Okay, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ali Lyons and I work here at the Faculty of Law. I am working on events and information for potential future law students like yourselves and I'm just going to give you a little bit of a breakdown of the application process if you choose to apply to study law at Cambridge.

So to start with, this is just an overview of the whole process. I'm guessing you guys are hovering around number one and number two, thinking about firming up your course choice and deciding about a college to apply to and this will run you all the way through the decision process in January and I'll also talk a little bit about what it is we look for in an application and what you can do as an applicant to make the strongest possible application.

So the first step is to choose your course. I'm guessing that, since you are here, you are at least interested in law. You may be a hundred percent decided on that or you may still be thinking about it a bit, but regardless, I would definitely suggest that you take the time outside of the classroom to dig into some of your academic interests and read a bit more, study a bit more about law and this is particularly important for law because most of our applicants will never have studied law in a classroom setting before and so if only for your own purposes, to try and figure out is this a subject you could really enjoy and love doing for three years, it's a really good idea to do some of that independent exploration.

The next step is to choose which college you are going to apply to. So at Cambridge, the university itself is made up of 31 different colleges and each college is its own slice of the university. For you as a student, what this will is that your college is the one that provides your accommodation and your dining hall, so it's where you sleep, it's where you eat, it's where you'll make a lot of friends. You'll also probably do a lot of maybe sport or social activities through your college or go to events and things and the colleges are also responsible for your academic and pastoral care through people who are employed through the college to help look out for you along your way at Cambridge. This is in contrast to the university itself, so the university is the one that determines the structure of the course that you're going to study here. The university sets the lectures and sets the exams and it's from the university that you eventually get your degree. So what that means is, regardless of what college you're studying at, if you're a law student you'll take all the same lectures and have the same courses available as any other law student. You'll sit the same exams and you'll finish with the same degree.

With that in mind, what should you be looking for when you're trying to pick which college to apply to? So choosing a college to apply to is really your chance to be able to say which
community you would most like to be involved in at Cambridge, so what that means is you should be thinking about things like do you want to live in a really big college with a lot of hustle and bustle and really big grounds and lots of facilities or would you rather live in a small college that's a much tighter community where you might get that chance to get to know every single other person in your college? Would you like to be right in the middle of town or would you rather your college was right next to the Law Faculty so that maybe you can just roll out of bed and into your 9am lectures if you're not much of a morning person? Those are all really important things for you to consider because this is really about all of the non-academic bits of your life while you're at Cambridge, what your community is going to be like. You do have the option to make an open application, which means that after you submit your application your application will be assigned to a particular college using an algorithm that we have and that means that, no matter what, your application will be processed by a particular college. You can absolutely make an open application if you look at all the different colleges and think, “I could really be happy at any of these,” but I would suggest you don't make an open application if either you have particular requirements as far as access or maybe specific learning disabilities, in that case you should definitely get in touch with the particular college so you can make sure that they have the facilities you need to meet your needs. I would also suggest you not make an open application in an effort to try and get in the easiest, basically. Choosing a particular college to apply to is not going to impact your chances of getting a place at Cambridge if you're a strong applicant. There is no college that's easier or harder to get into and we have a system in place that makes sure it doesn’t matter which college you apply to and I’ll talk a bit about that later.

I would also recommend you do not spend a lot of time trying to figure out which college is best for law. There really isn’t one. As I mentioned before, your core academic content is determined by the university so there might be colleges that have more law fellows or more law students but that doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re best for law. If you’re interested in trying to get a jump on figuring out which of these different colleges you might want to take a closer look at, I would recommend you get started with the Cambridge alternative prospectus which is a resource that’s written by current students and it gives a really nice informal feel for what the community is like at each individual college and that can be a good place to start because running this research on 29 different undergraduate colleges can seem like a lot to start with.

The next step is to check about any pre-interview assessments. So for law at Cambridge you do not have to take any pre-interview assessments but if you do choose to pursue a different subject then that’s something you’ll want to take a look at because you might need to register for that in advance. The next step would be you submit your UCAS application so the deadline for Cambridge for the UCAS application is 15th October and that’s just to give us a bit more time to interview you and to consider each applicant individually. A big part of your UCAS application is going to be your personal statement so this may seem really obvious but don’t lie on your personal statement. It’s not going to help you out at all if you say you’ve read a book that actually you haven’t. It’s really important for you to be open with us about your interests, about what you’ve done, partly because you might be asked about your personal statement in your interview so it’s a good idea to be prepared to talk about anything that you write there, but also because this is our way of getting to know you and we would really rather get to know the real you than some version of you you think we want to know.

That means that what we are really interested in is hearing about the ways you have explored your academic interests outside of the classroom, so we tend to call that super curricular exploration so that can be anything you do that enhances or helps you develop your interest in
law as a subject. So, for instance, attending the talks today, I’m sure that gave you guys some great ideas and great jumping off points for things about law that might interest you but that might also include things like reading books or following blogs, listening to a podcast, anything you do that furthers your academic interests. That’s in contrast to extracurricular activities which are anything that is not related to your academic interests, so things like sport and music. That doesn’t really factor into the application process at Cambridge. We know you will probably write about that in your UCAS personal statement because other colleges are interested, but it’s not something that’s going to be a big part of the Cambridge decision process.

The next step is that, after you have submitted your UCAS application, you’ll receive an email prompting you to fill out the SAQ, which is the supplementary application questionnaire, and this is just a Cambridge specific bit that we ask you to fill in a little bit of information that the UCAS application doesn’t ask for so that includes your AS marks if you have them, or topics covered in your A levels, but it also includes an optional additional Cambridge specific personal statement and that’s exactly what it says on the tin. It is optional. If you don’t feel you have anything to add that you haven’t already said elsewhere in your UCAS application, then by all means leave it blank. That’s not going to count against you, but if there is something that you would like to say that you weren’t able to say elsewhere, maybe something that’s specific to why you want to apply to Cambridge, the optional SAQ personal statement is a great place to put that and what I would suggest is that because the admissions tutor who is going to be looking at your application will read your UCAS personal statement back to back with your SAQ personal statement, I would suggest you write them together as well. That way you can make sure you’re not unnecessarily repeating yourself.

The next step is to do your admissions assessment. I mentioned that, for some subjects, this will happen before interview but for law we ask you to do an assessment that takes place at interview, so if your college invites you to interview they will arrange for you to sit the Cambridge law test. We don’t use the LNET here at Cambridge. We use the Cambridge law test as our admission test of choice and that is a one-hour long test where you answer one essay-based question. It will be on legal ideas but it’s not going to require you to have any prior knowledge of law. So the test is much more about seeing how you can articulate yourself in writing and how you can form a good argument and how you can structure an essay in a timeframe like this, so there are sample tests available online as well as a grading rubric and I would definitely recommend that you take a look at those and go ahead and try practising one to the hour time limit. Most of our students say that time crunch is the hardest part about the Cambridge law test.

The next step is if your college invites you to interview, that will happen in the first three weeks of December, and that means we ask you not to make any unbreakable commitments during this time so that you can be available to travel to Cambridge for your interview. Depending on the college that is processing your application, the interviews might look a little bit different. You might have one, two or three different interviews and they might vary in length. Again, with the interview as with the Cambridge law test, it’s likely you’ll be asked about legal ideas but it’s not going to require that you have any prior knowledge of law. So, for instance, you might be asked something nice and open-ended like what rights should animals have? How should those be different than the rights of humans? Or you might be given an excerpt to read either a few minutes before you come into your interview or while you’re sitting in your interview and asked questions based on that. Really how the interview is meant to work is it’s meant to be like a mini supervision, so it’s meant to give you the opportunity to practise this type of teaching that we have so central here at Cambridge so it’s a chance for you to sit down with someone who is
an expert in this particular field and have a discussion, have a little bit of a back and forth, and it’s our chance to see how you deal with that environment, if that’s a good way for you to learn, if you would be well-suited to the teaching style here at Cambridge. So that means we’re looking for you to be able to articulate your answers clearly, for you to be able to respond to a back and forth discussion, present your own opinions, defend your own opinions and maybe even change your own opinions if you realise you’ve said something that maybe didn’t make sense and you want to revise it. If you’re interested to know a bit more about how that whole process works for law, we do have a sample interview available online where we’ve asked a non-law student to sit down for an interview and that gives you a really good idea of the types of questions we might be asking.

Then the next step is that you will hear about decisions in January time, so you might be made an offer from the college that you originally applied to or you might be made an offer from a different college and that’s because of the pool system which is that system I mentioned earlier that means it doesn’t matter which college you apply to originally, you have an equal chance of getting in. So basically what happens is that if the college you apply to originally looks at your application and says, “Wow, this student is really impressive. They would be really great here at Cambridge but we just don’t have a place to offer them this year,” then they will submit your application to the pool which means that every other undergraduate college will have a chance to take a look at that application. The typical offer for law is A star, AA or equivalent and you can find those equivalences listed on the university website.

What information are we using to assess applicants? Basically, this is all the little bits that we picked up across this whole process so your academic record, your personal statement, your school or college reference, an extenuating circumstances form if that applies to you as well as your performance in interview and at the Cambridge law test and then a few bits of contextual information about your school and where you come from. With all of these different bits of information, admissions tutors will be basically trying to answer the one big question of if we give the student a place to come and study law at Cambridge will they be able to succeed and do really well on the course here? That means that we’re basically looking for the traits we think that successful Cambridge students have so in addition to really strong academic ability and potential, that also means your independent motivation to study your subject and your independent drive. A lot of the learning that goes on here is really going to be up to you as a student to push yourself and really get the most out of it as possible. We’ll also be looking for a good fit between the applicant and the course. What that means for law is that we’ll be looking to see you have the critical reading and writing skills that it requires to be a successful law student.

Finally, just to go into a little more detail about the super curricular activities that I mentioned before, so this can really be any activity that gets you thinking more about your academic interests so that might mean reading books, reading about legal issues in the news, attending events, attending your local court room, listening to podcasts or blogs or following a YouTube channel. Work experience is another potential way you might explore your interests but we do not require work experience here. We know that work experience is more about who you know than how interested you are in the particular subject so if it’s something you get, fantastic and I hope you get a lot out of it, but we absolutely do not require it. Then AG plus is another great option for some academic researches that are written by Cambridge academics, including some about law. With any of this, what we’re really looking for is not to see you’ve checked something off a list. It’s not about wanting to see you’ve read a specific book. It’s wanting to know what you got out of that experience, so what questions did you have?
you? How did you follow up on those interests? Did you maybe read a particular book and then think that was really interesting and find another book or article about that? We’re really looking for that drive and motivation there.

Finally, just to cover a couple of frequently asked questions, there is no minimum GCSE requirement whether that’s the number of GCSEs you have or A stars or As. There’s no cut-off there. We will look at your GCSE scores but there are no strict cut-offs. What is the most important part of an application? Believe it or not, there really isn’t one. We do look at all these different pieces and try and weigh them together to get a picture of you as a whole person. As I mentioned already, there is no college that is better or worse for law. Your academic life will be pretty much the same regardless of which college you’re at. The extracurricular activities that you can do to help your chances of admissions, again, that’s super curricular activities and absolutely if you can come up with something that wasn’t on that list that I just showed you that you think really helps you develop your academic interests, then there is still a case for it to count. It doesn’t have to be a pre-prescribed book that you read. Again, work experience is not required. If you do complete a work experience, we would be looking for you to show us what you got out of it again rather than you did it. What if you don’t know that you want to be a lawyer? That’s absolutely fine. We’re interested in your academic interests in law as a subject. If you want to take that interest after you graduate and become a lawyer, that’s fantastic, but if you’d rather take that interest and become a researcher or work in government or whatever you want to do with that, that’s absolutely fine. Then again what if I’ve never studied law? Many of our applicants have never studied law in a formal classroom setting. The degree is definitely designed to start you off from square one with that.

So just a couple of resources. These will all be in your booklets and your student packs you picked up but just to highlight our website and blog for prospective undergraduate students have a lot of fantastic resources available on there. Our Twitter feed for prospective students is also really great for giving you some suggestions for starting points for that super curricular exploration. Then finally, if you come up with any questions that you didn’t get a chance to ask today, feel free to email either the outreach email, that’s listed up there, will come to myself and one of my colleagues who’s an academic, or the ask a student email will be directed to a current Cambridge law student.

So with that, I will thank you all for your time and I will just ask for the parents to please get up and move into the next lecture theatre over so that we can have our parent Q and As and our student Q and As.