



Focus on The College of William and Mary

Founded in 1693 and located in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, The College of William and Mary is one of the so-called “public Ivies.” It has retained the word “college” in its name despite being a modern research university so as to emphasize its focus on undergraduate education. With just under 6,000 students, a 12:1 student-faculty ratio, and all classes taught by professors, it has the feel of a small liberal arts college, but resources that enable 70% of the undergraduates to have a mentored research experience.

Courses are rigorous, and the students intellectually engaged. In fact, the school ranks among the top 10 universities in the nation for the percentage of alumni who pursue Ph.D.'s, and its programs in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences are all equally strong. Additionally, the Mason School of Business provides a variety of concentrations for students who wish to enter it after having completed their sophomore year. Two hundred twenty-five students are admitted each year (180 in the Fall, and 45 in the Spring), and as the program has been gaining popularity in recent years, the minimum GPA required to enter has risen to 3.3.

While the students at William and Mary are certainly ambitious, they insist they are not competitive with one another. Instead, they speak of their strong sense of community and an environment where everyone wants everyone else to succeed. Governed by the nation’s first collegiate honor code, they take exams without proctors and enjoy being able to leave their things around the campus without fear of theft.

Professors are reportedly eager to help any students who are struggling, and there is an extensive academic support system including a Writing Resource Center and Tutoring Center both located in the library.

Seventy-five percent of the students (including all the freshmen) live on campus, and their social life takes place primarily right there. The Division 1 sports teams are almost all strong, and there is plenty of campus spirit.

Approximately 30% of students go Greek, and the fraternities and sororities host parties, but many students say that's not the reason they join as there are plenty of other recreational options. Furthermore, they say there is no social pressure to drink or to party and that in general the community is exceptionally welcoming and accepting of all types of people.

Fall 2015 will see the implementation of some new academic requirements designed to give all William and Mary students certain shared experiences: a freshman seminar, a senior year capstone project in their major, a study abroad experience or a course dealing with global issues, and a class that brings together the humanities, natural sciences and quantitative science to investigate a particular problem so that students may better understand how the disciplines affect each other.

A joint degree program with St. Andrews University in Scotland enables 40 William and Mary students to study there for two years, 20 of them studying for their first two years in each institution. This program is available to those who wish to major in History, Economics, English, or International Relations. They must apply directly from high school with an essay demonstrating their understanding of the program and why it's a good match for them in terms of personality and interests. Needless to say, this is a highly selective program, but it is most competitive for those who wish to major in International Relations, and a bit less competitive for those who wish to do their first two years at St. Andrews.

Because William and Mary is a public university with a commitment to take two thirds of their students from Virginia but many more applicants from out of state than from in state, the acceptance rate for applicants from outside of Virginia is just over 25%, while for Virginia residents it is closer to 40%.

Admissions officers look first at the strength of an applicant's academic program, preferring to see the highest level courses in more than one area. Eighty-one percent of accepted students are in the top 10% of their class. Overall, the median SATs for reading and math are 1270-1470, and the median composite ACTs are 29-30, but both medians are slightly higher for students from out of state. Interviews are optional but evaluative. Given on campus by students over the summer and in the fall, they are not available for every applicant, so anyone wishing to schedule an interview is advised to contact the admissions office early, preferably over the summer.