



## **Thomas Telford Alumni Students - An insight into University Life!**

Name:

**Jack**

A Levels / BTEC Courses studied at TTS:

**Maths, Further Maths, Physics, English Literature**

What course and where are you currently studying:

**Mathematics at Smith College, in the United States**

1. What is the best part about student life?

**For me, the best part of being a student, particularly being a student in the US, has been the opportunity to live independently in another country. I have met so many people from all over the world and have had so many opportunities that I would not have had if I had stayed in the UK**

2. Are you happy with the course you have chosen, and what is the best part about it?

**I am mostly happy with the course that I have chosen. The best part of being a student in the US, particularly at a liberal arts college such as Smith, is the opportunity to take classes outside of your major. For instance, I am a math major but during my time at Smith I have taken classes in German, sociology, politics, computer science, physics, film studies, and even fencing whilst also getting a very in depth mathematical education. This has allowed me to become more well rounded as a student and has also allowed me to find new interests in subjects that I hadn't previously studied. As well, I have had the opportunity to do research with one of my professors for the past two years, which has been a great experience for me and particularly helpful as I begin to apply to graduate school.**

3. How much contact time do you have with course staff and lecturers?

**I take 4-5 classes per semester, each meeting for 75 minutes two or three times per week. So, on average I am in class for about 10-15 hours per week. On top of that, professors have lots of open office hours that are not mandatory but give people the opportunity to get more help if necessary.**

4. How have you coped with self-managed learning? How have you found the change from classroom work to more independent learning, such as attending lectures, managing your own workload, taking notes from lectures and writing assignments?

I guess my situation is a little different to students in the UK as I have found that most of my classes are structured more like what you would find at TTS than the stereotypical 100 students sitting in silence in a lecture hall. That being said, at college there is no outside pressure (other than your final class grade) to do any of the assigned work or actually attend any of the classes but I haven't really found it challenging to stay on top of work, especially as I have always chosen to take classes that I genuinely find interesting so it doesn't feel that soul-crushing when I have to wake up early for my 9:00 am class. Moreover, there is pretty much always a very regular schedule in each class so eventually doing the work is just part of your routine.

5. How much work do you have to do outside lectures? And are your lecturers there to give support. How well do you know your tutor?

For every hour of in-class time, we are supposed to spend 3 hours studying independently (note: I definitely don't think I spend that much time studying, this is just a general rule). In STEM classes, it is normal to get one problem set per week and possibly have some reading assignments from a textbook. It is also pretty normal for classes in subjects such as computer science or engineering to have group projects on top of the weekly assignments, and in all STEM classes there is at least one midterm exam (my current physics class has three midterms spread throughout the semester) and a final exam. In social sciences/arts/ humanities, it is normal to get reading assignments for each day of class that can range from 10 pages to 80 pages. As well, there are assigned essays or research projects throughout the semester.

Professors are always very available to give support to students and have multiple office hours per week where students can get as much help as they need. There is also peer tutoring support available through the Quantitative Learning Center and the Center for Writing, Teaching and Learning that any student can access for free. Each student also has a major advisor they can talk to; I know my advisor pretty well as he has been my professor for two classes at this point.

6. Do you have time to get a part-time job, either on campus or nearby?

I have two on campus jobs: I am a teaching assistant in the physics department, and a physics tutor for the Quantitative Learning Center.

7. Would you recommend joining as many extra curriculum activities as possible to get the most out of the student experience? What societies do you belong to?

I would recommend joining as many activities as you feel is necessary to slightly expand your comfort zone. I definitely wouldn't recommend joining every society or organisation possible as I think it can be overwhelming (especially as the things you join will probably email you many times per week). I am only a member of one society, the musical theater organisation, and this is enough for me to feel involved with the campus community without being overwhelmed by extra curricular activities, especially as I have two jobs and take a lot of classes every semester.

8. What has been the hardest thing about embracing university life?

**Honestly, the hardest thing about being a student at Smith has been the class dynamics on campus. Smith is an expensive, private university and therefore has a large population of students that come from very wealthy and upper middle class backgrounds. These students have a lot of resources available to them that lower income and working class students do not. They also definitely seem like the majority and they are often very unaware of their privileges. It can be hard for someone like me who definitely does not have that background to find community.**

9. What is living in Halls like? How safe do you feel?

**Living in halls is fine. The only thing I will say is that there are very few en suite rooms and most students have a roommate for at least the first year. I actually have had a roommate for all three years at Smith, and this is relatively normal. All on campus accommodation is catered though, which is very handy. The dorms are definitely pretty safe as you have to have a student ID to access them, and they do have a strong sense of community, which is nice.**

10. How often do you travel home? Has it been easy to get home when you have needed too?

**I travel home once or twice per year because flights are very expensive. It's definitely not easy to get home but it can be done in an emergency if necessary, especially as there is emergency funding available through the International Students Office.**

11. How do you manage money, and have you been able to budget well, or has money been tight?

**I definitely have enough money to live pretty comfortably thanks to a large scholarship and my two on campus jobs. It definitely helps that I don't have to pay for food or pay rent!**

12. What if you don't get on with people, and you don't want to join a drinking culture? What other clubs and societies are there?

**From my experience, there is always a wide range of people to meet at university and there is never pressure to be involved in a drinking culture. In fact, because the legal drinking age here is 21, it is against the college code of conduct to drink in common spaces or serve alcohol at college sponsored events (including at society events). However, that isn't to say there is no opportunity to drink and party if that's what you want to do, it just definitely isn't the main culture here. There is a huge range of societies to get involved with and finding people to connect with isn't as hard as it seems at first.**

13. Are there people you can talk to, who can help with stress and anxiety?

**The college has a well utilised but tragically underfunded counselling service that many students use to seek help with stress, anxiety, and mental health issues.**

14. Is there anything else you wish you had known when researching or selecting Universities? Or any advice you want to pass on to current students:

**I am lucky that I had a lot of resources provided to me when applying to universities in the US, but I know that not many people have that. So, if you would like advice or resources related to studying out here, please feel free to email me at [jkendrick@smith.edu](mailto:jkendrick@smith.edu)**

**Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. We appreciate your help!  
Best wishes for the future from all of us at Thomas Telford School.**