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What's next?

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The college entrance essay. So much seems to be riding on it that it's crazy-making. There are books on how to write it and counselors to help you polish it. But when it finally comes down to it, you just have to put yourself out there.

We feel your pain, we really do. We thought the least we could do is walk a mile in

your shoes—put ourselves out there...in 1,000 words or less, tell you who we are and why you should pick us. Or not.

You'll find our essay in the middle of this book. If you're the kind of student who thrives at Vassar, we think you'll be curious about what we have to say.

There is no “core curriculum” at Vassar and very few requirements, but there is a core attitude.



Intellectual inquiry at Vassar is characterized by an unusual degree of flexibility and freedom. Even the few requirements that do exist allow for a great deal of choice. This is intentional. We aim to produce rigorously independent thinkers, and we've found that the best way to accomplish that is to empower students to take responsibility for their own course of study.

Way way back in 1878, Maria Mitchell, Vassar's first astronomy professor, and five students traveled over 2,000 miles by train to Denver to witness a solar eclipse. Recently, Jill Schneiderman, earth science professor, and nine students traveled to Death Valley to study sedimentation and stratigraphy. The Vassar mantra is "go to the source." Make your own observations, do your own thinking, don't be satisfied with second-hand knowledge.





In every discipline, students have opportunities to work closely with faculty on original work, whether it's a musical composition or a scientific study. The professors have high expectations; the work is challenging. But there is a lot of room here for self-direction. You will find support for just about any intellectual inquiry you are willing to get serious about.



There is a widespread misconception that a liberal arts education “doesn’t prepare you for anything.” True—it may not prepare you for any *one* thing. Instead, it prepares you for *everything*. A liberal arts education teaches you how to think, how to approach an issue or a problem from multiple perspectives, and how to learn whatever it is you need to learn to succeed in any endeavor.



The single most important advantage of a Vassar education is the quality of the interactions you will have with your professors. This is partly a matter of numbers—our student-to-faculty ratio is 8:1. But it's also a matter of educational philosophy. Vassar professors are topnotch scholars—in many cases internationally renowned. But they are also topnotch teachers. They come here because they want the opportunity to work closely with students and get to know them and have an impact on their lives.

Students at Vassar are the
architects of campus life.



Vassar students are a remarkably diverse group. They come here from nearly 50 states and 55 foreign countries, representing every socioeconomic background, ethnicity, religion, political ideology, sexual orientation, gender identity, and cultural identity. When they become members of the Vassar community, they agree to adhere to our core values of tolerance, mutual respect, and civility and to work toward creating a more egalitarian and inclusive society.



All students are members of the Vassar Student Association (student government), which oversees and funds student organizations. Any student has the right to start an organization and petition the VSA for funding. The Vassar Filmmakers Club, for example, was started a few years ago by three seniors who have since gone on to graduate school in film.



There are currently over 100 student organizations—club sports, political groups, affinity groups, a photographer’s club, social action groups, newspapers and literary magazines, comedy troupes, an FM radio station, and performing groups, among others.



There is a lot going on at Vassar—over 1,000 campus-wide events annually. That figure includes lectures by well-known scholars and public figures as well as concerts, films, dramatic productions, art exhibitions, conferences, and social, cultural, and athletic events. Many of these events are planned, publicized, and carried out by students.



Ring the bell is one of the oldest Vassar traditions. Toward the end of spring semester, the juniors officially become seniors when they ring the bell on top of Main Building.

There's a lot of advice out there on how to pick a college or a university. Don't worry—we're not going to give you any.

What we'd rather do is tell you what is important to us as an institution and what we aspire to. Then you can figure out whether these values and dreams resonate with your own.

Quite a few people describe Vassar as individualistic, and it's true that individualism is prized here. But what we mean by individualism isn't how you dress, or whether you have an accent, or that you play the tuba, although all of those things might very well be part of who you are. What we mean by individualism is the quality of character that results from the rigorous examination of your own mind—your beliefs, your biases, your assumptions.

Here's an example that's dear to our Vassar hearts. The man who founded the college, Matthew Vassar, had very little formal education. He was a successful businessman, a brewer. He lived in a time when women were widely believed to be too weak, physically and mentally, to withstand the rigors of a liberal education.

But he examined these ideas about the capabilities of women and found them spurious. "It occurred to me, that woman, having received from her Creator the same intellectual constitution as man, has the same right as man to intellectual culture and development"—his words to the newly

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formed Board of Trustees in 1861. The institution he founded—now one of the nation’s most selective coed liberal arts colleges—was dubbed “Matthew’s Folly” in the popular press. In our view it took a lot of courage to examine the prevailing views and take a stand in opposition. And to back it up with his fortune!

The kind of education we engage in here at Vassar takes courage. Opening everything to question isn’t always comfortable. It doesn’t matter what you major in—whether it’s biochemistry or economics or film or cognitive science or whatever captures your imagination—if we succeed in doing our job, you will sometimes be uncomfortable, you will be challenged. You will learn to think critically and carefully not just about the subject at hand but about everything you have hitherto taken for granted.

There’s a famous cartoon in which a mother, supervising her daughter’s packing for college, says, “I hope you won’t come back from Vassar with a lot of ideas!” If you want to graduate after four years the same person you were when you came in, you should probably pick another school. Vassar is transformative.

Another key Vassar value, and it’s related to the first one, is fairness, a level playing field. Matthew Vassar leveled the playing field for women. He extended the privileges of education to a group that had previously been excluded. In 1969, Vassar became the first of the elite single-sex colleges to go coed, extending the privileges of a Vassar education to men.

Today, we are committed to leveling the socioeconomic playing field. Our aspiration is for the most qualified

students, regardless of their financial circumstances, to have the opportunity to come to Vassar. We have a generous financial aid program, a guarantee to meet the full demonstrated need of every student offered admission, and a no-loan policy for students from low income families.

There are two reasons for these policies. The first is that they’re fair. The second is because of the individualism we were extolling earlier. If everyone in the room comes from the same place you come from and has the same beliefs, biases, and assumptions that you have, you’re not going to be challenged to examine those beliefs and biases and assumptions. To get the kind of challenge we’re after, we need a plurality of backgrounds, experiences, and belief systems.

It’s the same reason we put so much emphasis on multidisciplinary programs at Vassar. The intellectual yield is much more fruitful if you consider a given problem from multiple perspectives.

Finally, we value informed action. It’s not enough to learn how to think critically and independently. We want our graduates to use their Vassar education to change the world. And they do.

Consider, for example, one of our earliest graduates: Ellen Swallow Richards, class of 1870, was the first scientist to conduct water surveys in the U.S., which led to the first state water-quality standards in the nation. Former President Barack Obama honored Richards as one of four women who “helped protect our environment and our people while challenging the status quo and breaking social barriers.”

Or consider a more recent grad, Adam Green, class of 1995. Green founded Rocking the Boat, a not-for-profit after-school boat-building program in the South Bronx that “uses boats to build kids.” Green has received an Echoing Green fellowship, a Union Square Award for grassroots organizing, and a Manhattan Institute Social Entrepreneurship Award.

Or Olivia Iloetonma, a 2014 grad who landed her dream job as a financial analyst with an impact investment firm. Her goal is to raise the standard of living in developing countries by making investments that have a social return as well as a financial return.

The privilege of a Vassar education carries with it the expectation that you will go forth and use what you’ve learned to make your community or your region or your country or the world a better place.

If you’ve read this far, we would venture to make at least one conjecture about you. You’re intellectually curious. You’re willing to engage a non-simplistic idea and see where it takes you. You could have spent the ten minutes it took you to read this snapchatting your friends. But you didn’t.

If we’re right about that, about your intellectual curiosity, we hope that you will give us the opportunity to get to know you and to show you around this very special place. You’ll find the details about visiting and applying on our website. We look forward to hearing from you.

At Vassar, the residential experience is structured purposefully to foster “the art of living cooperatively in a diverse community.”



There are no freshman dorms, no "jock" dorms, no ethnic or cultural dorms, and no sororities or fraternities. Almost all students live in the same house (as we prefer to call them) from their first year until senior year, when they become eligible for senior housing in one of Vassar's three on-campus apartment complexes. As a result, the people in each house get to know each other well and form a cohesive community.



Eight coeducational houses (Main, Raymond, Davison, Lathrop, Jewett, Josselyn, Cushing, and Noyes) are home to the majority of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors on campus. There is also one cooperative (Ferry House), and one hall for women only (Strong House).



Our history gives us a different slant on coeducation. Vassar was built on the conviction that women are every bit as capable of intellectual achievement as men. The formerly men's colleges can't claim that. So in our admittedly biased opinion, the coeducation you'll find here is truer.

In fact, we'll go so far as to say that it's a model for gender equality, where the talents and aspirations of all our students, regardless of gender, are taken with equal seriousness.

Student-athletes at Vassar
are as committed to
achieving excellence
on the playing field as
they are in the classroom.

Vassar's goal in athletics is to foster the aspirations of a diverse community, including scholar-athletes who are top competitors in their sports. Vassar fields 23 NCAA Division III varsity teams and is a member of the Liberty League. The Brewers routinely compete for conference championships and NCAA berths, and our student-athletes are well represented on All-American teams. Most recently, men's volleyball advanced to the final 8, and two members of the team were named All-Americans.



Vassar also has very active club, intramural, and fitness programs. Two sports—rugby and rowing, both men's and women's—are classified as club sports but are under the auspices of Vassar Athletics and are highly competitive. In 2016, the women's rugby team reached the Final Four for the third time in four years.





The Prentiss Field Sports Complex is Vassar's field of dreams. The complex includes an eight-lane, quarter-mile track and turf field with finely groomed competition and practice grass fields for soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, and baseball. The Weinberg Sports Pavilion at Prentiss contains team locker rooms and a sports medicine facility.

Where in the world
is Vassar?

Vassar is in Poughkeepsie (pə-kīp'sē), NY, a small city on the east bank of the magnificent Hudson River, 75 miles north of New York City. Designated a National Heritage Area by Congress, the Hudson Valley has more major historic

sites per square mile than any other area in the U.S. The Vassar campus boasts two National Historic Landmarks—Main Building and the Maria Mitchell Observatory.





The Frederick Ferris Thompson Memorial Library houses one of the finest undergraduate libraries in the country—over a million print volumes—as well as extensive electronic resources and special collections. Illuminating the main hall is a massive stained-glass window depicting Elena Cornaro, the first woman ever to receive a doctorate, defending her thesis. A recent graduate, upon completing her own doctorate, sent a dozen red roses to be placed beneath the Cornaro Window.



The Vassar campus comprises over 100 buildings in architectural styles ranging from modernist to collegiate gothic and 1,000 picturesque acres ranging from the manicured lawns and formal gardens of the main campus to the meadows and woodlands of the Vassar Farm. 1,000 acres, two lakes, a meandering stream, a farm with a 400-acre ecological preserve—Vassar is idyllic.

Facts

Departments and Programs

Students may concentrate in a single discipline, an interdepartmental or multidisciplinary program, or they may design an independent major. There is no “core curriculum.”

Departments

Anthropology
Art (Art History/Studio Art)
Biology
Chemistry
Chinese and Japanese
Cognitive Science
Computer Science
Dance
Drama
Earth Science and Geography
Economics
Education
English
Film
French and Francophone Studies
German Studies
Greek and Roman Studies
Hispanic Studies
History
Italian
Mathematics and Statistics
Music
Philosophy
Physical Education
Physics and Astronomy
Political Science
Psychological Science
Religion
Russian Studies
Sociology

Interdepartmental Programs

Anthropology-Sociology
Biochemistry
Earth Science and Society
Geography-Anthropology
Medieval and Renaissance Studies
Neuroscience and Behavior
Victorian Studies

Multidisciplinary Programs

Africana Studies
American Studies
Asian Studies
Environmental Studies
Independent Program
International Studies
Jewish Studies
Latin American and Latino/a Studies
Media Studies
Science, Technology and Society
Urban Studies
Women’s Studies

Fellowships and Pre-Health Advising

Extensive information and support for students applying for fellowships and admission to professional schools in medicine

Office of Career Development

Extensive career counseling, graduate and law school advising, and job placement services, including career-mentoring network of 3,000 alumnae/i

Founded in 1861, Vassar College is a highly selective, residential, coeducational liberal arts college. Consistently ranked among the top liberal arts colleges in the country, Vassar is renowned for pioneering achievements in education, for its long history of curricular innovation, and for the beauty of its campus.



Location In the scenic Hudson Valley, 75 miles north of New York City, in Poughkeepsie (area population, about 100,000). Vassar is in a residential area three miles from the city center.

Students 2,450 students; approximately 65% come from public high schools, 35% from private schools (independent or religious). In recent freshman classes, domestic students of color comprised roughly one-third of matriculants. International students from 55 countries comprise 8-10% of the student body.

Faculty More than 300 faculty members, virtually all holding the doctorate or its equivalent. All classes are taught by faculty members. The student-faculty ratio is 8:1, average class size, 17. More than 70% of the faculty live on campus or nearby; one or two faculty families live in each residence hall as house fellows.

Campus 1,000 picturesque acres ranging from the manicured lawns and formal gardens of the main campus to the meadows and woodlands of the Vassar Farm. Over 100 academic and residential buildings ranging in style from collegiate gothic to modernist, including two National Historic Landmarks. Latest addition: 80,000-square-foot Bridge for Laboratory Sciences with state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities.

Campus Life 97% of students live on campus (housing is guaranteed). Over 100 student-run organizations and clubs. Over 1,000 campuswide events annually, including guest lecturers, visiting artists, performers, workshops, athletic events, and concerts.

Athletics 23 varsity teams (NCAA, Division III), club sports, and intramural leagues. Extensively expanded athletic facilities, including state-of-the-art grass and turf fields, baseball diamond, wood floor gymnasium, elevated running track, and 5,000-square-foot fitness facility.

Libraries (main, art, music, and special collections): over a million print volumes; over 5,000 serial subscriptions; 612,000 pieces of microform; an ever-increasing number of electronic resources and databases.

Computing and Information Services Campus is fully wireless and wired, including residence halls. Computer clusters are located in the library, College Center, Computer Center, residence halls, and many academic buildings.

Study Away Programs Students (usually juniors) may apply for a year or a semester away in Vassar sponsored programs (Costa Rica, England, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Russia, and Spain) or preapproved programs offered by other colleges. Students may also apply for approved programs at various U.S. institutions, including the historically Black colleges and members of the Twelve College Exchange.

Field Work, Internships, and Research About 500 students each year do field work for academic credit in local organizations and agencies or in New York City. Over 300 students each year work one-on-one with faculty as paid research assistants or academic interns in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities.

After Vassar The great majority of Vassar graduates plan to pursue advanced study within five years of graduation. Graduates are regularly accepted at top-ranking schools of law, medicine, business, and education. Vassar is a leader in producing PhD candidates. The Office of Career Development provides counseling, connections with hundreds of top employers nationwide, and access to an extensive network of alumnae/i career advisors.

Admission Highly selective. The primary criterion is academic ability as demonstrated by superior performance in high school; about 90% of matriculated students rank in the top 20% of their high school classes. Standardized test results are also considered. Personal strengths, motivation, and potential—as evidenced in essays, recommendations, and out-of-class involvements—are also weighed. Campus visits are strongly encouraged; tours and information sessions are offered weekdays year-round, and on most fall Saturdays. Alumnae/i interviews are also available upon request.

Financial Aid Vassar seeks to make a college education affordable and accessible to all admitted students. The college meets 100% of the full demonstrated need of all admitted students, domestic or international, for all four years. Awarded exclusively on the basis of need, approximately 60% of Vassar students receive financial aid as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the CSS Profile.

Costs, 2017/2018

Tuition.....	\$54,410
Room and Board	\$12,900
Fees.....	\$800
Total	\$68,110

Smoking Policy As of July 1, 2015, Vassar College is a smoke-free campus.

Vassar is committed to the principles of integrity in an academic community, as articulated in the statement on civility and responsibility. Vassar’s policy is not to discriminate in the admission of its educational policies, scholarships and loan programs, athletic programs, or other college programs and activities, and not to tolerate discrimination or harassment of its faculty, staff, students or visitors. Vassar College prohibits discrimination on the bases of race, color, religion or religious belief, citizenship status, sex, marital status, disability, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, military service or affiliation, genetic information, age, or any other characteristics protected by law.

This publication will be made available to the visually impaired in an accessible format upon request. To make a request, contact the Office of Communications at Vassar College at 845.437.7400.

Vassar College Office of Admission
124 Raymond Avenue
Poughkeepsie, New York 12604-0010
Admissions@Vassar.edu
www.Admissions.Vassar.edu
fax: 845.437.7063
845.437.7300 or 800.827.7270

Vassar’s oldest tradition is Founder’s Day, first celebrated in 1866 in honor of Matthew Vassar, the founder of the college. Every year on the weekend closest to his birthday (April 29), the event kicks off with a toast in his memory and then quickly escalates into an afternoon of full-blown revelry and concludes with an evening of fireworks at Sunset Lake.



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Office of Admission • 124 Raymond Avenue • Poughkeepsie, NY 12604 • admissions.vassar.edu • 845.437.7300 or 800.827.7270