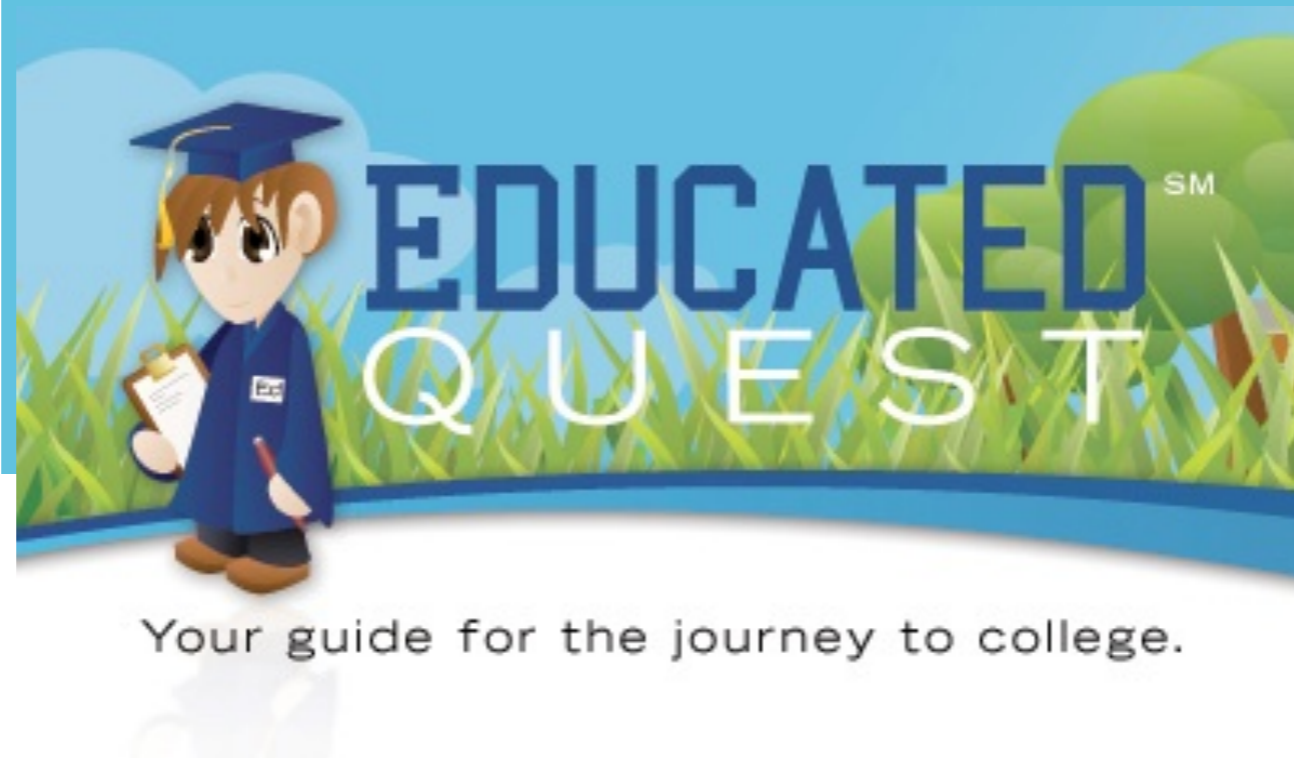


First Impressions: Washington College (MD)



Background

**Introduction to Washington
College (MD)**

Background

Founded in 1782 on Maryland's Eastern Shore, Washington College is the tenth-oldest college in the U.S. According to the College's history, General Washington gave the "College at Chester" a founding gift of 50 guineas, agreed to serve on its Board, and gave his permission to use his name. Washington served on the Board of Visitors and Governors for five years until 1789, when he became President of the United States. He accepted an honorary degree from Washington College that same year and became a leading alumnus. In addition to Washington five other American Presidents have visited campus: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and George H.W. Bush.

With just under 1,500 students, Washington College is a relatively small liberal arts school. While the College reports that students come from more than 30 U.S. states, 45 percent come from Maryland, according to its [most recent Common Data Set](#). Washington accommodates 85 percent of its student body on campus, including virtually all of the freshmen.

Among the students who graduated in 2014 the most popular majors were Psychology, Business, Biological Sciences and English. Eighty-five percent of the freshmen class who entered last year returned for their sophomore year, on par with most very good liberal arts schools. Seventy percent of the class that entered in 2008 finished their degree within four years, quite good considering the freshman retention rate for that class (82

percent) was lower than it is today. Approximately 5,300 students applied to join the class of 388 that entered in 2014, nearly 3,000 were offered admission, a yield rate of around 13 percent, which reflects on the level of competition in the College's market. According to their 2014-15 Common Data Set, Washington put 226 applicants on their wait list, but later admitted only seven.

While Washington is test-optional for applicants who have a 3.5 GPA or better, over 80 percent of its most recent freshman class submitted SAT scores. The range for the middle 50 percent of the class was between 1040 and 1270 (out of 1600) on the Critical Reading and Math sections of the test. Over half scored below 600 on each section. This suggests that test scores may not be overly important for gaining admission to the College. However, grades are; the average GPA of the students in the entering class was approximately 3.6.

Washington College is cross-shopped most often against other Maryland and Pennsylvania liberal arts colleges. Goucher, Hood, McDaniel and St. Mary's College of Maryland, one of the better public liberal arts colleges in the country, all compete for students, along with Dickinson and Gettysburg College. Salisbury University, a mid-sized (8,000 undergraduates) Maryland state school, is also a major competitor. [Dickinson and Gettysburg are more selective colleges; the Maryland private colleges slightly less.](#) Salisbury has an Honors College as well as rela-

tively low (around \$8,500 resident, \$17,000 non-resident) tuition and fees. St. Mary's was designed as Maryland's Public Honors College by the state's legislature. Goucher and McDaniel are two of the Colleges That Change Lives, though their retention and graduation rates are actually lower than those at Washington College. However, Goucher and McDaniel have benefited from joint marketing efforts shared with nearly 40 other schools as well as mentions in a book that has been sold and promoted for nearly two decades. Washington is at least "as good" as these schools, though it does not enjoy the same visibility.

The College hopes to increase its student body to 1700 students after a new president is on board. This will be a tough objective, given that its closest private college competitors in Maryland offer generous merit scholarships, as Washington does, and the public schools are reasonably priced. The student who is in the middle of the applicant pool at Dickinson or Gettysburg might be swayed to come here through a merit award. But the College will have to appeal to more students who reside outside of Maryland, New Jersey and Central Pennsylvania.

Costs



Tuition and Fees
Scholarships
Debt

Costs

Washington College has direct charges--tuition and fees, room and board--of approximately \$54,500 for the current school year. [The College's financial aid office reports](#) that more than 50% of all students qualified for a merit-based tuition scholarship at the time of their admission, pretty far into a class for a small private school. [On average, these tuition scholarships range in amount from \\$11,000- \\$21,000 per year.](#) with the [average being just over \\$19,000.](#) Membership in the National Honor Society or the Cum Laude Society means a \$12,500 award. These awards are renewable by maintaining a GPA of at least 3.0. Washington also awards merit scholarships to international students, rare for a U.S school.

The Presidential Fellows program, for admitted students at the top of the pool is quite worthwhile. Presidential, Comegys Bight (History) and John Toll (Mathematics and Sciences) Fellows receive funded summer research opportunities after their junior year. Rising juniors with a 3.6 GPA may apply to the Douglas Cater Society of Junior Fellows, another program that funds independent student research. Grants awarded through this program have been as much as \$6,000.

However, while the College is test-optional, the multi-year merit awards are tied, in part, to SAT or ACT scores. The College reports in its Common Data Set that it was able to meet 84 percent of the demonstrated need of its entering freshmen and 79 percent of the full student body. While aid includes student

loans, the average need-based scholarship exceeded \$26,000 for freshmen; the average was approximately \$24,000 for the full student body. This is almost half the direct costs of the education.

A student who might fall in the middle of the applicant pool at schools such as Gettysburg or Dickinson might qualify for one of the larger merit awards and pay somewhere between \$15,000 and \$20,000 less per year for their education. This presumes that the student has found the College to be as good a fit as these schools, or other similarly selective colleges, may be.

However, it is not likely that Washington College could discount its charges, except for the strongest applicants, to the in-state charges that Maryland residents would pay to go to Salisbury or St. Mary's. It must also be noted that Goucher, Hood and McDaniel also offer generous merit awards to statistically similar students.

According to the Project on Student Debt, the average student borrower at Washington College who graduated in 2013 had borrowed over \$35,000, a high level of indebtedness for a recent college graduate. A third of the graduates who took out loans borrowed from a source other than the Federal Government. This is cause for concern; the borrowing limit for dependent students who take out Federal Stafford Loans is \$27,000. By comparison, the average borrowers from Hood and McDaniel

borrowed close to \$30,000, still high though the average Goucher borrower owned just over \$27,000. Salisbury students borrowed approximately \$23,500 on average, St. Mary's students borrowed \$24,600.

The competing schools also place, on average, a lower debt burden on parents than Washington College does. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education's Parent PLUS Loan Database, Washington College parents who took out these Federal loans borrowed, on average, approximately \$18,600. Hood College parents borrowed, on average, \$6,000 less, McDaniel parents \$3,000 less and Goucher parents over \$2,000 less. The Maryland state schools imposed lower PLUS loan debts upon parents, on average, too.

In conclusion, an excellent (3.6+ GPA/1300+ SAT) student is likely to fare well in terms of covering their costs versus other private liberal arts colleges, especially if s/he does not come from Maryland. However, those below the upper third of the class may end up paying more than they would if they attended one of the competing Maryland schools.

Comforts

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On-Campus Housing
Local Housing Market

Comforts

Washington College assigns first-year students to one of three halls: Caroline House, Kent or Minta Martin, all of which are more than 50 years old. Kent and Caroline are co-ed halls while Minta Martin is all female. All three halls are Wi-Fi enabled while individual rooms are air conditioned. Freshmen may also live in the special interest houses located in East (International House), Middle (Arts) and West (Science) Halls. But interestingly, none of these halls have elevators, even Minta Martin, which has four floors. Fortunately, most of the other [residence halls](#), freshman and upper-class, are only two stories. Unlike many other liberal arts that have Greek life, fraternities and sorority members live in college-owned housing.

On-campus housing at Washington College is not overly expensive for any school. Kent Crossing, the most expensive living option, with four-person (two per room) apartments is less than \$6,400 per person for the school year as are the suites with partial kitchens in Sassafra Hall. Other halls, whether they are corridor or suite-style living arrangements, cost even less. In addition, unlike many colleges, students may upgrade or downgrade their meal plan early in the semester. The Advantage 19 plan is the best value because it allows meals to be inside or outside the dining halls and allows more than one swipe within the same meal time.

Given that Chestertown is a very small town (around 5,300 residents) as well as a tourist destination, it is probably better for students to live on campus and avoid the headaches associated with leasing from a private landlord.

Community

Campus
Environs
School Spirit

4

Community

The Washington College campus follows a red brick Colonial-style theme. Newer buildings such as the Gibson Center for the Arts, the Casey Academic Center and Goldstein Hall matching the coloring of the older ones. The campus layout is open and pedestrian friendly, the grounds well maintained. The [College's Clery Report](#) shows few incidents of any crime on campus between 2011 and 2013. As is the case with most other colleges the incidents reported or disciplined most often were alcohol and drug related, although there were two reported Forcible Sex offenses in each year of 2012 and 2013.

Chestertown, founded in 1706, was Maryland's second-largest port, after Annapolis, through the 18th century. The U.S. Census reported that it was also the geographic center of the United States in the very first Census taken in 1790. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has labeled Chestertown, a waterfront community, as one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations. But while the town is historically interesting and hosts [several festivals](#), it is more of a tourist/antique shopping destination than a college town. It is also not directly located outside of the campus gates.

Further, Chestertown is an isolated small town (less than 5,500 residents) hosting a small (less than 1,500 student) college. Aside from the festivals, which draw well in the region, the area is too small to attract the entertainers desired by college students. However, the College is close enough to Washington D.C. to have brought numerous public figures to campus. Among small colleges, Gettysburg is probably the only small college that has hosted more U.S. presidents than Washington College.

Washington College competes in the Centennial Conference which includes McDaniel and Johns Hopkins as well as several Pennsylvania schools including Bryn Mawr, Dickinson, Franklin & Marshall, Gettysburg, Haverford, Muhlenberg, Swarthmore and Ursinus. The team names, the Shoremen and Shorewomen, as well as the mascot, the Goose, are unique in college sports.

Curriculum

5

Academics
Honors Programs
Experiential Learning

Curriculum

Washington College offers 25 majors as well as joint degree programs in Engineering (with Columbia University), Nursing (with the University of Delaware and the University of Maryland) and Pharmacy (also with the University of Maryland). Education majors may also qualify to teach in secondary schools in Maryland, which has reciprocal agreements with 45 other states.

Students take a four-course load with 128 credits required for a Bachelor's degree. The [general education requirements](#) are similar to most liberal arts schools, though there are science course options for non-science majors clearly listed as well as a Capstone requirement for all majors. Everyone must study a year of a foreign language, either a year of a new language or continuation of the language studied in high school. It is very easy to double major here.

Washington College offers an impressive set of [experiential learning opportunities](#) for a small school. [Nearly two-thirds of the student body completes an internship](#) during the summer or the school year. The College also has unique programs in London and on [Wall Street](#). It is one of only seven Maryland schools to send interns to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Students may also do externships between semesters as early as the freshman year.

Most classes at Washington College are small, only 14 have more than 29 students. One is the introductory Psychology course which is team-taught by four faculty, each of whom teaches their specialty. This allowed the department to offer more upper-level courses in the major, the second-most popular in the College. The depth of this major, which included major investments in a Neuroscience laboratory, is impressive for a small school. The Business Management major also has considerable depth in Accounting and Finance courses, though the Marketing offerings are more limited. However, it is easy to add courses in other majors to provide that breadth. The Senior Strategic Management seminar is taken concurrent with the Capstone, which can be a business plan or research assignment.

Washington College students gave their faculty a 3.87 (out of a possible 5.0) on RateMyProfessors.com, higher than Dickinson (3.80), Gettysburg (3.66), Goucher (3.74), Hood (3.73), McDaniel (3.77), St. Mary's (3.80) or Salisbury (3.80) students rated their faculty.

Connections

Alumni Relations
Career Services



Connections

Washington College is quite diligent at [reporting the outcomes](#) for recent senior classes, as well as listing the [major employers](#) who have hired recent graduates. In addition to internship and career preparation programs the College offers additional [career services for scholar-athletes](#). The career development center was recently relocated from a residence hall to the center of campus to make it more visible to students. The College also participates in a Selective Liberal Arts College Consortium with five other Maryland liberal arts colleges, Salisbury University and the University of Mary Washington. The colleges share career events, employer site visits and career resources.

The College's alumni association has chapters in the major cities and states close to campus, including five in Maryland alone. There are also chapters in Chicago, Colorado, Pennsylvania (Lehigh Valley and Philadelphia), New England, San Francisco, Southwest Florida and the Pacific Northwest. The College's Alumni Weekend takes place during the end of May. The College also engages parents and alumni through the Fall Family Weekend, Downrigging Weekend and the Washington's Birthday Ball.

The College has approximately 2,000 alumni registered in LinkedIn.com, impressive for a school that graduates fewer than 400 students each year.

Conclusions

Summing up



Conclusions

Washington College is a very good school for a very good or excellent student who knows that s/he wants a liberal arts education. It will be an attractive option for those who are interested in Psychology, the Biological Sciences, the arts and politics as well as students who will want to combine a business major with another liberal arts major. A student who is drawn to a more selective school such as Gettysburg or Dickinson might want to add this college to their list. Washington share many of the same academic attributes as more selective liberal arts colleges, including joint degrees, experiential learning programs, a multi-college job fair and a demanding capstone requirement. Today 70 percent of a freshman class graduates within four years, a performance that families should come to expect of a small private liberal arts college. Graduation rates are likely to rise as freshman retention continues to improve.

Washington may be a better school for students who prefer a small school but have an aversion to Greek life as an important part of a campus social scene. The College is also close enough to Washington D.C to make day-long trips possible and worthwhile, though the campus is too far from the city to allow for a daily commute by students who are interested in internships during the fall or spring semesters. The campus itself is quite isolated, but so are many other liberal arts colleges, including McDaniel and St. Mary's College of Maryland. And Chestertown, while a historic waterfront community, is more of a day tourist/antique shopping destination than a college town. Fortunately, students are allowed to bring a car, if they have one. It helps, considering the College is less than two hours from Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington DC.

Washington College does not have the brand recognition of Dickinson or Gettysburg, nor the boost that Goucher and McDaniel receive as being

two of the Colleges That Change Lives, nor the state relationships that allow Salisbury and St. Mary's to charge Maryland residents much less in tuition and fees. The brand recognition will need to be stronger--housing renovations would also help--if this school is to continue to be competitive for the students it wants. The academics are certainly here and the history of the College is interesting. The school attracts pretty much the same student (statistically) as its closest in-state competitors, all aggressive at discounting their prices. Further, the debt burden on students and parents is higher at this school than its most-shopped competitors. Merit awards go pretty deep into a freshman class at Washington, so this is surprising.

It's too easy for people who live outside of Maryland, Central Pennsylvania and New Jersey to overlook Washington College. But those who want a liberal arts education should not overlook this school in their search. In the world of higher education perception is reality. A "very good" school that wants to be known as a "great" school needs to do better at getting its message out. Especially if it offers much the same assets as its peer and aspirant schools as well as similar outcomes for its more diligent graduates.

Ed Quest's Report Card						
Washington College (MD)						

Four-Year/ Six-Year Grad Rates	Freshman Retention	Costs	Comforts	Community	Curriculum	Connections
A/B+	B+	B	B	B+	A	B

Strengths	Weaknesses
Generous merit aid for the very good as well as the excellent student	Average level of student debt is high, considering the market where this school competes--its higher than the cross-shopped schools
Interesting internship options in Washington DC and New York City, among others, through aggressive career services and academic departments	Chestertown is quite isolated. Washington DC is 75 minutes away, and that includes the ride to the New Carrollton train station.
Investments in theatre, biological sciences and psychology are impressive for a small liberal arts school	Residence halls and special interest houses are showing their age, although room and board charges are reasonable
Joint degree options in nursing and pharmacy that are unique among Maryland liberal arts colleges	If you don't get one of the larger scholarships, other Maryland liberal arts schools are quite competitive with financial aid. So are the prices of public St. Mary's and Salisbury
Everyone does a challenging Capstone project--and the better students have a chance to get it funded	Limited brand recognition within a state that has several fine liberal arts schools
Interesting ties to U.S. history and national politics surpassed by only Gettysburg among smaller schools	

The End



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