

## **ACADEMIC DIFFERENCES AT OXFORD INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Wycliffe Hall and the University of Oxford. One of the biggest shocks to those coming to Oxford from another country is the difference in the educational systems. Most of you, regardless of your nationality, will be used to the “American” system of University education. The “American System” has two semesters per year where the student signs up for 4 to 5 “three” or “two” hour classes that meet either two or three times a week for the whole semester. A syllabus is given at the beginning of the term outlining the reading assignments for each class, and the student is to go out and buy their books for those classes. One or two 2000-3000 word essays involving library research are also written during the term, and one or two exams are given during the semester. In short, the bulk of learning is focused on reading assignments (from books purchased for the class) and class meetings. Also, the class and semester end when you take your final.

The Oxford system, however, is different in many ways. First, you can seek different theology degrees that differ in content and work load. Most international students, especially those seeking to be ordained, will be choosing either the two-year Bachelor of Arts in Theology (BA) followed by the one-year Oxford Diploma in Ministry (ODM), or they will choose the three-year Bachelor of Theology (B.Th). These will be discussed in detail below.

Second, Oxford has three “terms” that make up the year. They are the “Michaelmas” (Fall; mid October - mid December), “Hilary” (mid January - mid March), and “Trinity” (mid April to mid June) terms. Oxford terms last eight weeks, but Wycliffe Terms are usually longer to accommodate Ordinand training sessions. Michaelmas Term is about 11 weeks, Hilary is about 10 weeks, and Trinity is about 8 weeks. All terms are separated by long breaks. There is no such thing as “summer school” or “Maymester”.

Third, the classes are graded differently. The grading scale is as follows:

First Class:	70% and above (i.e. “A”)
Upper Second Class:	60% to 69% (i.e. “B+”)
Lower Second Class:	50% to 59% (i.e. “B”)
Third Class:	40% to 49% (i.e. “C”)
Pass:	35% to 39% (i.e. “D”).
Fail:	34% and below (i.e. “F”)

The way your course is graded is also different from the “American” system. The different course are assessed differently, they too will be discussed below.

The individual courses are discussed below, but please read all the course descriptions. Relevant information for one course may be found in the other. Also, please review the information on the Wycliffe Hall and Oxford University websites for more information. Please review this information carefully and note the differences between each degree. This document was written to assist you in choosing the course that best suits your purpose and life as well as to familiarize you with the difference between the two academic systems. Choosing the wrong course may cause you stress or difficulty in the future.

## **BACHELOR OF THEOLOGY**

This degree was created by Oxford University to offer a course that provided theological and practical training for Christian ministry. As such, it is a favorite of those seeking to be ordained as priests or deacons. If you are an Ordinand or Postulant with a wife and/or family, this may be your best choice. Technically, this is an undergraduate degree, but it is also the equivalent of a Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) from an American university.

The course is structured as follows. The course usually has a set curriculum, so there is no need to sign up for classes. Your classes only meet one hour per week, and it is primarily lecture time. However, essay titles and reading lists are provided by the professors, and each of the four classes has two 2000-2500 word essays due by the end of the term. For the B.Th, this ends up being eight essays per term (i.e. one per week). No books need to be purchased for the class, and all of your reading for the essays is on reserve in the library. You will read between 80 to 150 pages per essay.

The majority of your classes will be at Wycliffe Hall, but you will also attend a University lecture or two outside of Wycliffe. These are lectures given by various members of the University of Oxford's Theology Faculty, and they are given in the "Examination Schools": a building on the High Street. This will either be in addition to a class, or it will count as your lecture and you will have a separate seminar to review your essays. You will not write any essays for the professors lecturing in Schools, but you will have to write on the topic of the lecture to a Wycliffe Hall professor. Let me give you an example to illustrate.

In the first Michaelmas (fall) term, you study Matthew's Gospel in your New Testament class. The lecture is given by an Oxford University Theology Faculty Professor in Schools once a week, and you will write two essays on Matthew's Gospel. The essay topics and review, however, will be handled by a Wycliffe Hall professor and not by the "Schools" Professor. In addition, the Wycliffe Hall professor that reviews your essay will also hold a seminar with others in your course to discuss the essays. In short, the essays and lectures are not handled by the same professor.

The BTh is evaluated by written exams and long essays. The short essays that you turn in during term are graded, but they do NOT count toward your final grade. They are only a means to prepare you for exams and for you to digest the material. The educational philosophy is that you will learn it better if you have to read and write about a topic.

For the classes graded by exam, you will only have one exam for the year. For example, you will have two terms of lectures on the New Testament, and you will take your New Testament exam at the beginning of the third term. As such, there are no exams before Christmas or Easter. For classes graded by long essay, your essays are the only grade for that class. Long essays are due before the beginning of the fall term, so you have the entire summer to work on them.

For more specific information about the classes, please check the course description on Wycliffe Hall's website.

### **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN THEOLOGY (BA).**

This is the standard Oxford University Course in Theology. It is a two year course (if you have a degree from another University), and it is focused mainly on academics.<sup>1</sup> If you wish to have some ministerial training, you can do an additional year taking a non-University Oxford Diploma in Ministry (ODM) course at Wycliffe Hall.

Compared to the BTh, you do have more choice in the BA. You can choose to do one of three tracks: Biblical Studies, Christian Doctrine and Philosophy of Religion, and Comparative Religions. Once you decide on a track, then your classes are somewhat set.

The majority, if not all, of your lectures are at the Schools building. Also, like the BTh, you must write essays on assigned topics that do not count toward your final grade. You will write approximately twelve 2000 to 3000 word essays per term. These topics are assigned by your Tutor (Professor), and you must present your essays to your tutors either alone or with two or three other BA students. The Tutor will then comment on your essay.

The BA is graded by written exams. These exams come at the end of your two year course. There are practice exams (known as "collections") throughout the two years, but they will not count toward your final grade.

Please see the course description on Wycliffe Hall's website for more information.

### **CONCLUSION**

I hope that this has helped you understand the differences between academic systems and degrees. As noted above, please review the information about these courses on the Wycliffe Hall website and Oxford University website for more specific details about them.

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<sup>1</sup> By "academic", I mean that you will not, for example, explore how the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. Rather, you will explore things like dating, authorship, and the theology of various books of the Bible. The approach can be a bit disconcerting at first, and a conversation with one or more professors before getting started would be worthwhile.