



Focus on Occidental College

Occidental College is a small liberal arts college for a close-knit community of 2,100 undergraduates, who enjoy a beautifully landscaped 120-acre campus just eight miles north of downtown Los Angeles. Learning by doing is a hallmark of an Occidental education, made possible not only by the 10-to-1 student-faculty ratio and average class size of 19, but also the availability of internships in L.A. and easy access to the ocean for Marine Biology students. There is also a major focus on undergraduate research. Opportunities abound in every discipline, and students obtain many impressive grants to fund their work, which is frequently published in academic journals.

The diversity of the student body is another distinguishing feature of Occidental, which *U.S. News and World Report* ranks 4th in diversity among nationally ranked liberal arts colleges. Approximately 45% of the students are from California, with Washington and New York the 2nd and 3rd most well represented states, respectively. Everyone is required to live on campus for the first three years. Residential Life is very active to ensure that freshmen, who are housed together with classmates in a seminar course, develop a sense of “family” away from home. Mentors and residential advisors organize weekly meetings as well as social events, and each dorm has both quiet lounges for studying and lounges specifically for social activities.

Freshmen all take a Cultural Studies Program seminar with a theme of their choice. Here their writing skills are honed and tested at intervals, and they must demonstrate proficiency by the end or else take another CSP course with a different theme sophomore year. A senior year comprehensive project is also required of everyone. It could be a paper or presentation, the format varying depending on the student’s major, but in all cases it is based on original work and should be the culminating achievement of which the student is most proud.

At the end of sophomore year, students must declare a major from the 31 available or design their own, subject to faculty approval. Most majors require 10 classes, allowing students ample

time to explore other areas of interest as well. Occidental offers a “3 + 2” option for aspiring engineers to spend their first three years studying liberal arts here before transferring to Cal Tech or Columbia for Engineering. They must apply to the other schools during their sophomore year, but at the end of five years they graduate with two degrees.

Fifty percent of Occidental students study abroad, choosing from a multitude of programs all over the world. Programs are available for students in every academic area, so a semester abroad will not jeopardize anyone’s ability to graduate on time, and financial aid is maintained while students are abroad. A special United Nations Internship enables 15 seniors each year to work for a non-governmental organization and conduct independent research. An unlimited number of students more interested in domestic affairs may opt to do a Campaign Semester, working on a political campaign in either California or their home state.

Occidental students are a particularly happy group both academically and socially. Professors are caring mentors, so it’s easy to get help, the social and recreational opportunities are varied, and the community is generally inclusive. With 100 clubs and student organizations, something is always happening to keep many students on campus even while others leave for recreational opportunities in the city, in the mountains, or at the beach

Twenty percent of Occidental students are involved in Greek life, but the fraternities and sororities are not exclusive. Their parties are open to everyone, and they organize community service projects. In other words, they function similarly to the cultural, religious, social justice, political, and arts organizations.

About 25% of Occidental students participate in Division III sports, and many more in club and intramural sports.

Applications are evaluated holistically by the regional admissions officer familiar with the student’s school as well as an additional reader. The transcript is of paramount importance, as they seek students whose courses demonstrate a willingness to challenge themselves, and they look closely at performance trends from the sophomore through senior years. Also taken into consideration are standardized test scores, the breadth and depth of extra-curricular involvements, and leadership experiences. Three application essays are used to get a sense of each applicant’s personality, so it’s important that these be written in the student’s own voice. Interviews are optional, and not having one and not visiting the campus will not jeopardize admission.

For the class of 2017, the median GPA was 3.77, median SAT was 2030, and median ACT was 30.

Financial aid is provided to meet 100% of demonstrated need, and a variety of merit scholarships are available too.

