their respite in the afternoon. My favorite afternoon activities have

included ice-skating, seeing a film, or window-shopping.

Nonetheless, academics remains the backbone of the Oxford experience. I am enrolled in the Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics (PPE) Honor School, which decrees that I read two papers—in our terms, take two classes—per term. For each paper, I write a weekly 12-15 page essay. For each essay, my tutor assigns a reading list. One list may have 50 books on it! There are no textbooks required, though textbooks often show up on the reading list. Many days, I spend an entire morning and afternoon tromping all over Oxford looking for books. The Bodleian is the central library in Oxford and the oldest library in the Western world. Oftentimes, the Bodleian is the only library in Oxford with a book. On the down side, no one may check books out of the Bodleian. On the up side, I know that the books I need will always be at the Bodleian. Since many libraries close in the early evening, one must plan one’s day well to be able to get all the reading done. Fortunately, I soon discovered that no one reads everything on the list. Not even the tutors really expect us to read everything. I quickly learned that they hold up an unattainable standard, without anticipating that anyone will ever achieve it.

After reading various arguments and approaches on a topic, I set out writing the essay. My moral tutor—the equivalent of an advisor—once told me never to spend more than four hours writing an essay. However, I think that must not have included revisions, for by the time I finally print out an essay, I will have spent well over four hours. I then take the essay with me to my weekly one hour tutorial. Many tutors require their students to hand in their essay 24 hours ahead. Mine have not. In general, PPE tutors are more easy-going. Sometimes, I read my essay aloud to get the discussion rolling. A good tutor spends most of the hour going over the basics and then filling in the gaps. A tutorial system allows a tutor to address individual confusions and thoughts on a topic. This is the essence of an Oxford education: the one-to-one hourly sessions. It is just me and an internationally known expert in the field. This term, I have the same tutor for both papers: International Economics and Economics of OECD Countries. We had to rearrange one of our tutorials because he had to suddenly fly to Moscow to serve in an advisory role regarding a

national economic dilemma. One day last term, my tutor for Classical Economic Thought, Walter Eltis, mentioned that he had to run off to London—that Tony wanted to discuss something with him. Yes, that is correct: Tony Blair!

The most difficult aspect has been the lack of formal feedback on my work. My tutors read and mark my essays, but have not assigned a grade to them thus far. There are no tests until collections (finals), which are taken at the beginning of the next term after the six-week break. Even then, collections do not formally count for anything. Full-time Oxford students receive no permanent marks on their transcript until finals at the end of their time at Oxford, which is normally three years. However, the collections do serve as indicators of a student's progress and retention. If they do not do well, there are consequences. Another significant difference from a liberal arts education like Illinois Wesleyan is that Oxford students study only their subject. They do not have general education requirements. Instead, it is assumed that economics students will learn about the arts and humanities on their own. I have found that Oxford students generally have a broad range of interests and knowledge. The sports players go to plays and ballets; the scientists participate in poetry readings; and most everyone speaks more than one language. On the few days the sun is warm enough to sit out on the quad, one finds people playing chess and drawing portraits instead of the traditional American game of frisbee. If I were to characterize Oxford in any one way, it would be that it is a place to talk—talk about anything at any time with anyone. Whether it be with tutors or friends, conversations freely move from economics to politics to religion to literature to art to morality to philosophy and back to economics again in a matter of minutes.

As for the formal academic requirements, weekly and biweekly lectures and seminars are supplementary and optional. Tutors are generally associated with the same college as their students, though not always. On the other hand, lectures are

university-wide. Thus, one's tutor is most likely not the lecturer for the same subject. It is assumed that students will attend lectures in order to receive the information they will need for finals. I rarely find a lecture which corresponds with that week's essay topic. Consequently, I plan my week around how long I judge it will take to read the books and articles on my reading lists from my tutors. One does not sign up for lectures. As a Visiting Student, I am taking advantage of my year here by attending lectures not only in economics but also in other subjects which interest me, such as law, politics, and ethics.

I was shocked to find that most of my tutors do not believe the Classical economic models, with perfect markets, are relevant since they don't exist.

Finally, I arrive at the long-awaited aspect of content: do they teach the same basic material as in the States? From talking with PPE "freshers" (freshmen), I have gleaned that the macro and micro theory courses are very similar to our own, concentrating mainly on Classical models. However, many of my papers have corresponded to second and third year work. I was

shocked to find that most of my tutors do not believe the Classical models, with perfect markets, are relevant since they do not exist. In my Labour Economics paper, I studied various alternative explanations for real-world phenomena, such as the monopsony theory to explain why a minimum wage might actually raise employment. There is a strict format for all PPE essays: introduction, explanation of key definitions, opposing theories to answer the question, empirical evidence, and then a judgment and summary of the findings. For instance, in the case of the essay topic "Does the introduction of a national minimum wage necessarily raise unemployment?", one would introduce the topic, define "low-paid" jobs and unemployment, review the Classical model in which wage floors always lower employment, introduce a monopsonist model which proposes the opposite conclusion, summarize the empirical evidence, and then make a judgment. Most Oxford students focus mainly on British markets. Because I am an American Visiting Student, my tutors try to assign American authors also.

Many people—both here and at home—have asked me which system I think is superior. Frankly, I deem neither to be superior. Obviously, the Oxford system has history and reputation on its side. As a junior studying abroad, I feel that the freedom and flexibility of the tutorial system have fit me nicely. This system has allowed me to read more on the subjects which truly interest me while also learning the aspects which my tutors deem most important. However, I would not recommend the system for every stage of a college career. I have witnessed many a

Pembroke fresher falter in the wake of so much freedom. Freedom is always accompanied by responsibility. The tutorial system requires a great deal of self-discipline. As for the content, I do advocate reading all sides of an argument for oneself, and not just from a textbook summarizing a topic. Of course, it does require more time and effort to learn the bulk of a subject on one's own, attending tutorials only to clarify and fill in the gaps. In the end, the superiority of one system over the other depends largely on the person and the purpose of study.