



## **Focus on Union College**

The 2,200 undergraduates on Union College's beautiful campus in Schenectady, New York, are an unusually diverse group in more ways than one. Twenty-five percent are persons of color or international students, and their interests range from Engineering to Visual and Theater Arts and everything in between. Professors routinely collaborate across disciplines, and students are encouraged to pursue multiple interests and make connections among them. For instance, the new science building has a lab designed specifically for the interdisciplinary study of music and electrical engineering.

Union's other most noteworthy feature is the close relationships that virtually all students develop with faculty. The small classes and multitude of research opportunities beginning as early as freshman year make this possible. Everyone is required to take a research seminar in their sophomore year, except for those in the honors program, called the Scholars, who take it freshman year. More than three-quarters of the students across all majors do some sort of senior research project, which is required in the social sciences and Engineering. I was told that everyone becomes close to at least one faculty mentor, while many students enjoy several such relationships. Professors also participate in the social life of the school by engaging in activities like performing with their guitars at the Greenhouse Jams held during lunch every Friday.

The school year is structured around three 10-week terms, so students typically take three courses each term, making the workload more intense but also more

focused than it would be with a two-semester schedule. Union students say they work hard, but they also enjoy a very varied and active social scene on campus.

Union is an excellent choice for students who are considering studying Engineering but aren't certain or don't know which type of Engineering they would like to do. The department, which is highly regarded, offers Bio, Computer, Electrical, and Mechanical Engineering, but no applicants to Union are admitted by major. Once admitted, students who choose Engineering have until the end of their freshman year to declare their major, and everyone else has until the end of the second year to do so.

Approximately 18% of Union students major in Engineering, but 50% are in the STEM fields taken together (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Of the other 50%, approximately 30% major in social sciences and 20% in humanities. Many do a second major or a minor in one of the arts, and a few even major exclusively in one of them. The Visual Arts building currently under renovation is scheduled to open in September 2016, completing the Arts Quad, which already has a new dance studio, renovated theater, and music center with performance space and practice rooms.

Upon entering Union, everyone is assigned to one of 7 Minerva Houses, living-learning communities where they live the first year and with which they will remain associated throughout their remaining college years if they wish. These houses, which have faculty and administrators assigned to them as well, are governed by a council of students who plan a wide variety of events. Such events, for instance, might be a dinners which students cook together with professors, followed by a discussion while they eat. Everyone is welcome to attend events sponsored by all the Minerva Houses, not just their own.

After the first year, students may opt to stay in a Minerva House or to move into theme-based housing, a renovated hotel, or apartment-style dorms. Fraternities and sororities attract approximately 35% of the students, but pledging is not permitted until sophomore year. Beginning in their junior year, some students will opt to live in their Greek houses. With the completion this fall of new on-campus apartments, housing is guaranteed for all four years, and currently over 90% of students live on campus throughout their time at Union.

More than 50% of students participate in study abroad programs, most commonly during their junior year, and it is possible to do so regardless of their major. They typically take three courses abroad, choosing from programs on six continents. In most cases, either Union professors teach the students while they are abroad or else a Union professor with special knowledge of the area accompanies them.

When on campus, students have a range of entertainment options. Union students have lots of school spirit. The school is Division 1 in ice hockey and Division 3 in most other sports, but students come out to support their friends in all activities

ranging from sports to music and theater. A concert series brings professional musicians to perform in the new concert hall, and students enjoy 136 clubs and organization as well as the restaurant scene a ten-minute walk away into town.

Applicants are evaluated holistically, so submission of standardized tests is optional although 60% of applicants typically send them. Union is looking for students who have earned A's and B's in challenging coursework, who have interests outside of school too, and have demonstrated leadership in some sphere. These are the applicants they believe will contribute most to the campus community. The top 50 students admitted each year are invited into the Scholars program.

