So, good afternoon and a very warm welcome again from me. My name is Amy Goymour and I'm one of the lecturers here in the Law Faculty and I lecture in each of the three years of the law degree. Now, I'm here just to tell a little bit about the substance of the course here at Cambridge. Now, a lot of the information I'm going to give you is also available online in various places, in particular on our website but, hopefully, by talking you through it, by adding a few anecdotes here and there, it will be useful to you to sort of hear it in person. Now, having been a student here myself many years ago and having now taught many cohorts of students through the years, I know that sitting there, one of the biggest questions you are probably thinking is, "Well, what is it like to make this step into studying law at university?" and in a way it's a doubly fearful step in the sense that you don't know what university is like on the one hand and, secondly, many of you don't really know what law is like to study.

You don't need to have studied law at A level in order to apply for law and many of probably aren't studying it, so it's a double step into the unknown. So in the 25 minutes or so that we have together I'm going to try and illuminate a little bit what it is to take that step into studying law at university, in particular at Cambridge, our degree and, hopefully, it will be a step that appeals to you. So, just so you know where we are heading, I'm first of all going to talk to you a little bit about the teaching style and the content of the course. Then we will get into some details and look at the precise structure of our course, what you will be studying and when. The normal three-year law degree is what most of you will be applying for but there are a couple of alternative course structures which we will spend a few moments on in case those are of interest and, finally, we will consider some further information, in particular we will ask, as many of you are probably asking, why should I study law at university rather than doing a different degree and doing a law conversion course before becoming a lawyer? We will think about that question as we go through.

So, first of all then, thinking about the teaching style and the content, the broad content of our course, now, of course if you are studying law we will be engaging with the rules that govern particular areas of society. So what happens if you damage somebody's property, what happens if you go into a shop and buy something, what happens if you accidentally download something you shouldn't have done, a song that's copyright protected, etc. Now, we will be looking at those rules, we will be thinking about how they apply but the reason we've got this slide here is to make it clear that we are not here just to study the rules. That would be a very, very dry degree if you were just learning rules and learning how to apply them. A computer almost could do that. What you do in a law degree is much, much more than that.
We think about the law and we bring in studies from other disciplines in order to help us understand more about what the law is trying to do, what it should be doing, to help us think about whether it’s in a good state, whether it should change, and to do that we might draw on some learning from politics, for example, thinking about the value and the legality of referenda, for example, a very topical point of debate. Or we might think about different policies. For example, at the moment the Law Commission, which is a governmental reform body, is currently looking at the law of surrogacy, thinking about the procedures and what should and shouldn’t be allowed and how it should be regulated. That can’t be done just by thinking about rules. It’s got to be done thinking more broadly about ethics, about policy, etc.

I’m not going to go through each of those but we also think about the history behind the law. The way the law develops is very, very important. Not only is it interesting to know how the law developed from, say, the 1400s to today, it’s also interesting to think about how the law might develop in the future, so we can learn from history about how the law incrementally develops, and if you really like history there is a paper in the second and third year you could do on legal history itself. Psychology as well can inform our understanding. So one of the subjects I teach is land law, which is a second year subject, as you will see in a moment, and all of the topics we do in the first terms is the law on squatters’ rights. If you, without permission, start living on somebody else’s land and then the real owner comes along and tries to evict you, generally speaking they are allowed to do that but is there an argument that the law should respect the person who is living there because they have made some kind of psychological attachment to their land, to that land as their home. So here you can see that psychological arguments might come into question when we are thinking about what the law should be. So these are just a few little examples. There are many, many others.

Now, one of the points that isn’t on this slide but is in this speech bubble instead is a quotation from a former student who says, “At school I had always enjoyed maths and science but also art subjects and I had this idea that law would combine something of everything.” So even if you are more mathematically or scientifically inclined, law is a very, very good subject to study because it involves you analysing, thinking about rules, thinking logically. So not only are these other disciplines important, you can also rely on the skills you have developed as a mathematician or a scientist and bring them to bear on your legal studies. So it is a bit of everything and, not only that, it’s a very practical subject. We’re not just thinking about ideas in the abstract, we’re thinking about ideas as they really do apply in the real world and to many students that’s very appealing.

So in terms of how you learn at university, beginning with that first speech bubble, one of our former students has said the biggest difference between any course at university and school is the amount of independent study that has to be done. So you spend a lot of time studying on your own. So, literally on your own or talking to other likeminded friends as well, which can be a very fun way of making independent study more lively. Now, thinking about the sort of general nature of our course, yes, the law degree can help you on your journey towards becoming a qualified lawyer, a barrister or a solicitor. Now, we’ll pause there just to note what this means. In order to become a barrister or a solicitor in England and Wales you have to qualify academically, you have to do a practical course and then you have to do your legal training on the job.

If you do a qualifying law degree, which our degree is, you tick the academic qualification box that leaves you to go on and do the practical course and the practical training. So that’s what it means to do a qualifying law degree, which ours is. As I said earlier, you don’t have to study a
law degree in order to become a qualified lawyer. What you could do is study a different degree first and then go on and do a conversion course after your first degree — not offered here in Cambridge — and in one year you would do the academic qualification, in quite a compressed way. Then you go on and do the practical qualification and then your on-the-job training. Now, so all I am saying is our law degree does help you on the way to becoming a qualified lawyer but it’s much, much more than that. It’s not just vocational, it’s not just helping you along that journey, it is an academic degree first and foremost. So it gives you a chance to think about the law, not just learn what you need to know for future practice. You can reflect on the law, you can really think deeply on it, think about whether it needs to be reformed, whether it needs to be changed. Does it need to adapt to future technology, etc, etc.

So if you like the idea of thinking academically about the law, then a law degree is going to be a very good bet. So you engage with the subject material, you question the status quo, is it in a good state, and you consider new applications of the law. So just thinking about a subject, another subject area I teach, at the moment if I take something from you without your permission, say, your book that is lying on the table, you can sue me to recover the book or its value and the reason you can do that is because the book is something we can touch and the law has developed a set of rules around property which we can physically touch, what we call “tangible property”.

Quite recently the highest court has been asked to think about whether those same rules that allow you to sue me can apply to property which we can’t touch. What if I take something from your bank account? You can't touch your bank account, but it’s an asset. What if I interfere with a contractual right you have got? So there are big, big questions which we have to ask as lawyers. Does the law, should the law be able to adapt to new ways in which society works? More and more things, if you think about it in this modern world, are things that are valuable even though you can’t touch them. Internet sites, information, etc, etc. How does the law adapt to think about changing technology? So that’s what we have to start thinking about and that’s what makes law interesting, at least I think so.

So, more practically, how do you learn? Well, as is typical at a university, one mode of learning is through lectures. Lectures happen in this building and generally for the compulsory subjects, which I will discuss in a moment, they happen in this big lecture theatre that you’re in now. Every student, regardless of college, would go to the same lectures so your college choice doesn’t affect which lectures you go to. Your choice of subjects affects that but not your college. Lectures are typically an hour and you would have between about ten and twelve, sometimes a few more, lectures per week. So compared to school, if you compare it to the number of lessons you are used to having, that’s not actually very many. So you can see that that leaves you with many, many other hours in the day in order engage in your independent study. I have to say, if you were lectured for eight or nine hours a day you would be dropping at the end of the day. You couldn't possibly obtain that much information via the lecture format. So it’s really important that you get an introduction to an area via the lectures and that gives you a starting point to then launch you into your independent study.

Now, I’m going to spend a little bit more time talking about supervisions because they’re really special and really important. In Oxford they’re known as tutorials. A very special part of the Cambridge system. Now, supervisions take place in colleges, so if you apply to college X and you get into college X you may well receive your supervisions in your own college. Supervisions are small group teaching, two, three or four students per academic and they last for an hour. Now, if your own college doesn't have a fellow, an academic in a particular subject
that you’re taking you may well go to a different college just to get your supervisions and it’s very, very normal to go to all sorts of different colleges for your different supervisions. Whilst I am based at one college I do supervise for lots of other different colleges. The students come to me in my office at my own college and that’s very, very normal.

Now, the idea of a supervision is that your supervisor for a particular subject will give you a reading list, give you some questions, maybe give you an essay to write ahead of the time and then you will go to your lectures, you will do your independent study, you will think about the questions, you will write your essay, you will discuss things with your fellow students and then you come to the supervision as an expert and then you sit down with your supervisor and the other students and you become more of an expert. So the idea isn't that you're going to learn things for the first time in the supervision, you're going to enhance your understanding of an area. Now, there sometimes will be situations where you just really haven't understood the law. The law is so complicated that the supervisor will then help you through towards understanding it, but sometimes the law is much easier and the time is better spent in a supervision engaging with the policy debates. Is it in a good state? What if we changed that? What if this were to happen in life? How should the law adapt to that, etc, etc.?

So the nature of a supervision can really vary depending on which particular legal topic you are looking at and I have to say supervising is one of the joys of being an academic and I think of being a student in Cambridge, you can ask the students yourselves for their opinion, but it’s a real chance to really engage with each other and with the supervisor. I have learned as much from my students as they imagine they have learnt from me. So they have asked me some of the most penetrating questions that have actually led me to research novel points in my research. So it's certainly not a one-way dialogue, it's far from that, but I’m sure you can find out a bit more about supervisions by asking the students that are here today. As I’ve said, you will typically have an hour-long supervision and for each subject you do you will have one per fortnight. So you have got a whole two weeks in which to prepare. You will be preparing other subjects at the same time but that’s the kind of lead-in time. So you will go to the lectures, you will get your reading list, you will do the reading, then you will go to the supervision. That’s generally the order in which it works and it amounts to having two or three supervisions a week, broadly speaking. Now, that’s the sort of broad teaching style.

If we now get into the finer details of what this actually shapes out like in a student's life. Now, as I have already said, our degree is a qualifying law degree. It gives you the tick in the box, in the academic box, if you want to go on and qualify as a lawyer. To be a qualifying law degree we have to offer you seven foundation subjects. You need to do all these seven subjects to become a qualified lawyer so we do have these subjects as part and parcel of our law degree, not all in the same year. As you will see, I will show you how they are broken down, but you must do all these seven subjects. You have options on top of that. If you were to do a conversion course, so a different degree first and then a conversion course, you would do all seven pretty heavy subjects in one year which would give you a kind of whistle-stop tour of each of these seven subjects. You’d do what you need to do but with not much space to breathe, not much space to think around them.

So how do we structure the course? I think the headline point in terms of the structure is, as you know, it’s a three-year law degree. You do four-and-a-half papers in your first year, five papers in the second year, as you will see in a moment, five papers in your third year. The most important point to take away and what’s quite unique about the Cambridge system is that you are examined at the end of each year. So in May/June each year you will have exams on the
relevant year’s topics. So at the end of your first year, exams, end of the second year, examined on your second-year papers, etc, etc. Now, what this means is that you have the summer completely and utterly off. We have no expectations of our students over the summer. So if they study tort law in their first year, as you would do if you are a student here, you will not be examined on tort law again beyond May/June of your first year. So just something to think about. It’s a heavy first year, heavy second year, but the summer is definitely all yours.

Now, the subjects in bold on this slide are the compulsory ones, so the foundation subjects. So in your first year you do three of the foundation subjects. Tort law, which is generally speaking when one person harms another, can the person harmed sue the other? Motorbike accident, for example. Very, very important area of law. Constitutional law. Very, very topical in the light of the referendum, etc, and Scottish independence quests. Criminal law, I think it’s as it sounds. Criminal law, you will look at some of the major offences and some of the theories of criminal law. So what does it mean, what do you need to show in order to commit a criminal offence and, in particular, you would look at murder, homicide, sexual offences, theft and some others.

Now, the one that might take a little bit more explanation is civil (Roman) law. We call it “civil law” but it is actually the law that the ancient Romans practised. We’re talking about the first two-and-a-half centuries AD. This is a compulsory first year subject. It wasn't on the foundation list of seven subjects we saw earlier but in Cambridge it's compulsory. So you might be wondering why is this ancient subject compared to these modern subjects compulsory and one of the answers is that the Romans were very, very good lawyers. Their legal system is excellent. It’s definitely worth studying because it puts you into a very good position in terms of knowing the basics and once you know the basics, like the grammar of law, you can then use those basics in order to pick up other legal subjects more quickly.

So we think it gives you a very, very good grounding right at the start that helps you become a better lawyer as you go through the degree, and also because the Roman society was itself quite small, Roman law is itself quite small. So you study basically the whole of Roman law as one of your first year four papers. If you studied the whole of English law I’m not sure you would do it in your lifetime actually, so the idea that you can study a whole course in one year, as a quarter of your year, is actually quite special and well worth doing. The fifth subject you do is a half-paper and it’s an essay: legal skills and methodology. You are asked to write an essay that is marked on a pass/fail basis which you hand in around Easter time. The other papers are properly graded. So that’s the first year. The second year, as I said, you step up to five subjects.

Once you’ve learned the ropes of being a law student you are thrown into five subjects. Here you do two compulsory subjects, contract law, land law. They are in bold. Land law is one of the subjects I teach. Then you have three options. I will come back to the options in a moment but we do have a wide range of options, which I think is really good. So you can really choose what you think you will enjoy and also what you’d be good at. In your third year you would study equity, the law of trusts, EU law, still a compulsory subject. Obviously, has some very topical topics within the course at the moment, and then again you have three options, a lot of choice in your second and your third years. Just thinking back to that first year, you will be studying criminal law, tort law, constitutional and Roman law as well as writing a dissertation.

I won't go through all the details on that slide but what I thought it might be useful for you to see is a typical first year timetable. Now, again, this doesn't look anything like what you are used to school, I imagine. The lectures are in light blue at the top. So you can see here that you would
have two to three lectures a day. Lots of white time, lots of time when you’ve got no formal contact with anybody. Now, that isn’t a chance to go shopping or to a coffee shop. You might go some of the time but that is when you would be doing your independent study. So, for example, on Monday between eleven and twelve there is a free period. You could go up into the Square Law Library, the lovely light spacious area you’ve seen upstairs, and crack on with some of your supervision reading. The dark boxes at the bottom are when your supervisions might typically be. So in the first year the lectures are typically in the morning.

Supervisions, typically, in the afternoon, sometimes in the evenings, and so you can see roughly how your time might be split. So hopefully that gives you some idea. Now, what isn’t on this is the extracurricular activities you might want to engage with. Law is a hard, time-consuming subject, but there is time to do other things and we encourage that because it helps to give you a more balanced life. So you’ve just got to work in where you can fit in your extracurricular activities, whether it be music, drama, etc, sport.

Now, if you want to find out about a day in the life of a first-year law student we produced a video a few years ago where three first-year students at one of the colleges were given a camcorder and took it round with them for a day. I would have a look at this if you are interested. It is quite a revealing video. We chose a nice spring day in order for this to take place but it happened to snow on that day. We chose a spring day so it would show Cambridge at its beautiful sunny best but it is snowing when you look at this video, and that’s on our website, the ba.law website. Now, just coming back to the second year, as I have said, you have to do contract law, we have to do land law.

Here are some examples of some of the optional papers, because you have three options. A lot of these are very popular. Those who like history might choose to do legal history, purely looking at the history of certain legal topics. Other popular options are family law. International law is a very, very popular option. Jurisprudence, the philosophy of law, also a very, very popular option, but you can see all the options there. If you really like Roman law one you can do Roman law two, also known as “civil law 2” here, or human rights law which is a relatively new addition reflecting the increasing importance of human rights rules. In the third year you have an even bigger choice. You have to do equity, you have to do EU, but then you have three choices.

Now, the reason you have more choices is because whilst you have got three optional subjects to choose from or to pick, one of those options could be writing a dissertation. Quite a lot of our students choose very successfully to write a dissertation. It’s something they really enjoy because it’s something they haven’t had a chance to do before in this law degree and they write a dissertation on a very narrow area of law which they can really, really go to depths of. So you choose a topic of your dissertation from this box on the right in one particular area. It could be public law, law in ethics of medicine, etc, you can see. Now, the very left-hand column are some of the optional full papers you could choose in your third year. Intellectual property, copyright, trademarks, etc, company law, commercial law.

The middle column is yet another type of option. In your third year you could replace one option with two half-papers and that middle column is a range of half-papers you could choose from. So this is where your choice gets ever bigger. Banking law, legal and political philosophy, civil procedure; you can see the list there. Now, this can change from year to year slightly but this is a good example of what’s on offer at the moment. I said that the typical law degree is the three-year law degree I have already talked about but I will just spend a couple of minutes talking
about alternative course structures. Now, some of you may be thinking of doing an Erasmus year, which means a year at a European university. In Cambridge you have to go, or you can only go, rather, to one of our partner universities in Europe. So we’ve got an exchange with Poitiers in France, Regensburg in Germany, Madrid in Spain and Utrecht in the Netherlands.

Now, if you go, as you can see from this slide, you go in your third year and then you come back into what would now be your fourth year into what would normally have been your third year. So you are basically breaking your three-year law degree in two by inserting the Erasmus year, as you can see on this slide. Now, a few bits of information. First of all, at all of these universities, apart from the Netherlands, the courses are taught in the native language so you have to be proficient in French, German or Spanish if you want to go and study law at one of those universities. Studying law is hard enough, studying it in another language is one step further, so you need to be proficient for your own sake, but in the Netherlands the courses are taught in English so if you haven’t got another language, that might be worth thinking about. Second key point, you don’t have to apply for the Erasmus year now. So there isn’t a separate course code. You apply for straight law. If you’re interested in the Erasmus year you apply for it at the beginning of your second year. So emails are sent out when the application time comes around so you don’t need to worry about it now, in other words. People are interviewed and typically they are interviewed in the native language just to check their language skills are good enough, but not for the Netherlands.

So that’s the Erasmus option. It’s a very good option, very, very good option and people typically really value having studied law in another country and, more importantly, having absorbed a culture of another country before then coming back and normally doing very well in their third year having had that extra year of legal study. Now, the other option, the other alternative course structure probably doesn’t apply to many of you but if you have already done a degree or if you are in the process of doing a degree elsewhere, and you are thinking of doing a second degree in law, then you could think about applying not for the three-year law degree but for the two-year senior status degree. That means you’ve already got a degree. If you do this, this is what the first and second years would look like. You do all seven subjects across the two years leaving you with three options, one in the first year, two in the second year. This gives you all of the foundation subjects and means that you get the academic part of qualifying as a lawyer. So this is something to think about if you have already got a degree.

It is also worth mentioning that at Cambridge it is possible technically to swap from one subject into another. So, for example, this isn’t the only example, if you are really interested in history and you apply for history and get in for history, you might think halfway through your history degree, “I really want to start studying law instead.” Now, it is sometimes possible to go to the relevant law fellows at your college and ask them if you can switch into law. If you switched into law from another subject you would then do two years, typically two years of law and it would look like this. So you might do two years of history and then two years of law. Now, this is technically an option but it’s not something that can ever be guaranteed so if you apply for history that is what you are guaranteed to be studying.

If you want to switch into another subject it’s up to you to persuade the college that that is something that you should be doing and typically the college would interview you just as they would if you were applying for the first time to make sure that you are up to standard as a law student. So it’s not a guaranteed option at all but it is something that some of our students do. So something perhaps to talk to the college you are interested in applying to to see what their
thoughts are on changing into law. What it does have the merit of doing is giving you a chance to study one thing and then studying law academically and not just doing the conversion course in a rushed year. So that’s something a few of our students do. Finally, I don’t think there is much more to add other than why would you do law at university rather than as a conversion course? Well, here are a few other answers to that question. It can save you time and money. You do three years of studying law, not three years of studying something else and then a conversion year that adds a year and it adds expense. Spending more time studying law gives you more time to specialise so you have more options. You can choose areas of law that you wouldn’t otherwise be able to do on a conversion course. It gives you more chance, more opportunities to meet potential employers and to do work experience.

So those are just some thoughts for you. It’s completely up to you but I hope this has at least illuminated that step that you are thinking about taking into studying law at university and hopefully it’s a step that might appeal, but I wish you all the best, all the best of luck and I hope you enjoy the rest of the afternoon. Thank you.