



## **Focus on Williams College**

Williams College in rural Williamstown, Massachusetts, provides a liberal arts education of the highest quality for approximately 2,000 undergraduates. Williams' admissions officers are quick to explain that this is not a pre-professional institution, but rather a place that nurtures intellectual exploration and growth across an array of academic disciplines. The 7-to-1 student-to-faculty ratio and predominance of small classes ensure that students develop close relationships with their teachers, who mostly live very close to the campus and are deeply invested in the students on a personal level.

Tutorials are perhaps the most unusual hallmark of a Williams education. These are courses taught by a professor to two students at a time. Listed in the course catalogue alongside all the other offerings, they typically register ten or twelve students per semester, who are then divided into pairs by the professor following an initial meeting. Partners with different interests and areas of expertise are assigned to one another so that they will bring different perspectives to the discussions. The two students then switch off being responsible for a five-to-seven page paper or a two-page paper on the weekly reading.

While tutorials are surely intense experiences, the students who take them love them and say that they are good not just for subjects where they feel most comfortable; on the contrary, they are especially helpful when students could benefit from extra help because the professor may devote as much as fifteen minutes each class to providing oral critiques of their papers. Some of the tutorials are designed specifically for freshmen, and others pair first year students with upperclassmen. Fifty percent of Williams students take at least one tutorial in the course of their four years, and of those who try them, 80% end up taking more than one.

Research opportunities for everyone are another hallmark of the college. With a faculty heavily engaged in research and only two tiny graduate programs, there are opportunities for students as early as freshmen year to participate and to receive funding. Although Williams offers no summer classes, approximately 300 students remain on campus each summer to do research, two-thirds of it in the sciences. For this they receive room and board as well as a stipend. Many also do paid research during the school year, sometimes as part of their work-study commitment for financial aid.

Williams operates on what they call a 4-1-4 calendar, meaning that students are expected to take four courses in the fall and spring terms, and one course during a three-week term in January. Some use the two hours of class time per day during this winter term to delve intensely into an aspect of their main field of study, while others use it to try something entirely different. Everybody uses the rest of these days for fun activities and bonding with one another. The school provides daily transportation to a nearby ski resort, and students report that the area has a special beauty in the winter.

Outdoorsy and athletic students predominate at Williams, where the Outing Club, which is the school's largest club, sponsors many events throughout the year and lends out equipment of all sorts so that students can take full advantage of the multi-acre forest the school owns.

Team sports play a large role in life at the school too, where 35% of the students are varsity athletes. The teams are so successful that for 23 of the past 25 years, Williams has won the Directors' Cup for the NCAA's best Division III athletic program.

While Williams students certainly work hard, they also know how to have fun. The tight sense of community and the abundance of academic support (which it is assumed everyone will need at one time or another) help them deal with the academic rigor. Students have high standards for themselves, but tend to be supportive of their classmates rather than competitive with them.

Housing is guaranteed all four years, and the dorms for first year students have 30-person "entries" that function as social units, each with a junior advisor. Since the freshman dorms are configured in suites consisting of one single room, one double room, and a common space, 40% of first year students live in singles and 60% in doubles.

Admissions is need-blind for domestic students, and the financial aid is among the best in the country, as Williams meets 100% of demonstrated need for tuition and all other expenses with packages that average 93% grant and the rest a combination of subsidized loans and six-to-eight hours of work-study.

The transcript and letters of recommendation are the most important components of the application. Admissions officers look first to see that the applicant has chosen challenging courses and then at the grades. Eighty-seven percent of the students admitted to the class of 2020 were in the top decile of their high school class. The SAT or ACT is required, and of those who reported the SAT, 43% had 750 or higher on the verbal section while 56% had 750 or higher on the math. Among those who reported the ACT, 69% had a composite score of 33 or higher. Williams does not conduct interviews or take into consideration demonstrated interest.

