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.
Ringing 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.
At Vassar, the residential experience is structured purposefully to foster “the art of living cooperatively in a diverse community.”
There are no first-year dorms, no team 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.
Nine traditional Houses (Main, Strong, Raymond, Davison, Lathrop, Jewett, Josselyn, Cushing and Noyes) house the majority of the freshmen, sophomores, and juniors on campus.

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. In 2018-19, women’s soccer, women’s basketball, and field hockey all advanced to the NCAA tournament while swimming & diving and track & field also sent individual student-athletes to the NCAA championship.
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 2018, the women’s rugby team won the first ever team national championship at Vassar, capturing the USA Rugby Collegiate Women’s Division II Fall Championship.
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-kĭpsĕ), 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.
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.

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

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 67% come from public high schools, 33% from private schools (independent or religious). In recent freshman classes, domestic students of color comprised roughly one-third of matriculants. International students from 35 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, 16. 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 building, with state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities.

Campus Life

97% of students live on campus (housing is guaranteed). Over 150 student-run organizations and clubs. Over 1,000 campuswide events annually, including guest lectures, visiting artists, performers, workshops, athletic events, and concerts.

Athletics

23 varsity teams (NCAA, Division III), club sports, and intramural leagues. Extensive 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

Extensive information and support for students applying for fellowships and admission to graduate school or professional schools in medicine and law. Comprehensive career counseling, job placement services, connections with hundreds of top employers nationwide, and access to a robust network of alumnae/i career advisors. Graduates are regularly accepted at top-ranking schools of law, medicine, business, and education.

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, more than 60% of Vassar students receive financial aid as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the CSS Profile.

Costs, 2019/2020

Tuition ........................................ $57,910
Room and Board .......................... $14,220
Fees .................................................. $860
Total ............................................. $72,990

Smoking Policy

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 civil rights. Vassar’s policy is not to discriminate in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarships and loan programs, athletics programs, or other college programs and activities, and not to tolerate discrimination or harassment of its faculty, administration, staff, students, or visitors. Vassar College prohibits discrimination on the basis 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.

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Upon request, the Advisory Committee on Campus Safety will provide all campus crime statistics as reported to the U.S. Department of Education. Vassar’s campus crime statistics and Annual Security Report can be accessed on the college’s website at security.vassar.edu or by contacting the director of Safety & Security at 845.437.5200. Information can also be obtained directly from the U.S. Department of Education website at ope.ed.gov/security/.

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Admissions@Vassar.edu
www.Admissions.Vassar.edu
845.437.7063 or 800.827.7270

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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.