



The University of Melbourne Extension Program – History

This article explores the experiences of secondary school student Emily Shallcross who participated in The University of Melbourne’s Extension Program.

Emily Shallcross, student, Presbyterian Ladies’ College

As part of my last year in secondary school, I participated in The University of Melbourne’s Extension Program (UMEP) studying history. Following are some of my impressions of the experience.

Why did you decide to apply for the UMEP?

I chose to apply for the extension program for several reasons, but the first and most important reason was because of my love of history. Unfortunately, history is not prioritised in the primary school curriculum, and in the lower year levels of secondary school it often exists in the shadow of more ‘important’ subjects, such as science, English and maths. Therefore, I wanted to take every opportunity to learn as much as I could about history. In Year 11, I studied both Year 12 Australian History and Year 11 Twentieth Century History (in preparation for taking Revolutions the next year). After thoroughly enjoying both subjects, I was eager to explore what other programs were available for me to continue to learn about different areas of history. Given that my school did not offer any other history subjects, I saw the UMEP as a way to challenge myself, improve my writing and research skills, and explore new areas of history.

How did you manage the competing priorities of your VCE and university studies?

To be honest, it was often a challenge to manage my VCE work and university studies. As any VCE student will tell you, a normal workload of four to five subjects can be difficult enough to negotiate. However, the addition of a university subject, which has an even heavier workload than a VCE subject, meant that more had to be added to my study timetable. Also, the work and the way you study for a university subject is very different. There are no timed essays or exams and students are expected to spend a substantial amount of time planning and researching topic questions, including finding sources outside of their allocated weekly readings.

During the weeks that university assignments were due, they tended to become the priority, and it was often difficult to find time for school work. However, when the university holidays started (which were much longer than school holidays), I could focus solely on school work for up to two months in the middle of the year and, as the university subjects were different from semester to semester, I didn’t have to continually retain information – and there was no end-of-year exam! That being said, during the holidays, students were still

expected to continue to attend tutorials and keep up-to-date with university work.

Were you on campus with other students?

Whether or not you spend time on campus with other students really depends on the university and subject you are enrolled in. In order to pass my subject, I had to attend seventy-five per cent of all weekly tutorials. These tutorials involved journeying to the Parkville campus and participating in discussion, led by the tutor, based on the lectures from the previous week and the weekly readings. There were also team activities and a lot of conversations with other students who, over the term, you get to know quite well.

How many other Year 12 students were doing the same program?

Not many students chose to undertake the UMEP due to the heavy workload and the associated travel time into the Parkville campus. However, I was joined by two of my classmates from school, which was an asset as we could occasionally discuss program material or how to handle certain tasks. This doesn't necessarily mean that you will be at a disadvantage if no-one from your own school decides to apply with you. The university program focuses mostly on independent research and learning, so students are not reliant on each other for information or note-taking. Indeed, even though I had two classmates in my subject, we were not always in the same tutorials and so would only see each other on rare occasions.

Did you have to wear school uniform?

At Parkville, I was able to choose between wearing uniform or wearing casual clothes. Most students choose to wear casual clothes as no-one, not even the tutors, know that you are a high school student rather than a university student. On more than one occasion I had to wear school uniform; however, when doing so I wasn't judged any differently by fellow students or the tutor.

How did you find the coursework?

I really enjoyed the coursework, especially in the first semester which focused on medieval history. I was given the opportunity to study the plague, the Hundred Years War, women in literature and warfare in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The primary sources in particular were fascinating.

One of my first assignments involved analysing a primary source from the medieval period and I chose to look at the trial of Guillaume, a man accused of heresy in a French village in the year 1320. Though the document was lengthy and repetitive, it was interesting to see the values of French rural communities during the fourteenth century and to explore how an actual heresy trial was conducted – a process that has been dramatised through its representation in the media, film and literature.

I found the second semester, which looked at the Age of Empires, perhaps less interesting, though for no other reason than personal preference. Even so, many of the sources contained stimulating material and were relatively easier to read, such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*¹ and Burbank and Cooper's *Empires in World History*.²

Did participating in the UMEP change your VCE experience?

I found that participating in the UMEP certainly changed my VCE experience. In many ways the program is like doing a Year 12 subject in Year 11 – both prepare you for the future and give you a taste of what you will be doing the following year. Taking part in the program made the prospect of university a lot less daunting and made me feel more confident about leaving the relatively safe and protected environment of secondary school.

I found that the program was also good for improving organisational and note-taking skills, as well as comprehensive reading, which is a skill that you will develop with all the reading you have to do for the weekly tutorials (on one occasion this exceeded 135 pages). Participating in the program also widened my reading sphere as we tackled extracts from Leo Tolstoy to Dante, John Shinnars and Denys Hay. Although some of the reading was certainly easier to understand than others, all of it had fascinating content.

What do you think your future holds?

If all goes to plan, I hope to be studying Arts next year, majoring in either History or English. One of the benefits of the UMEP is that it enables you to start a second year subject in history in your first year of university (as long as you meet all of the prerequisites). I therefore hope to be studying at least one second-year history subject next year.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Old Quadrangle, The University of Melbourne. (Photograph by ClaudineC, used under CC BY-SA 2.0)

- 1 Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: William Morrow, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2017).
- 2 J. Burbank and F. Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

RIGHT: Old Arts Building,
The University of Melbourne.
(Photograph by Polly Clip,
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What advice would you give to other students who are contemplating applying for The University of Melbourne Extension Program in History?

There are several pieces of advice I would give to other students who are considering applying for the program:

- 1 Discard the myth that history is easy. History is often perceived as a relatively easy subject to get good grades in and therefore is a good extension subject that will help to boost your ATAR. However, history can be challenging and should not be underestimated – especially given the amount of outside research and reading you are expected to undertake. Secondary and primary sources are often lengthy and complicated, and assignments require in-depth analysis and academic research. This should not scare students off though – history is a very interesting, exciting and insightful subject. The sources you will need to read might be long but they are often fascinating.
- 2 Be organised. Allocate time for reading the materials for each tutorial and make sure you watch every lecture online if you are not able to attend them. Comprehensive note taking is crucial to both understanding the topic and achieving high marks in assignments.
- 3 Ask questions. If you are ever unsure of anything, never be afraid to ask questions in tutorials, contact your tutor via email or contact your lecturer. It is also worth noting that

most lecturers have certain hours when you can arrange to speak to them in person.

- 4 Utilise the university library. By participating in the program, you are given full access to the university library both on campus and online. This opens up a whole world of incredible materials that can be used for studying your extension subject and your other subjects – I studied *Revolutions* in Year 12 and found access to online resources very useful.
- 5 Make sure you know all the steps in applying. Before you decide to apply for the program, make sure you know all the requirements for each subject – that is, where the tutorials are being held, what sort of assignments you will have to complete and how you are going to timetable your study.

Generally, I would advise anyone interested in history to think about applying for the program. It certainly helped me to get a sense of what university is like and to explore areas of history we don't really tackle in secondary school. I found the program truly insightful and I would implore anyone who loves history to give it a go, even if you don't think you're up for the challenge – you might just surprise yourself!

See overleaf for information about university extension programs at Victorian universities.

Further Information about Victorian university extension programs

VCE Extension Programs in History are available at The University of Melbourne, Monash University and La Trobe University. Applications for the following year open in second semester. All of the extension programs are recognised by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and provide a fifth or sixth subject ATAR bonus (e.g. a mark of 50–59% provides an ATAR contribution of 3.0, a mark of 70–79% provides an ATAR contribution of 4.0). There is no ATAR increment for International Baccalaureate (IB) students, but they are eligible for the other benefits.

Students must be reasonably high-achieving students in Units 1 and 2, and their school and parents must support their application. Extension programs can only be undertaken in the final VCE year. Lectures can be viewed online but students must attend weekly tutorials in person.

Successful completion of these subjects will be counted towards a relevant degree undertaken at the providing university.

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE EXTENSION PROGRAM

Offered at the Parkville campus and Goulburn Valley Grammar School, Shepparton.

- HIST10007 Medieval Plague, War and Heresy
- HIST10010 Age of Empires: 1720–1914

MONASH EXTENSION

Offered at the Clayton campus.

- ATS1316 Medieval Worlds: From Vikings to the Silk Road
- ATS1317 Renaissance Worlds: Conflict, Art, Invention

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY VCE PLUS

Offered at the Albury–Wodonga, Bendigo, Melbourne, Mildura and Shepparton campuses.

- HIS1MLH Myth, Legend and History
- HIS1TEN Ideas That Shook the World

There are VCE extension programs in subjects other than History available through these universities and through RMIT Extension and Deakin Accelerate (which also offers wholly online courses with real-time seminars).