



Focus on Middlebury College

Middlebury College in central Vermont is home to 2,500 exceptionally strong, intellectually engaged, and passionate students, who speak with great enthusiasm about their courses, their community, and the opportunities afforded them by their beautiful natural surroundings. A poised and well put-together looking group whose attire is mostly “preppy,” they nonetheless pride themselves on being open-minded to diverse points of view and relishing opportunities for lively debate.

Currently, twenty-six percent of the students are Americans of color, 12% are international, and 14% represent the first in their generation to attend college, making the college much more diverse than the state, yet increasing its diversity remains an ongoing mission for the school. Not everyone is liberal, I was told, but everyone is passionate about making a positive change in the world.

The college was the first in the country to have a program in Environmental Studies, begun in 1965. It has also long been known for outstanding programs in foreign language studies (including its summer language schools), and currently the most popular majors include International Global Studies and International Politics and Economics. The former attracts students interested in Foreign Service and embassy work, and the latter is frequently an entry point for students to pursue careers in international business. Sixty percent of the students study abroad in international universities where they are taught in the local language alongside native classmates, but in a cohort led by a Middlebury professor.

The curriculum of the school is predicated on a liberal arts model, with a focus on critical thinking and effective communication. Students are encouraged to pursue divergent interests and interdisciplinary studies. Most classes have approximately 15 students, and the workload is intense but the atmosphere collaborative rather than cutthroat. Students are governed by an honor code, which means that exams are administered without a proctor.

Everyone is required to take courses in 7 of the following 8 areas: Literature, The Arts, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Physical and Life Sciences, Deductive Reasoning and Analytical Processes, Social Analysis, and Foreign Languages. Although the core is quite traditional, the most pressing issues of the day are never far from view at Middlebury, due in part to the many symposia and guest speakers. Additionally, a select group of undergraduates are chosen each year as “fellows” of the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation. They take a course that integrates the theory and practice of social entrepreneurship into their particular fields of study, and they engage in two consecutive relevant summer experiences funded by a grant. They are then expected to share their experiences with the rest of the Middlebury community and to mentor the next year’s fellows.

Middlebury’s academic terms operate on a 4-1-4 calendar, meaning that students all take one course during the month of January. They describe this as a chance to immerse themselves fully in something that is often entirely different from the rest of their studies. During the J-term, many non-academic workshops are given as well. Anyone can offer these, and topics have included things like East Asian Cuisine and Hip-Hop Dance. J-term also provides an opportunity for students to enjoy the college’s own ski mountain, thanks to a shuttle that takes them there every day.

The majority of Middlebury students engage quite actively in campus activities throughout the year. Upon entering, they are placed in a “Commons,” a living-learning community of approximately 120 students. They are placed according to freshman writing seminar, and since they choose the topics for these interdisciplinary seminars, the expectation is that they will find themselves among people with similar interests and develop a tight, supportive community within the larger one. The freshman seminar professor serves as the students’ first advisor until they declare an academic major. Each Commons also has multiple levels of advising including a student, a recent graduate, and a dean who really gets to know the students from the very beginning of freshman year.

The 31 varsity teams have been highly successful and enjoy much support from the students. All are Division 3 except for the Ski Team, which is Division 1. Besides the Alpine and Nordic ski areas, the athletic facilities include all the usual plus a golf course. There are also 180 clubs and student organizations, including normal ones like a multitude of a capella and dance groups and some unusual ones like a club of runners who sing songs in Swahili while they run.

To be admitted, applicants must generally be in the top 10% of their high school

class and have taken a rigorous program of study. They must also submit the SAT, ACT, or three Subject tests. The writing section of the SAT or ACT is not required, but it is included in the reported medians of 1930-2140 for the SAT and 30-33 for the ACT. One unusual feature of the Middlebury admissions process is that of the 680 freshmen they aim to enroll each year, 590 enter in September and the other 90 in February. The February admits are exactly the same as the September ones but have declared on their application that they wish to take a Gap semester to do something interesting and different. They will then graduate in a February ceremony four years later.

