

THE INS AND OUTS OF YORK'S COLLEGIATE SYSTEM

[George Wood](#) shares his experience of York's college system

Thursday 22 August 2013

York boasts about its collegiate system, and with good reason. True, York's colleges don't play the autonomous, academic role you'd find in Oxbridge, but they can bolster and help define your social life and experiences of living in halls during your first year.

Making the decision of which college to choose when making your accommodation choices is daunting. Do you go for the party spirit of Derwent, or the relaxed, en suite elite air of Alcuin? Or perhaps you'd prefer living on the shinier land of Heslington East, York's newer campus? Last year, I was umming and ahing between Alcuin and James, two nice, safe choices for someone of a middle-class, southern background. I eventually plumped for Alcuin, buying into the en-suite eliteness and beautifully spacious kitchens, and had an incredible time living there.

But in reality, such a choice wasn't the be all and end all I made it out to be. Sure, living in an Alcuin flat meant I bonded quickly with those I shared a kitchen with, but slowly with others in my block. In Derwent and Vanbrugh, blocks and halls are organised in a way that it's easier to familiarise yourself with more people. Yes, Alcuin's social events tend to be quieter, more relaxed affairs than the ones I've witnessed in Derwent. And obviously there are the practical differences between colleges: en-suite or shared bathrooms, catered or non-catered, proximity to lecture halls, etc.

However, the informalities of York's collegiate system means you never have to restrict yourself socially. Especially when you start to settle down after freshers', you'll be making friends through societies and your course from all over the university.

So what does college life mean then, exactly? It's a framework for how you live your life at university. It's a place where you're going to eat for a year, do laundry for a year, and perhaps even work for a year (though don't always count on that!). It will be your home. Support comes through college welfare, through the student network of the Junior Common Room Committee (JCRC) and through your college's Dean, Provost or college tutors. Sports can be played at college-level regardless of skill or ability, and there's a friendly, less intimidating competitiveness that you simply won't find in other universities. Then, of course, there are the college socials, which are at the forefront of the freshers' week schedule and continue throughout the year.

College life for me meant making some fantastic friends who've been by my side from the drunkenness of Freshers' week to the anxiety of the exam period. As I enter my second year, I'll miss the uniqueness of block parties (and subsequently being reprimanded by porters to turn the music down), the chilled afternoons in the JCR watching films or playing video games, or the fact that I lived seconds apart from friends in other blocks.

Fortunately, I never had to make use of the college welfare, and apart from a very brief flirtation with volleyball, I wasn't so interested in taking part in college sport. I did, however, go to most of Alcuin's socials; their themed nights out may not be as loud and proud as other colleges' events, but they were

entertaining change from the average night out. York's RAG parade every year is college-orientated, and though we didn't win, I had a great fun marching around town as a cat. Alcuin's food nights, which ranged from celebrating Chinese New Year to simply the end of term, and exam refuge, which offered free toasties and coffee everyday during the exam period, were always winners in my eye (as a self-catered student, you'll find any free food is good food!).

Perhaps because York's colleges are so informal and friendly, college pride runs high. The differences between colleges are often minimal, but the feeling that you're part of a community makes your introduction to university life the more welcoming. Though moving out from my college this year means the collegiate system will play less of a role, forever I'll be Alcuin 'til I die.



2 COMMENTS

Ben

27 Aug '13 at 6:40 pm

The alternative view: most people don't really care about their college, but we've got to have them because it allows us to pretend we're more like Oxbridge.

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Leigh

27 Aug '13 at 7:08 pm

I tend to agree with George. Even back in the late 80s -before the newer colleges existed and with only one en-suite block in Alcuin- the college gave me a base and a 'first level' of friends with whom I could grow into the wider university. Ben's response was also something I heard back then but mostly from people lacking in imagination or unlucky enough to be in Langwith! Ever an Alcuin boy I still remember the friendly rivalry with those from 'the other side of the bridge.' Which was actually the entire university but we meant Langwith.

Go Alcuin.

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