

CAMBRIDGE COMMONWEALTH TRUST/LINK FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP

Peter Niven, is a 2007 Cambridge Commonwealth Trust/Link Foundation Fellow, who has enjoyed academic life at the University of Cambridge. He completed an LLM - the advanced law degree, the Master of Laws, at Girton College, Cambridge during the 2006/07 academic year.

Peter Niven reports: I completed a LLM at Cambridge over the 2006-2007 Academic year. I came to Cambridge from New Zealand, where I had been working for the New Zealand Defence Force as a legal officer, and my LLM was very much focused on international law and civil liberties. I joined Girton College and along with the other Girton post-graduate students was housed close to the law faculty and to town at Wolfson Court, considerably more convenient than the main College site which is a couple of miles up Huntingdon road.

The LLM programme is very much a self-teaching exercise. Contact time is limited to a two hour seminar/lecture for each of four courses for the first two eight week terms. The last term is study time before exams. Much of the focus is, therefore, on reading and considering material covered in the lectures and seminars. The approach differed considerably depending on the individual lecturer, with some of my courses consisting essentially of straight lecturing, while others were discussion based. The LLM programme is strongly international, with 90% of the students in the papers I took coming from countries outside of the United Kingdom. It was possible to elect to do a research paper in lieu of an exam for most of the papers.

The law faculty and the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law, which is part of the law faculty, organised a fascinating and broad series of lectures and seminars by visiting legal scholars and practitioners. Colleges and other faculties also held a wide range of lectures and seminars open to anyone, including some fascinating topics. The best of these that I attended was on the Cambridge spies who were recruited by the KGB in the 1930s.

One of the advantages of the College system is exposure to students studying across a broad range of academic disciplines. The friends I made at Girton were post-grads studying everything from theoretical physics, philosophy, history, international relations, through to computer speech recognition. In addition, like the LLM programme, the post graduate community at Girton is strongly international, and my friends there range from the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, through to Saudi Arabia. Exchanges with the Middle Common Rooms of other colleges gave an opportunity to visit other colleges and attend their formal halls. Socially and intellectually it is exciting and enriching to meet and talk with people from such diverse backgrounds about such a diverse range of studies

I joined the Cambridge Union Society, the Cambridge debating society, and enjoyed attending a wide range of debates involving some pretty interesting characters, including a range of current and ex-members of Parliament, ex-Ministers in the UK government, a proprietor of a number of English strip clubs, Bianca Jagger and so on. The speakers brought in by the Union also covered a wide and interesting range, including the President of Iraq, who was accompanied by a security effort that included snipers on the rooftops next to the Union.

Cambridge is a beautiful location to live and study. The main part of the city where the university faculties and most of the colleges are located is compact and easily navigated

quickly atop a bicycle, and it is bicycles that will be an abiding memory of my time at Cambridge. There are cyclists and bicycles everywhere! I already miss living somewhere so bicycle-friendly and where I can sail about quickly and efficiently on a bicycle everywhere I need to go.

Overall Cambridge was a wonderful experience, which offers the potential for a wide range of experiences over and above the academic experiences that one would expect from an institution of such antiquity and reputation.