

From Widening Access to Widening Belonging



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About

I am a DPhil Anthropology Candidate at the University of Oxford, having completed my undergraduate studies at UCL and Harvard. My research project, currently titled '*Once You're In, What Makes You Stay? Do You Assimilate, Co-Exist, or Hide Away?*', examines how specific initiatives and programmes at elite institutions, such as the University of Oxford, promote a culture that champions various forms of diversity. Some of these 'structures' of particular interest include university-wide initiatives such as the Astrophoria Foundation Year programme and Opportunity Oxford, college-specific programmes, and student and alumni-run societies and organisations. I aim to explore how social anthropological insights from these '*institutionalised structures of advocacy*' can guide us from a narrow focus on widening access and participation, to a more holistic understanding of belonging and retention within elite institutions.

The principal investigator for the Diversity of Student Experience project, Dr Elizabeth Rahman, noted that some questions that emerged from the literature review for my DPhil upgrade exam align with the Diversity of Student Experience research project. Thus began the process of summarising and synthesising insights for this review, to help other researchers and practitioners in the widening access and participation space contextualise how current work fits within a historical backdrop. This review has benefited from feedback and suggestions from the outreach and admission's policy team at the university. I am currently in the fieldwork phase of my research, so despite my project's overarching intention to uncover insights on retention and belonging, this review focuses on access and participation, as precursors to belonging.

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Executive Summary

This paper weaves my pre-fieldwork PhD research with a panel discussion I chaired as part of the Diversity of Student Experience [Knowledge Exchange Forum](#) on October 6th 2023 at St John's College, Oxford.

The following abstract is adapted from my panel, 'Once you're in, how do you stay? Do you assimilate, co-exist, or hide away?', and serves to situate the review in a set of key questions:

Over the last 25 years, universities have been engaged in an ambitious journey to diversify participants in elite education. Through myriad schemes, programmes, and initiatives at both university and collegiate levels, historical admissions pipelines and monopolies have been disrupted, marking significant progress in fostering socioeconomic, geographical, and ethnic diversity, to name a few. While the conversation around access is still crucial, to sustain the intended impact, the discourse would benefit from paying more attention to the question of retention. That is, how do students experience and engage with the institution post-admission. To do this, the emphasis should shift from 'will they get in?' to 'will they stay?' In the context of Oxford, the kinds of questions we should start to (re)consider, (re)question, and pursue include: 'can these students from historically under-represented backgrounds call Oxford home?', 'what does it mean to truly belong at Oxford?', and 'what institutional if not also idiosyncratic processes and structures help to foster and facilitate notions of belonging at Oxford?'

Within the bulk of this paper, there are four key sections:

- **Section 1** briefly considers what makes Oxford an anthropological place of particular interest. This section could be considered a response to the question: why might it be important to focus on Oxford as a field site? It anchors this research as part of a continuous thread of scholarship originating in the 1960s that considers how ideas of belonging, integration, assimilation, and co-existence play out in the university's context.
- **Section 2** maps the history of widening access and participation to Oxford, starting with some failed attempts to modernise Oxford's admissions policy in the 1830s, up to the matriculation of women in the 1920s.
- **Section 3** documents an array of modern programmes and initiatives affiliated with the university's widening Access and Participation Plan covering 2020-2021 to 2024-2025. This section segments the various programmes into 4 categories: External Partnerships, Alumni and Student-Run Initiatives, University-Wide Schemes and Admissions Data, and Collegiate Infrastructure and Programmes.
- **Section 4** acknowledges the multifaceted progress Oxford has made. It also draws attention to the complicated and nuanced realities of

upwardly socially mobile individuals and the perils of this plight to 'climb the ladder'.

The aim of this review is to offer a summary of the earliest historical context behind Oxford's widening access practices for undergraduates, connecting the past to the present. It focuses on landmark milestones in Oxford's admissions history from 1854 to 1920, such as the admission of women and religious dissenters. Notably, the review mentions but does not focus on ongoing oscillations in the admittance of students from state and private schools. Independent commissions reviewing and critiquing the disparity in school-type admissions to Oxford started as early as 1922 with the Royal Commission and continued with reports such as the 1961 Robbins Report, the 1963 Hardie Report, the 1966 Franks Commission Report, the 1997 Dearing Report, and the 2016 Sutton Trust report. Comprehensive commentary on these commissions would require a separate review. Instead, this review uses the radical reformations that occurred between 1854 and 1920 to highlight various dilemmas related to widening access and participation. It also suggests that our next task should be to consider how we widen belonging. It strives to refrain from making any firm, premature claims, and instead references theoretical literature and poses questions that serve to shape my current empirical research.

Contextualising Widening Access and Participation

Section 1: A Brief Note on Oxford

While not all places are marked by their power, prestige, and politics, many places could be marked by their connection to identity-construction, relationship-building, and history-making. Given this, what makes the University of Oxford such a notable, potent, and generative anthropological place worth studying in relation to belonging?

Sociologist, Joseph Soares, offers some insight. He notes that “until the late nineteenth century, the University of Oxford was a pillar of the British state. Along with the monarchy, Parliament, and the Church of England, Oxford¹ was a branch of the governing establishment” (Soares, 1999, p. 5). Recent data suggests that even in the 21st century, the perennial connection between the university and pillars of British society, culture, and business has remained entrenched.

The Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission’s 2019 report, *Elitist Britain*, highlights the educational backgrounds of “those at the top of British society” (p. 2). It notes that nationally, only “1% [...] graduate from just two universities, Oxford and Cambridge”, yet Oxbridge graduates account for 24% of MPs, 36% of newspaper columnists, and 56% of civil servants (p. 4-5). This implies that Oxford and Cambridge, have maintained their positions and reputations as educational training grounds and conveyor belts for some of the most powerful and prestigious positions in British society. In a more recent report, *Parliamentary Privilege*, Erica Holt-White reports that “77 [current] MPs [approximately 12%²]” attended the University of Oxford for their undergraduate degree (2024, p. 7). Although Sir Keir Starmer was the first person in his family to attend university, his role as UK Prime Minister prolongs a perennial “trend of every Prime Minister who attended university (except for one, Gordon Brown) since 1937 having attended the University of Oxford” (ibid.).

If one believes that state establishments influence national practices, then what could a focus on Oxford teach us about British society? Is it possible that in understanding belonging at Oxford, we get closer to understanding what it means to be British? Does the interplay of exclusion, integration, assimilation, and co-existence at Oxford reveal something about their interplay on a national level? Such questions are tangential components of my broader DPhil, and for now, will remain mere percolating thought-experiments.

However, over the years, several scholars have considered belonging in relation to elite, higher education establishments. For example, Sheila Kitzinger (1960) pioneered the anthropological examination of the experiences of non-traditional students at Oxford. Kitzinger was specifically interested in how ‘coloured’ students at Oxford were positioned in relation to white students and how they had to navigate and negotiate parts of their identity to fit in. This research, in combination with Phillip Garigue (1953) and Alex Carey’s (1955) research on the experiences of Commonwealth students at London universities, sets the stage for a further exploration of the sociocultural elements that either help or hinder the integration of diverse groups into British society.

¹ ‘Oxford’ and the ‘University of Oxford’ are used interchangeably throughout the paper. Both terms refer to the educational institution.

² Based on a total elected MP figure of 650: <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/MPs> [accessed September 2024]

From Widening Access to Widening Belonging builds on these historical insights and more contemporary research on the relationship between elite, higher education institutions and belonging (Ahmed, 2012; Warikoo, 2016; Jack, 2019; Agbetu, 2021; Anyadike-Danes, 2021; Macdonald, 2021).

Section 2: The History of Widening Access to Oxford

In 1854, in the lead-up to what could be considered the University of Oxford's first significant admissions policy reform, the Protestant Dissenting Deputies petitioned that:

“These ancient institutions should be made conformable to their original intention as public schools for the instruction of the nation and also that they should be brought into accordance with the requirements of the present age” (Manning, 1952, p. 373).

The Dissenting Deputies were asserting several things: that Oxford reflects on who, to that date, had benefited from an Oxford education; that Oxford considers the aim and intention of knowledge powerhouses to disseminate information to the masses; and the responsibility and accountability such institutions have in remaining relevant to modern-day needs. Until this point in Oxford's history, those who were admitted had the following in common: racialised as white, wealthy enough to afford membership to an Oxford college, male-identifying, and a practicing Protestant. In earlier centuries, one condition for admission to Oxford was also consanguinity. George Drewry Squibb's *Founders' Kin* (1973), traces the connection between one's kinship tie to the founder of an Oxford college and one's associated birth right to admission. Returning to the 1854 Bill, before this date, the religious criterion was strictly enforced. Matriculates, that is those who were granted admission to Oxford at the undergraduate level, had to be devout members of the Church of England. To prove their allegiance, they had to “subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles upon matriculation” (Lund, 1978, p. 2) and pass the theological test.

The passing of the 1854 Bill, or the Oxford University Act 1854, allowed people of other religious faiths and even secular candidates, to matriculate at the undergraduate level. However, this was not the first attempt at reforming Oxford's admissions policy. In 1834, Protestant Dissenter and MP for Lancashire, George Wood, “introduced a Bill in the Commons to implement the petitioners' proposal to admit Dissenters to first degrees [at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge]” (Twaddle, 1966, p. 45). However, the Bill was rejected by the House of Lords. Nonetheless, the Dissenters' efforts to make university education, and more specifically the benefits of an Oxford education, more accessible did not go in vain; as outlined above, twenty years later, the Bill was passed.

Regardless of this relaxation of religiosity in 1854, it is worth noting that Oxford was still considered and critiqued as being “[a] preserve of the upper class” (Lund, 1978, p. 3). This is because tuition involved a strict affiliation with an Oxford college, and therefore the necessary wealth to afford the accompanying fees. Yet, change was on the horizon, albeit a fourteen-year horizon.

In 1868, the requirement to be attached to a college shifted slightly. That year, the formation of the Delegacy of Unattached Students allowed non-collegiate students, those not affiliated with an Oxford college, to matriculate. Non-Collegiate students were typically male students from more modest socioeconomic backgrounds who could not afford to live on campus (St Catherine's College, 2022). However, as we

will shortly encounter in the case of Iwakura, the Delegacy also “enabled wealthy mature students to [pursue undergraduate studies at Oxford] in a private capacity” (Millea, 2023, para. 8). Although records of Oxford’s undergraduate student profile in the 19th century do not appear to document statistics linked to religious affiliation and socioeconomic status, one might lend their imagination to how these policy changes may have materialised on Oxford’s campus. This also raises questions about how legible diversity was in the 19th century; put simply, I am left wondering how one may have communicated their secularity or relatively modest socioeconomic status. Would it have been through dress, decorum, habitus, accent, or maybe even (dis)comfort? Regardless, I imagine that the religious and socioeconomic diversity engendered through these structural evolutions, may have helped the University of Oxford work towards widening access and participation to broader demographics.

Five years after this shift in socioeconomic diversity, Oxford’s admissions policy took another remarkable turn. This turn would see Oxford move closer to admitting women and take a step in undergraduate ethnic diversity. In 1873, Mary Ward, Louise Creighton, and Mrs Max Müller – women’s education campaigners who were also the wives and sisters of Oxford professors - set up a scheme to educate women affiliated with the university. This scheme was called *Lectures For Ladies* (Howarth, 2000, p. 243). While these lectures were hosted on the university’s premises, at the Clarendon Building, the students, due to their gender, were not allowed to formally matriculate at the university until 1920. Alongside the launch of *Lectures for Ladies*, Annie Rogers, the descendant of a pedigreed Oxford academic family, was awarded an exhibition (scholarship) to two Oxford colleges based on her zenith performance in Oxford’s newly established Delegacy of Local Examinations. However, after Balliol and Worcester realised that Rogers was a girl, they rescinded the offer and instead gave it to a boy who “had come sixth on the list”.³ Following this, Rogers went on to become a renowned campaigner for women’s education rights.

In addition to the launch of *Lectures for Ladies*, it is inferred that in 1873, Oxford also admitted its first students not racialised as white. The emergence of two things: disrespectful and stereotyped caricatures, and segregated university record lists for those with non-Anglicised names, suggests that Christian Frederick Cole and Tomotsune ‘Tats’ Iwakura were the first, or among the first, recorded non-white students at Oxford. Cole, according to the caricatures and university alumni records, was a Black student from Sierra Leone who read Classics. Iwakura was from Japan and was the third son of the Japanese Prime Minister. The placement of Iwakura's name in Joseph Foster’s *Alumni Oxonienses*, a published register of all those admitted to the University between 1715 and 1886, gives an inkling of how Oxford, at the time, navigated ideas of integration, assimilation, and exclusion. Those without Western European origin names, a note that may have applied more to Iwakura than Cole, were recorded in the register using a “highly disrespectful categorisation” of “Indians, etc” (Millea, 2023, para. 10).⁴ Both Cole and Iwakura were non-collegiate students (i.e. St Catherine’s College). However, Cole later became a member of University College and Iwakura transferred to Balliol College.

These dates, starting in 1854 and running to 1920, trace the first recorded and significant milestones in widening access to Oxford for various under-represented and marginalised demographics. These landmarks signpost the incremental transformation of Oxford into a more latitudinarian establishment, a place that admitted candidates from various religious and secular backgrounds, different socioeconomic backgrounds, and different continents. These checkpoints show how

³ <https://www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk/this-is-st-annes/history/founding-fellows/annie-rogers/> [accessed January 14th, 2024]

⁴ <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/2023/06/20/oxford-and-japan-150th-anniversary-of-the-admission-of-the-first-japanese-student-at-oxford/>

Oxford started to successfully hold itself accountable to its original intention: to instruct and educate a nation representative of the modern age.

In the next section, we will consider Oxford's admission's data in a modern context. We will consider just how heterogenous and accessible Oxford is at present, in relation to ethnicity, gender, and proxies for socioeconomic status.

Section 3: Meeting Requirements of the Present Age – Oxford Admissions in the early 2020's.

The summarised version of the University of Oxford's Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020-2021 to 2024-2025⁵ notes the university's three strategic aims. These are: supporting attainment at school and widening access to higher education, improving admission rates to Oxford, and improving the attainment rates for good degree outcomes at Oxford. It then lists the twelve ways the university aims to achieve these. In thinking through my own audit and understanding of how Oxford approaches access and participation, I found it helpful to group initiatives and programmes into four areas: External Partnerships, Alumni and Student-Run Initiatives, University-Wide Schemes and Admissions Data, and Collegiate Infrastructure and Programmes. Below, I elaborate on these groups and offer some examples.

External Partnerships

I define external partnerships as collaborations between the university and independent organisations. These partnerships typically focus on driving specific yet intersectional components of diversity which can include geographical location, ethnicity, or socioeconomic diversity. Two examples of these external partnerships include IntoUniversity and Target Oxbridge.

IntoUniversity is a UK charity that offers learning centres across the country that address underachievement and social exclusion among young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. These centres curate programmes focused on coaching, raising aspirations, out-of-school study, and mentoring. At present, IntoUniversity has 2 centres affiliated with Oxford. Since 2014, IntoUniversity Oxford – Southeast centre, has partnered with the University, Christ Church, and the Queen's Trust. In 2016, IntoUniversity launched its North Islington centre. This centre receives funding from Wadham College, Oxford.

Target Oxbridge, born out of Rare Recruitment, is a programme focused on helping students of African and Caribbean heritage gain admission to Oxbridge. In 2022, for its tenth year-anniversary, Target Oxbridge announced that it had helped over 350 students gain admission to Oxbridge.⁶

Alumni and Student-Run Initiatives

These are outreach programmes run by alumni or current students. These initiatives aim to make the University of Oxford more accessible to students from specific demographics. Two examples of these initiatives include: The Oxford African Caribbean Society Annual Access Conference and Zero Gravity.

⁵ https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/academic/documents/media/2022-07-25-14-01_10007774_oxford_university_app_summary_plan_july_2022_final.pdf [accessed July 19th 2024]

⁶ <https://www.rarerecruitment.co.uk/news/target-oxbridge-celebrates-ten-years-of-success> [accessed January 15th 2024]

In 2013, the Oxford African Caribbean Society launched the Annual Access Conference. This is Britain's largest access conference for Black state-school students of African and Caribbean heritage. The conference aims to help students of African Caribbean heritage consider Oxford as a viable and attainable higher education option.

In 2018, an Oxford graduate, Joe Seddon, launched Access Oxbridge, a digital mentoring platform to help low-income students. In 2020, the organisation expanded its remit and offering; and rebranded to Zero Gravity. Zero Gravity aims to help students from low-opportunity backgrounds gain admission to top universities and careers.

University-Wide Schemes and Admissions Data

I define university-wide as internal programmes founded at the university. These programmes are centralised and operate at the institutional level. Some examples of these kinds of programmes include:

- the UNIQ Summer School: Oxford's university-wide access programme for UK, state-school students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and under-represented geographical locations. It combines online course preparatory materials, with admissions support and an in-person, subject-specific, residential summer school
- the Astrophoria Foundation Year programme: a fully-funded foundation year course for UK, state-school students who have significant academic potential and have overcome a range of severe personal disadvantages
- Opportunity Oxford: a pre-university academic programme set up to prepare UK students who have already received an offer from Oxford and who come from under-represented backgrounds
- Oxplore: a free digital learning platform aimed at 11–18 year-olds from various backgrounds that engages learners in key skills such as critical thinking and argument-building

This is a selection of the available university-wide programmes. This list aims to offer an insight into how Oxford is tackling and institutionalising access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in 2024.

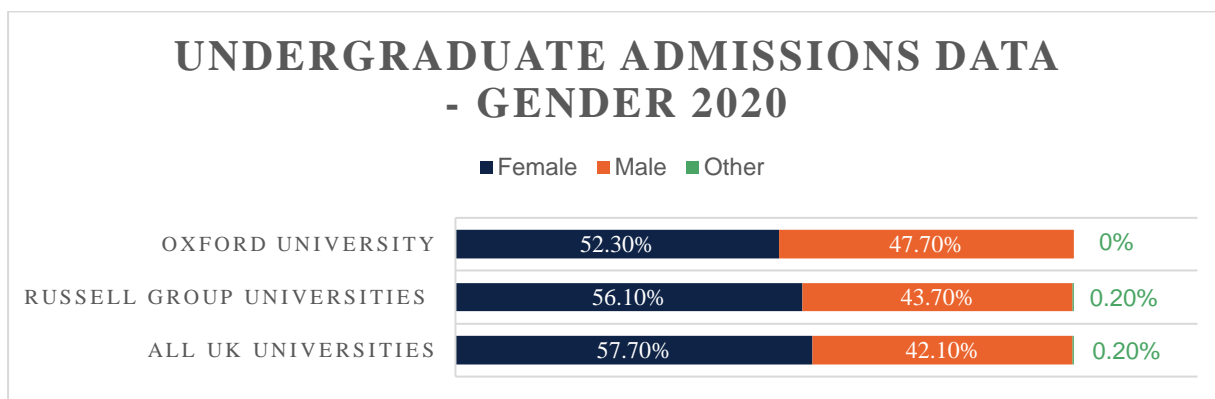
Another significant way that Oxford institutionalises access is through how it records various points of data about its student demographic. In the next sections, I summarise open-access data from Oxford's admissions website related to gender, ethnicity, and school-type diversity. It is worth noting that the admissions data between 2020 and 2022 has been impacted by COVID.

Admissions Data - Gender

Below is a statistical breakdown of Oxford's admissions data focused on gender diversity. For the year 2021⁷, the data suggests that the proportion of female students at Oxford is slightly lower than that at all UK universities and Russell Group universities.

⁷ At the time of writing, this is the most recent year at which all data pertaining to all variables is available.

Figure 1: Breakdown of UK undergraduate admissions data based on gender (2020)⁸



Admissions Data - Ethnicity

On the following page is a statistical breakdown of Oxford’s admissions data focused on ethnic diversity across White students and Black and Minority Ethnic students.⁹ The data suggests that for the year 2020, the proportion of BAME students at Oxford is higher than that at Russell Group universities outside London, but lower than Russell Group universities in London and all other UK universities.

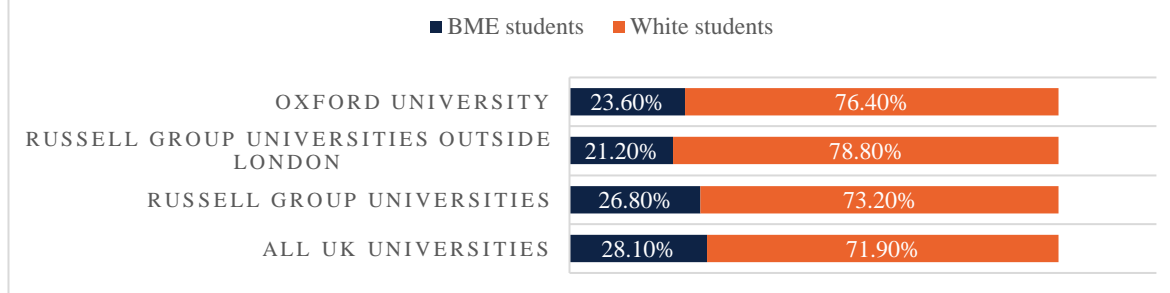
Figure 2: Breakdown of UK undergraduate admissions data based on ethnicity (2020)¹⁰

⁸ To offer a direct comparison across the same period of 2020, I used the data from https://public.tableau.com/views/UniversityofOxford-AdmissionsStatistics2022Gender/Gender?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:showVizHome=no [accessed October 2023] and <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-students/current/gender> [accessed October 2023]. The graphs listed on the Oxford Admissions website compare one set of data from 2020 with another set of data from 2022.

⁹ According to Oxford’s website, UK-domiciled Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students include those who indicate in their UCAS application that they identify as Black (including African, Caribbean and other Black background), Asian (including Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and other Asian background), Mixed Heritage (including White & Asian, White & Black African, White & Black Caribbean and other Mixed background), Arab or any other ethnicity except White

¹⁰ To offer a direct comparison across the same period of 2020, I used the data <https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/AnnualAdmissionsStatisticalReport2023b.pdf#page=22> and <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-students/current/ethnicity> [accessed December 2023]. The graphs listed on the Oxford Admissions website compare one set of data from 2020 with another set of data from 2022 [accessed December 2023].

UK UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS DATA - ETHNICITY 2020



Below is a statistical breakdown of Oxford's admissions data focused on ethnicity. The data suggests that between 2018 and 2022, there has been a steady, year-on-year, increase in the proportion of BAME students admitted to Oxford, within the total number of those with UK resident status.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Oxford's admissions data based on ethnicity (2018-2022)¹¹

	BME Students			White Students			BAME proportion of total UK students admitted ¹²
	Applications	Offers	Admitted	Applications	Offers	Admitted	
2022	4,610	773	708	9,119	1,952	1,835	27.8%
2021	4,254	670	648	9,408	2,049	1,987	24.6%
2020	4,024	706	684	9,509	2,293	2,214	23.6%
2019	3,596	669	558	9,583	2,306	1,978	22.0%
2018	3,097	551	457	9,048	2,305	2,045	18.3%

Admissions Data – School type

On the next page is a statistical breakdown of Oxford's admissions data focused on school type. The data suggests that between 2018 and 2020, there was a steady, year-on-year increase in the proportion of state-school students admitted to Oxford. The data also suggests that between 2020 and 2022, the proportion of state-school students admitted to Oxford has decreased slightly, year-on-year. This is due to the changes in the ways that A Level grades were awarded in the period 2020-2023.

¹¹ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-students/current/ethnicity> [accessed December 2023]

¹² Excluding students whose ethnicity status is not declared

Figure 4: Breakdown of UK applications to Oxford, offers made, and students admitted based on school type (2018-2022)¹³

	State			Independent			State proportion of total UK students admitted ¹⁴
	Applications	Offers	Admitted	Applications	Offers	Admitted	
2022	9,965	1,851	1,678	3,855	815	785	68.1%
2021	9,608	1,829	1,760	4,104	833	819	68.2%
2020	9,411	2,021	1,937	4,060	902	886	68.6%
2019	8,914	1,908	1,557	4,403	1,050	942	62.3%
2018	8,207	1,789	1,502	4,265	1,069	981	60.5%

This statistical admissions data is a regulatory requirement as part of the Access and Participation Plan. It serves as a helpful metric to keep the university accountable to its widening access and participation aims. Such data contextualises and benchmarks Oxford’s progress at both the nationwide level and Russell Group level.

Collegiate programmes and Infrastructure

I define collegiate programmes and infrastructure as college-backed and funded initiatives, scholarships, and even physical buildings. Below is a selection of the undergraduate focused programmes that fit this remit:

- Christ Church Horizons
 - for Year 10, 11, and 12 pupils who attend state-schools in the London Borough of Barnet
- Exeter Plus
 - a residential ‘bridging programme’ for incoming first-year undergraduates
- Hertford's Next Steps Essex
 - for students from non-selective state-schools in the local authorities of Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock
- Pathfinders: Lincoln’s Flagship Access Programme
 - a 3-year continuous programme for year 9 pupils eligible (or previously eligible) for free school meals
- St John’s Inspire programme
 - for pupils from Primary to Year 13 from non-selective state-schools in the London Boroughs of Harrow and Ealing
- The Locke Access Centre at Wadham College
 - a purpose-built hub for Wadham's extensive school outreach work
- The AJ Tracey Fund at St Peter’s College
 - set up to support and empower the Black student experience at Oxford

This is not an exhaustive list; other programmes exist across Oxford colleges. The selection above offers insight into various programmes, scholarships, physical structures and initiatives across Oxford colleges that support various forms of diversity.

¹³ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics/undergraduate-students/current/school-type> [accessed October 2023]

¹⁴ Excluding students whose education cannot be classified as either state or independent.

In this section, we have considered the four categories I use to make sense of Oxford's multi-pronged approach to access and participation. Across External Partnerships, Alumni and Student-Run Initiatives, University-Wide Schemes and Admissions Data, and Collegiate Infrastructure and Programmes, we can see how different parts of the university strive to make Oxford accessible to students from under-represented and marginalised backgrounds who may not have otherwise considered Oxford as a viable and attainable higher education option.

While it is important to acknowledge and celebrate this remarkable progress in widening access and participation, we must also consider how formerly under-represented and marginalised people fare once they arrive at said host institution. The data above focuses on admission but does not leave us with any insight on retention.

One of the seminal scholars on social mobility, John Goldthorpe, suggests that the upwardly socially mobile have a seamless experience integrating into the host institution (Goldthorpe, 1980, p. 248). However, various scholars have wondered whether Goldthorpe's deduction captures the whole story, and if not, what lived experiences we might not be privy to. The next section unpacks some of these.

Section 4: The Negative Consequences of Widening Access – What Is Overlooked?

It is important to note that I see the critiques that follow as invitations to key stakeholders to consider the elements of integration, assimilation, and co-existence that we might otherwise take for granted.

In response to Goldthorpe's research, Friedman suggests that widening access and participation is a double-edged sword and aptly calls this the 'Price of the Ticket' (2014, p. 352). Here, he outlines the potential negative consequences of social mobility on one's cultural identity. His research suggests that the beneficiaries of widening access and participation do experience this process as stressful, often resulting in what he terms being "culturally homeless - dislocated from a recognisable cultural habitat, permanently caught with one foot in two different taste cultures" (ibid, p. 363). Scholars have also questioned what unique demands there might be on a widening access and participation student to shed parts of their heritage to appear more palatable to the hegemonic and dominating cultural attitudes within the host institution. This raises questions as to whether the formerly under-represented become part of the institution and find an authentic, perennial sense of belonging - and if not, why not?

Scholars have also suggested that active forms of exclusion such as racism, classism, and "strategies of condescension" contribute to alienation (Bourdieu, 2009, p. 124). They posit that these acts of exclusion delegitimise and destabilise the non-traditional students' grounding (Fanon, 1967; Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001; Meghji, 2017; Wellington-Lynn, 2020; Anyadike-Danes, 2021). One example of a strategy of condescension could be a peer's remark that a widening access and participation student only got admitted because of their 'diversity' as opposed to their academic potential. The potential underlying component of such remarks, that make them malicious, is how they question the recipient's deservingness and their right to belong at the elite institution.

Furthermore, existing research argues that while students from diverse backgrounds may have newfound access to elite university education, and the opportunity to benefit from some of its resources, there is still a “system of separateness” (Howarth, n.d., para. 1). This system renders the students “interlopers” (Howarth, 2000, p. 272) and members of the “parvenus” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 95) who are considered to have joined a group of “legitimate, i.e. hereditary, possessors of the [correct] manner, without being the product of the same social conditions” (ibid.).

The suggestion here is these students inadvertently experience the university in a way that is incongruous with the experiences of those whose presence is deemed more ‘legitimate’. This also conveys an implicit value judgement about which cultures are deemed valuable and worthy. Furthermore, the literature suggests that this experience may be exacerbated by some widening participation recruitment strategies that lead to ‘cream skimming’ (Thomas, 2001; O’Sullivan et al, 2019). This is when an institution admits the “most intelligent students from low socioeconomic status communities” (O’Sullivan et al, 2019, p. 556), without acknowledging or addressing the “societal and structural barriers which limit progression and aspirations” (ibid, p. 556). When these students struggle to cohere their newfound position of socioeconomic privilege with their former position of socioeconomic poverty, they are often blamed to be the ones at fault, rather than the host institution. The host institution defends itself by claiming that the students lack the required tools and skills to perform at the same level even when they are given the same opportunities as those from more affluent backgrounds. Such rhetoric is a key feature of the “deficit model” (Wilkins and Burke, 2015, p. 3).

The interplay of widening participation practices and the deficit model raises a question about the future of widening participation as a category. Per the title of the paper, perhaps we need to move on from institutions needing to solely widen the remit of who can participate; maybe it is the perfect time, if not slightly overdue, for us to consider the category of ‘widening belonging’. Without doing so, we risk the crude reawakening of ‘diverse’ students being in Oxford, but “not of Oxford” (Howarth in Brock & Curthoys, 2000, p. 272). Such phrasing was first used to describe what it would mean for women to study at Oxford in the early 20th century.

Loveday argues that by participating in higher education, students from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds are seen to be embarking on a journey to become part of the dominant and hegemonic student group at the institution by “acquiring these valuable forms of capital” (2015, p. 571). Goldthorpe describes this process as ‘embourgeoisement’, that is the working-class demographic’s craving for “respectability and enhanced social status which materialises in a willingness, indeed eagerness, to accept the bourgeois social values, lifestyles, and political ideas” (Goldthorpe, 1967, p. 12). During this process, Bourdieu suggests that “parvenus members” (1984, p. 162), people from humble origins who gain an elevated status in society, are faced with three options: to conform to elite decorum, reject the group’s requirement to conform and instead assert their difference, or create their own counter-culture that is a blend of various identities. However, some students are unable to exist so comfortably in both class groups, and some working-class students in HEIs (higher education institutions) were found to reject their working-class origins (Granfield, 1991; Hurst, 2010). These students treated the process of upward mobility through HEIs as an opportunity to align their identity with their destination class group. In order to succeed, such students turn away from the ‘values, lifestyles and self-images of their predominantly working-class and lower-middle-class friends and families’ (Brint and Karabel, 1989, p. 117).

However, it is important to note that while such insight is helpful in painting a picture of some experiences, we should also consider it a possibility that all students, regardless of how 'traditional' they are, have myriad realised and unrealised interests. If this is in fact the case, it might also mean that in gaining exposure to and pursuing different pastimes and extra-curricular activities, students are merely leveraging their agency. Should there be a ceiling or arbitrary parameters drawn around who can participate in what? If so, herein lies part of the problem. In dismissing or assuming that 'non-traditional' students must 'know their place', we risk reinforcing rigid archetypes and even fuelling stereotypes. Instead of a limiting rhetoric suggesting that those who exercise their curiosity are attempting to align or assimilate with a dominant class affiliation, we should ensure that students from all backgrounds have the tools and resources to engage in social, artistic, political, and creative endeavours that may not have previously been accessible.

Nonetheless, the 'victims' of 'embourgeoisement' have been ascribed various names such as "strangers in paradise" (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2009, p. 1104) and "space invaders" (Puwar, 2004). Other scholars have described the consequences of this phenomenon. These descriptions include "social and emotional disequilibrium" (Friedman, 2014, p. 358), the 'dissociative thesis' (Hopper, 1981), 'habitus clivé' (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 161), 'double consciousness' (Du Bois, 1903), and 'anomic suicide' (Durkheim, 1951). My undergraduate anthropological dissertation *'Cultivated Agency, Systematic Oppression: the fallacy of social mobility for Black men'* (2020) suggests that Black men can experience elite universities as 'anti-social' entities of 'non-mobility' due to the subtle cultural and structural edifices that mark them as out of place, regardless of their credentials. For example, one of my participants, a Black male student at Oxford, remarked that there was an incongruence between what he had access to and what he could participate in. He had completed his A Levels at Eton on a scholarship which covered all of his tuition and living expenses; however, post-Eton, he was "poor again". During our interview, he commented that he did not "make sense" at Oxford. He suggested that he did not have the same economic resources and disposable income as some of his Etonian peers at Oxford which meant that, although he had access to the same friendship groups and social activities, he could rarely participate fully or to the same extent as his peers. This was because some activities, such as an Oxford college summer ball, had a high entry cost that was the equivalent to several weeks' worth of grocery shopping.

While there were 'enrichment funds'¹⁵ available for other students from a low-income background, the fact that he had gone to a private school beforehand made him ineligible for these bursaries. Similarly, he reflected on how he attempted to join student-run societies for students from low-income backgrounds, but how in those spaces, there was often an "anti-private school" rhetoric that meant that he had to attempt to hide or downplay his private schooling background while also recognising that those experiences were a core part of what had shaped him and his perspective. Experiences such as this were commonplace among some of the people who participated in my undergraduate project and suggested that there was a class of people whose hyphenated identities: low-income, from an under-represented background in the UK, yet privately educated via a scholarship, were overlooked.

¹⁵ These refer to specific bursaries available to cover the costs of engaging in university-wide social events and activities such as the cost of membership to student societies, sporting equipment, or summer commemoration balls. My participant remarked that on average, a summer ball ticket cost £150.

Moreover, my research proposes that the anti-social component arises when these institutions become unfriendly and hostile places for some Black men through practices that question their presence, undermine their deservingness, and rely on harmful and negative stereotypes. For example, one of my participants at Cambridge was often asked for his ID card when he attempted to enter his college while his friends from other colleges, who were visiting, were not questioned. The data from this project suggested that some Black students at elite universities have a dichotomised experience at elite universities. On the one hand, some of these students had accrued social and cultural capital; they have the accolades, affiliations and networks to signal their 'respectability' in society, and in some cases, they even have the wealth. On the other hand, some of their experiences also tell a story of isolation, exclusion, and ontological uncertainty.

Building on this, it has been suggested that some of the various impediments to belonging include academic under-preparedness to some institutions' idiosyncratic teaching styles which can fuel feelings of culture shock (Pascarella et al., 2004), financial constraints (Oldfield, 2012; O'Shea, 2019), and complex management of identity or existing relationships (Waller, Bovill, and Pitt, 2011; Brine and Waller, 2004; Mannay, 2013). The latter point refers to what happens when there is a lack of unity between one's experience at an institution such as Oxford and 'back-home'. It might be possible that widening access creates life changing opportunities for formerly under-represented students. It might simultaneously be possible that gaining access is only half the battle, a measure which addresses statistical proportionality. The accompanying challenge once someone has access to a place is their socio-spatial experience of belonging, isolation, and disempowerment. If access and participation address the issue of under-representation, belonging addresses the issue of retention.

Conclusion

Since starting the DPhil in October 2021, I have been thinking through the difference between several elements related to my project. I have considered the difference between access, participation, and belonging; the difference between admission and retention; and the difference between under-representation and marginalisation. Throughout the editing phase, these questions became even more confronting, particularly the difference between under-representation and marginalisation. What has become a fruitful thought for me is how marginalisation appears to consider the socio-spatial experiences of isolation and disempowerment, something to which belonging could serve as an antidote. The other, under-representation, appears to consider the experience of statistical proportionality, to which access and participation might be the antidotes.

Nevertheless, the period 1854 to 1920 marked a stark shift in Oxford's admissions policy and saw the university widen its student demographic population to include Anglican dissenters, students of modest income backgrounds, students from Sierra Leone and Japan, as well as women. Fast forward to the 2020s, the university's widening access and participation practices can now, after further years of commissioned reports and campaigning for equity, be considered to operate at various levels. The data in this review suggests that Oxford continues to address the issue of under-representation. Still, if access is only part of the equation, retention is the rest of the equation which leads me to the core of my empirical research: 'Once You're In, What Makes You Stay? Do You Assimilate, Co-exist, or Hide Away?'. This

raises a question for all stakeholders involved in making Oxford not only a place that represents people from various backgrounds, but also retains them. More than ever, I am committed to anthropologically teasing out what kinds of 'institutionalised structures' advocate for different forms of diversity and help students recognise that their unique identity is an asset to be honed and cultivated. If Pierre Bourdieu was right, and 'institutional structures' carve out the potential to endorse, validate, and legitimise various marks of diversity, how do these structures either help or hinder the process of belonging?

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