Summer Reading List
St Peter's College
Biologists 2020/21

Congratulations on achieving success in your results. That's really fantastic and I am really looking forward to working with you over the next four years.

Your first year at Oxford can be very difficult and the way you approach the subject will be very different from the way it is taught in school. The MBiol course is challenging, extremely demanding of your time and will require intellectual investment. This will culminated at the end of your first year with a set of public examinations – Prelims.

You will be better prepared for these challenges if you use your time wisely over the next few weeks. I provide some suggested reading. While these books may not be on your recommended reading for the first year course, they will, I feel, give you a very good foundation and frame of mind to ‘hit the ground running’ in the autumn.

General Introduction


You might like to read these books as we will discuss aspects of them during your first sets of tutorials.

Quantitative Studies

In contrast to popular belief, biology is a highly quantitative subject. It involves the use of statistics, the development of mathematical models and understanding their application. Many (if not most) first students are poorly prepared for and often very intimidated by the quantitative aspects of the course. This need not be the case.

If you spend some time this summer preparing yourself for this aspect of the course, it will be highly rewarding and pay dividends later! Toward that end, I highly recommend the following two books:


This book is highly recommended if you did not take A-level mathematics (and even if you did it is probably worth the time reading it!)


This is an excellent, highly readable introduction to the concepts you will have to master during your first year quantitative methods course. Make sure you attempt to do the problems at the end of each chapter.
I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for biologists to fully understand and use quantitative methods. The more time you spend now, the greater the benefits in the long-term...

Philosophy of Science

Lastly to prepare yourself to start thinking about science, I recommend you look through either or both of the following books:


It will be great to have you here at St. Peter’s and, I am looking forward to meeting you again and getting started on our intellectual pursuits. I hope that you are really excited about coming to Oxford. I will meet you in 0th week of Michaelmas term but if you have questions before then, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes

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