



Academia in the UK

Alicia M. Barry

In general, what was your student experience in the UK like?

Overall, I loved my student experience in the UK. I did my undergraduate degree at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. SOAS is a small university specializing in the study of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, making it very different to any other university in the UK. Although my primary academic focus was on China, the lively academic atmosphere and the many open debates that took place on campus meant that I was always exposed to a wide range of global issues and debates that added nuance to my own perspectives and beliefs. Perhaps most importantly, SOAS is regarded as the leading institution in the UK for the linguistic and cultural study of China, so the specific skills I gained from my studies enabled me to further my academic journey in this field. My postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford offered a very different yet also highly valuable experience. Being such a large university located in a small and historic city, Oxford is an idyllic place to develop one's academic interests. Whatever your interest, you can be sure to find someone working in that field in Oxford. Moreover, the college system means that you always feel connected to a small and intimate academic community because of the various social events that are arranged by the college. The sociology department there has a strong emphasis on quantitative research, which also opened my eyes to different ways of approaching social science.



Why did you decide to continue your studies in Hong Kong?

Given my research interest in China and Hong Kong's academic reputation, the city was a natural choice of location for the continuation of my studies. Specifically, I was attracted by CUHK's expertise on the sociological study of China and the number of professors and students who share my interest in the topics of gender and reproduction. This made me feel that I would be in good company in this department. Aside from the academic reasons, I was also drawn to the unique beauty of Hong Kong as a city. I love the contrast between dense urban landscape and the natural greenery and ocean views. I also like that Hong Kong is a diverse and multi-cultural city with infinite options for things to do in one's free time.

[See Full Interview](#)

Unusual Transition: From Computer Science to Sociology

LI Yujie

Why Sociology?

Actually, I never thought I would come to the Department of Sociology before 2021. Although my minor was political science, I majored in computer science and learned about artificial intelligence and big data during the past several years. Honestly, I planned to be an algorithm engineer during my undergraduate and master's degrees. However, I took part in a research project on political polarization for accidental reasons when I was a master student. I liked the feeling when I used tools like natural language processing and graph theory to understand the phenomena in the real world. Meanwhile, analyzing real-world data is much more enjoyable than improving the prediction accuracy in some datasets - a common topic in artificial intelligence. This research experience made me realize that computational social science may be the correct choice for me, as it allows me to use my expertise while exploring issues in the social sciences. Therefore, after careful consideration, I chose the Department of sociology - the place that suited me best and took computational social science as one of my research interests.

How does your previous experience influence you when you consider the problems in sociology?

Computer scientists and social scientists will react differently to the same phenomenon. Computer scientists always need to predict or measure something - even the method (like neural networks) used for prediction is a black box, while social scientists always try to explain something. As a result, although I am now a sociology student, my first instinct is often to predict or measure phenomena when I consider problems, as I have received computer science training for five years. Anyway, if the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail. On the other hand, knowledge in computer science updated very quickly. Sometimes we call a method invented ten years ago a 'classical' method. And this kind of thinking also affects me to a great extent. I often ignore the knowledge and literature of the last century when I need to collect information (in sociology).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

✓ Call for papers and applications

- 1st Work in Progress Virtual Workshop on Digital Sociology. International Sociological Association TG10: Digital Sociology. **Deadline for Applications: March 15, 2022** [[See the ad](#)]
- Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. W.E.B. Du Bois Special Issue on Religion and Social Inequality. **Deadline for Papers: June 1, 2022** [[See the ad](#)]

✓ Job Ads

- Tenure Track Faculty in Sociology. Singapore Management University. **Deadline for Applications: March 15, 2022** [[See the ad](#)]
- Tenure Track Professorship in Qualitative Social Research. University of Vienna. **Deadline for Applications: March 15, 2022** [[See the ad](#)]

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