On Knowing

You start by knowing something.

And then you wrestle with it, pull it apart, connect it to other things, see it differently. You search and question and reimagine. And this leads to a new kind of knowledge—deeper, more creative, more profound.

That’s how great ideas are born. That’s how effective communities thrive. That’s how learning at Amherst works.

We start by knowing this: Amherst is not simply a preparation for your professional life. It is a preparation for your lifelong journey of learning—exhilarating and surprising, rewarding and vast.
Academics

The essential starting point. An experience that involves access to a liberating open curriculum, an astonishingly talented and accessible faculty, the expansive Five College Consortium, and myriad opportunities for research and internships around the world—all within the context of an undergraduate liberal arts college. An experience that often prompts a slight (and thrilling) sense of vertigo. Or that gives you an oceanic sense of possibility. An experience that will stay with you for the rest of your life.
Admission
A source of pride, not for the obvious reasons, but for the less obvious, hugely important reasons: We search for exceptional students from across the country and around the world, including places and populations that are historically underrepresented in higher education. We offer one of the most comprehensive, ambitious financial aid programs in the country.

Advising
A signature of our academic program. Students work with faculty members—some of the smartest, most accomplished, most approachable people you’ll ever meet—to choose courses and plan for research and internships and the world beyond. Related to our open curriculum, a distinctive opportunity that allows more independence and requires more initiative than a typical curriculum.

Alumni
Taken as a whole, an inspiring example of the power, the ingenuity, the lasting impact that a relatively small group of people can have. Taken individually, an endlessly expanding list of people you would want to talk to, work with and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with as you advance the frontier of human possibility. All together, an active force for good, in the world and on campus. (See Pathways.)

The Amherst Student
One of many student-run publications. From its (much-read) website: “Established in 1868, The Student is the oldest independent weekly college publication in the country, with over 2,000 copies circulated per issue. As an independent publication, The Student and its staff are committed to a standard of conscientious reporting and quality writing.”

To name just a few: Joseph Stiglitz ’64, Nobel Prize–winning economist. Ana Salas Siegel ’91, senior vice president at NBC Universal. Andrea Dutro ’95, geoscientist at the vanguard of research on global sea level. Kimmie Weeks ’05, founder of Youth Action International. Debbie Applegate ’90, author of a Pulitzer Prize–winning biography of Henry Ward Beecher (Class of 1834).
Amherst (the town), Massachusetts
Home to slightly more than 35,000 politically engaged, culturally aware people; excellent coffee; affordable restaurants offering a range of national and international cuisines; an art cinema; a town green; and, slightly off to the side, a large shopping center with enough retail options to serve the needs of thousands of students. Also home to farms, country roads, farmers’ markets, art festivals and Emily Dickinson’s house. Frequently named “best college town in America.” Here’s the amazing thing: Our campus is essentially in town. No fences, no gates. If you go to Amherst College, you’re a neighbor in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Amy Rosenzweig ’88
Pioneering interdisciplinary scientist, working at the crossroads of biochemistry, molecular biology and cell biology. Conducts research that many knowledgeable people (at the MacArthur Foundation, for example) believe will change the way we treat a variety of diseases.

Athletics
We have the oldest athletics program in the country—and in 2014 we won our 10th NCAA team title. We played the nation’s first intercollegiate baseball game,3 and in the past several years, 17 of our students have won Academic All-America awards. Roughly 30 percent of our students play on our 27 Division III teams,4 and about 80 percent are involved in intramural or club sports (including fencing, mountain biking, Ultimate Frisbee). We sponsor a leadership program for student-athletes, and a liaison program with our Center for Community Engagement allows teams to connect with the local community. Teams regularly host dinners where they talk about, for example, immigration reform or the debt ceiling.

Beneski Museum of Natural History
Three floors of exhibits, more than 1,700 specimens on display, and tens of thousands of specimens available for use by scholars and researchers from across campus and around the world. Highlights: the world’s largest collection of dinosaur tracks, including “Noah’s Raven,” the first confirmed evidence of a dinosaur to be found in North America; one of the premier vertebrate paleontology collections in New England; a mineralogy collection with nearly 10,000 items; and an exceedingly friendly staff. All in the supermodern Beneski Earth Sciences building.

Biddy Martin’s Office Hours
The president of the College holds regular office hours, open to all. She can talk about almost anything, from Rilke to football. She’s also very good at listening.

3. In 1859. Against Williams. We won, 73-32, allegedly in 26 innings. Good game.
Book & Plow Farm

A 10-acre vegetable farm adjacent to campus. Originally conceived by students; now annually provides more than 16,000 pounds of vegetables to Valentine Dining Hall, hosts student interns, serves as a research site and co-facilitates an environmental studies course.
Book Tree
A hollow tree in the Wildlife Sanctuary into which students place poems, love letters, pages from novels and other literary items that are considered worthy of residence within a lovely tree.

The Brilliance of Memorial Hill

Buckley Recital Hall
A warm, acoustically generous performance space in the Arms Music Center. Hosts regular appearances by student groups and senior thesis projects by music majors. Home of the Music at Amherst concert series, which is free for students and features adventurous national and international acts (in recent years: The Bad Plus, Meredith Monk and Ying Quartet, among others).
Carnivals/Festivals
In fall and winter and spring. In which we meet on Valentine Quad or Memorial Field and run through an inflatable obstacle course or ride a mechanical surfboard or make s’mores or eat cotton candy or carve pumpkins. A time of unapologetic hokeyness. And, more to the point, community.

Career Center
Ready for use as soon as you step on campus. A place to reflect on what’s important to you, what you’re doing here and where you want to go. A place with the resources (databases and human networks for internships and jobs), the professionals, and the programs (career fairs, alumni networking events, skills workshops) to get you there. A lifelong benefit.

Center for Community Engagement
A resource for people who want to put their education to work for the common good. Provides funding for student and faculty projects and stipends to cover unpaid summer internships in the nonprofit sector. Offers internship programs and volunteer opportunities across the Pioneer Valley and around the world. Collaborates on community-based learning courses, including “Hydrogeology,” “Reading, Writing and Teaching” and “Regulating Citizenship,” which is taught in a correctional facility and enrolls both Amherst students and facility residents. Students serve as engagement advisors to clubs, athletic teams and peers. The CCE also runs a popular (and often transformative) three-day orientation trip in the fall. Like the Multicultural Resource Center, it’s located in the middle of our campus center—for a reason.

Charles Drew ’26
Discovered the chemical method for preserving blood and later became director of the first American blood bank. Organized the blood-plasma programs of the United States and Great Britain in the early years of World War II. Advocated for the elimination of discriminatory practices in plasma-supply networks (e.g., excluding the blood of African Americans). One of those unsung heroes who do the hard, practical work of blazing trails. One of our theme houses, dedicated to black culture, is named in his honor.

The Condition of Being All In
“Everyone here is incredibly passionate about what they do. They’re excited about learning new things; they’re open to new experiences. Writing a thesis, playing a sport, combating social injustice—we go all in.”

Tierra Wilkins: junior; Wilmington, N.C.; English and Black Studies double major; executive board member, Pride Alliance

The Cost of Attendance
It’s in the mid-$60,000 range. Significantly, the majority of our students pay less—often far less—than the cost of attendance. Under our need-blind admission policy, about 60 percent of our students receive financial aid. Last year, our average financial aid award was more than $48,500.

5. That figure includes tuition, room and board, student fees, travel, books and supplies, health insurance and personal expenses. See our financial aid section at amherst.edu for the most current figures—and for information about our financial aid program, which is (we’re not going to be modest here) one of the most generous and progressive programs in the country.
The Culture of the Liberal Arts

It’s a culture of intellectual exuberance. To us, a liberal arts education—an Amherst education—is rooted in habits, practices and skills that are at once timeless and urgently needed: effective communication, strong writing ability, insightful problem solving, and creative, analytical thinking. This is an education that allows you to be flexible, nimble, to change and adapt to new opportunities, new information. In a world that is endlessly renewing itself, this is an education that is endlessly relevant.
Dancing and Stepping at Amherst College
A selective performance group, affectionately called DASAC. Produces student-choreographed, biannual dance and step shows—among the most popular cultural events on campus. Another popular option is Amherst Dance, offering an even broader range of styles. And thanks to the Five College Dance Department, students have access to dance programs across the Consortium. 6

David Foster Wallace ’85
Polymathic, critical-minded, compassionate, digressive, blazingly self-aware. Completed theses in English and philosophy. Played for the varsity tennis team. Went on to write astonishingly ambitious fiction (Infinite Jest, Brief Interviews with Hideous Men) and wide-ranging, unclassifiable nonfiction (A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again). Among the most influential writers of his generation. 7

Excellence
Often mentioned at Amherst in statements such as: “We strive for excellence in everything we do.” What it means to us is that we are unwilling simply to do something mechanically well. The research project, the performance, the game, the internship, the road trip—we want to do these things with as much life, as much joy, as much intensity as possible. We do not settle; we are not interested in “good enough.” The result is that a student might, for instance, conduct groundbreaking research or produce an original play—or both. Excellence is multidimensional.

6. The Five College Dance Department pools the distinctive dance offerings of all five schools, making it a uniquely rich and diverse dance department and one of the largest in the nation.
7. One way in which he was influential: He turned footnotes into a literary tool of the highest order.
Professor GEntzl Er: Hans-Georg Gadamer makes some surprising claims about philosophy and philosophers. He suggests that philosophers are concerned primarily with gaining knowledge of themselves. He also suggests that philosophers have discovered and aim to bring about what he calls the highest principle of action, ‘freedom for all.’ What’s the connection between these two claims? Does Gadamer’s characterization of philosophy match your understanding of the work that you’ve done at Amherst? 

Jianlin: Connecting Gadamer’s two claims, it seems that he wants to say that philosophy makes people achieve freedom through examining ourselves. As a result, we will have the option of changing our behaviors and beliefs so that they are more coherent with what our reason dictates. Instead of viewing philosophy as the narrow pursuit of very specific and sometimes even technical questions, I agree with the ancients that philosophy is a much more general pursuit of wisdom. And by studying philosophy, we become lovers of wisdom.”

Jyl Gentzler, the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Philosophy and co-director of the Writing Center 

Jianlin Zhong: senior; Shenyang, China; mathematics and philosophy double major; summer internship with J.P. Morgan
Fayerweather Hall

Where art lives. Featuring studios for painting, drawing, photography, sculpture and printmaking, plus the Eli Marsh Gallery. Home to exhibitions by students and visiting artists, honors thesis exhibits, gallery talks and free Thursday evening figure drawing sessions, open to students, faculty, staff and the greater Amherst town community.
Financial Aid
Four things you should know about our financial aid program:
1. Our admission process is need-blind for all students, domestic and international.
2. We meet 100 percent of every student’s demonstrated need.
3. We were one of the first colleges in the country to adopt a no-loan policy.
4. Only a few colleges in the country can make those three statements. We’re proud to be one of them. Find out more: amherst.edu.

The First-Year Experience
A singular, profound, paradigm-shifting time in your life at Amherst. You live in a first-year residence on the main quad, with people who are spectacularily different from you but who are all sharing this experience. You participate in our orientation program, including a LEAP experience of your choice—an intensive three-day engagement with a place or a theme (the outdoors; the local community; our Book & Plow Farm; our Mead Art Museum; mindfulness and yoga; arts and performance; innovation and entrepreneurship). You choose courses and ponder the future with a professor who serves as your first-year advisor. And you take a first-year seminar—meeting twice a week with a professor and a student to explore a specialized topic. You analyze it, think critically about it from all sides, write about it. You experience what learning at Amherst is all about.

The First Five Years After College
What happens in those years? About 85 percent of our graduates pursue advanced work in graduate or professional school. An unusually high percentage of our seniors and recent graduates win major scholarships and fellowships—Fulbright, Gates, Goldwater, Rhodes, Watson—that fund research and creative, professional work around the world. Many new graduates build on experience they’ve gained at Amherst—an internship at the Federal Reserve Bank, a summer science research project with a professor, a service program with an NGO in Sierra Leone. They use the resources at our Career Center to find opportunities they hadn’t imagined, or connect with alumni through the center’s Pathways Mentoring Program. So, in a way, the question isn’t “What happens in those five years after Amherst?” It’s “What happened in those four years at Amherst?”

8. In one recent year, 13 Amherst students or recent graduates won Fulbright awards for work including research in Vienna on composer Arnold Schoenberg (Luca Antonacci ’14); teaching in Taiwan before medical school (Cassey Gross ’14); and teaching in Vietnam before graduate studies in international relations (Manuel Guerrero ’14). Laura Poole ’14 actually declined a Fulbright in order to pursue a master’s in education. She majored in computer science and math, and wants to work with young women in those fields.
9. Stylishly deconstructed as: learn • explore • activate • participate.
10. You choose one seminar from a list of dozens. A few seminars from a recent year: “Friendship,” “Secrets and Lies,” “Evolution and Intellectual Revolution,” “Death and Dying in Islam,” “Science Fiction or the Posthuman,” “Asi in the European Mind,” “Genes, Genomes and Society” and “Liberation.” The last one is indicative of what you can expect at Amherst.
11. Which is helped considerably by the PVTA, the free Five College bus system.
12. But let us not forget our other libraries, dedicated to math, music and science. We love them, too!
Green Amherst
We’re proactive about creating a sustainable campus as part of a sustainable world. We’ve developed ambitious programs in composting, green building design, single-stream recycling and carbon reduction; and we’re powered by an innovative cogeneration plant. Our Office of Environmental Sustainability works to develop innovative programs and to integrate campus sustainability initiatives with research and teaching on campus.

Harold Varmus ’61
Former director of the National Institutes of Health, president of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, director of the National Cancer Institute and a Nobel laureate in medicine. These are the kinds of things you can do with a degree in English from Amherst.¹⁴

How Marisa Parham Conducts Research on the Digital Frontier
“One of my recent research projects has morphed into a digital presentation: developing a classic Harlem Renaissance novel, Jean Toomer’s Cane, into an interactive gaming experience. Digital humanities projects are technologically innovative, so they often require collaboration across disciplines. They allow us to build new kinds of intellectual communities, and I find that to be an incredibly energizing experience.”

Marisa Parham, associate professor of English, director of Five College Digital Humanities

Humphries House
A residential theme house that’s also a student-run cooperative. Residents cook group dinners five nights a week. They host social gatherings that are sometimes refined (annual wine and cheese reception for faculty), sometimes happily not (a legendary Phish concert). They make key decisions together, and generally serve as an ongoing experiment in letting smart people collaborate on something surprising and enlightened and cumin-scented. Everyone calls it “the Zu.”

¹⁴ He wrote his thesis on Charles Dickens.
Internships

Thousands of opportunities are available, many established through our network of alumni, parents and friends of the College and accessible through our Career Center. There’s also a range of public service internships through our Center for Community Engagement.

A few internships that students have taken recently:

- AIDS Healthcare Foundation
- American Cancer Society
- Arnold Worldwide
- Berkshire Botanical Garden
- Brightfields Development LLC
- Close Concerns
- Facebook
- Goldman Sachs & Co
- Loretta Howard Gallery
- Macquarie Capital
- Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
- Mississippi Innocence Project
- OneVillage Partners
- Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP
- Social Innovation Forum
- Urban Justice Center
- U.S. Department of Justice

Interterm

Three weeks during the January break between semesters when you can pursue a passion in a number of ways: participate in a winter sport, do research in a lab, take an internship off campus, take a noncredit course at Amherst (such as “Private Equity Investments in Natural Resources,” “Organizing for Social Change,” “Web Programming” or “Makerspace Uncourse”) and generally embrace the joys of winter.
Jeffrey Wright ’87
One of the most decorated actors of his generation, with Tony, Emmy and Golden Globe awards to his name. Major roles in Angels in America (on stage and screen), Basquiat, A Free Man of Color, Boardwalk Empire and The Hunger Games: Catching Fire. Also an activist for sustainable, ethical mining practices in Africa. These are the kinds of things you can do with a degree in political science from Amherst.

Jobs
Our education is designed to build multiple intelligences, so you can adapt to the job you want, or invent the job that doesn’t exist but that the world urgently needs.¹⁴ Some jobs taken by recent graduates:

- Analyst, AlphaSights
- Associate Consultant, Bain & Company
- Business Analyst, Deloitte
- Financial Analyst, Ecolab
- Software Developer, Epic Systems
- Account Strategist, Google
- Media Planner and Buyer, Havas Media
- Investment Banking Analyst, J.P. Morgan
- Clinical Research Coordinator, Massachusetts General Hospital
- Legislative Assistant, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
- Corporate Paralegal, Simpson Thacher & Bartles LLC
- Solar Development Analyst, SunEdison
- Teacher, Teach For America

Johnson Chapel
A campus landmark, visible for miles around, set at the center of College Row—the original three buildings on campus. Hosts lectures by people of great renown, from David Brooks to Rachel Maddow, from Bill McKibben to Antonin Scalia, from Dan Brown ’86 to Jonathan Kozol. Serves as a performance space, a classroom, a chapel (!really!) and a venue for community events both serious (the annual DeMott Lecture) and not-so-serious (Lip Sync).

Jonatha Brooke ’85
Founding member of beloved folk-rock group The Story. Pioneer of alternative music distribution methods. Invited by Woody Guthrie’s daughter to adapt unreleased Guthrie songs. Wrote and starred in an Off-Broadway play. Wrote her first song in an Amherst composition class, based on a line from e.e. cummings: “love is more thicker than forget.”

Karti Subramanian ’07 and Taylor Downs ’08
Founded Vera Solutions, which builds cloud and mobile apps to help social service organizations collect, organize and learn from data. Named to Forbes’ “30 Under 30: Social Entrepreneurs” list.

¹⁴. An impressive example: Risalat Khan ’13 co-founded and is CEO of BhaloBasha, a start-up in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that uses urban rooftop aquaponics to provide food to the city’s residents.
Keefe Campus Center
The distinctive yellow building that almost every student visits at least once a day. Home to the campus post office, movie theater and game room; the offices of The Amherst Student newspaper and WAMH radio; Schwemm’s Coffee House; and the McCaffrey Room for meetings and performances—plus the Center for Community Engagement, the Multicultural Resource Center, and the Women’s and Gender Center. It’s the center of centers.

Keri Lambert ’13
Won a Watson Fellowship and traveled to Ghana, Tanzania and Malaysia to study "how the production of goods that are consumed on the global scale affects people locally in their day-to-day lives." Also won the national title in the 3,000-meter steeplechase.

Kirby Theater
A state-of-the-art 384-seat theater, featuring computerized lighting and sound equipment and scene and costume shops. Connected to the Holden Experimental Theater, a flexible 6,000-square-foot space with moveable seating, computerized lighting and sound, and catwalks. Home to boundary-pushing performances, including the Fringe Festival and student theses, year-round.

Lengthening Your Cultural Horizon
Some of the most active student organizations on campus are affinity groups, including the Asian Students Association, the Black Student Union, La Causa, Pride Alliance, and the International Student Association. They’re politically engaged, culturally adventurous and responsible for some of the year’s best campus-wide events.

Lip Sync
An annual show in which groups of students produce skits and dance routines to popular songs, to compete for the highest numbers among their classmates in Room Draw (the housing lottery). An evening when you see people doing things you never imagined them capable of doing.

Leaving the Safe Harbor
“I think people naturally try to harbor themselves in comfort zones and avoid difficult conversations. I realized here that I wouldn’t grow if I did that. I’ve been challenged to listen to and respect different points of view. I’m no longer afraid to engage in deeper and harder dialogues—in class and outside of class, too. To me, this is true education. This is what makes education valuable.”

Cristian Navarro: junior; San José, Costa Rica; economics and mathematics double major; member of the crew team.

Listening for the sonic link between the Valley and the coast
Abigail’s senior thesis was “Shore,” a composition for string quartet. “I wrote it for two reasons: to express emotions in music that I couldn’t express in words, and to build a sonic link between the Pioneer Valley and my home on the coast of the Atlantic.” She met every week with her advisor, Eric Sawyer (who had recently premiered his opera The Garden of Martyrs). They’d sit at the piano and work through a section, or share sources of inspiration, or just talk.

PROFESSOR SAWYER: “Abigail refined her string writing with great care and patience, and—best of all—with an unfailing vision of how she wished the instruments to combine expressively.”

Abigail Gray: senior; Woolwich, Maine; English and music double major; resident of Marsh Arts House; club hockey player.

ABIGAIL: “I think place and sound are inherently linked. To capture a place through a series of sounds—and, conversely, to project a series of sounds on a place—that’s an enlightening process.”

Eric Sawyer, professor of music.
Professor Trapani: “It’s amazing that vertebrates have evolved such intricate systems for detecting sound, gravity and nearby water currents—if you’re a fish. The sensory receptor that is responsible for this transduction of mechanical stimuli into electrical signals that are sent to the brain is called the hair cell. This cell is critical for human hearing and balance.”

Alexander: “We perform electrophysiology on tiny zebrafish larvae. The technique is so sensitive that we have to do it on a table that floats on a layer of air to isolate the fish from vibrations, and we use remote-controlled robotic arms to insert the recording electrodes. Fortunately, both Razina and Professor Trapani have been amazing at getting me up to speed. They’re great teachers.”

Razina: “My honors thesis examined how one type of channel in the hair cell contributes to the hair cell’s ability to encode sensory information with speed and reliability. Professor Trapani has been an incredible mentor. I’ve presented my work at a national neuroscience conference, published an article in a scientific journal and collaborated with a lab in Germany, which involved their sending zebrafish larvae in thermoses across the Atlantic Ocean. Now I know what I’m capable of.”

Josef Trapani, assistant professor of biology
Alexander Ordoobadi: junior; Washington, D.C.; neuroscience major; head of Amherst College Emergency Medical Services
Razina Aziz-Bose: senior; Lexington, Mass; neuroscience major; research assistant, Massachusetts General Hospital
Majors

We offer 38 majors. Traditionally, about 35 percent of our students double major; a number create their own interdisciplinary majors. In addition to a wide choice of majors, our open curriculum gives you the flexibility to pursue your intellectual passions, and the freedom to be the architect of your education.

- American Studies
- Anthropology
- Architectural Studies
- Art and the History of Art
- Asian Languages and Civilizations
- Astronomy
- Biochemistry and Biophysics
- Biology
- Black Studies
- Chemistry
- Classics
- Computer Science
- Economics
- English
- Environmental Studies
- Film and Media Studies
- French
- Geology
- German
- Greek
- History
- Latin
- Law, Jurisprudence and Social Thought
- Mathematics
- Music
- Neuroscience
- Philosophy
- Physics
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Religion
- Russian
- Sexuality, Women’s and Gender Studies
- Sociology
- Spanish
- Statistics
- Theater and Dance

Making History

It happens fairly often here, sometimes at tens of billionths of degrees above absolute zero. David Hall, for example, led an international research team working with ultracold atomic gases. In Hall’s lab the team observed a Dirac monopole, which is related to the as-yet-unobserved magnetic monopole, an isolated north or south magnetic pole. This work is progress toward an ultimate result that could be as revolutionary as the discovery of the electron. “We pursued these experiments because of student interest in the theory,” says Professor Hall. “It is personally gratifying to see students graduate after having built apparatus and written theses based on their scientific work in my laboratory.”

David Hall ’91, the Paula R. and David J. Avenius 1941 Professor of Physics

“Man, you gotta relax.”

What men’s soccer coach Justin Serpone says to his players, often. This turns out to be what you have to say to players on a team that routinely wins New England Small College Athletic Association (NESCAC) championships, qualifies for the NCAA tournament and simultaneously attempts to do world-class work in every other area of life. You say: Relax. Do your best. Enjoy the process. Then move on to the next great thing you’re doing.

Marsh Coffee Haus

A regular performance series hosted by the Marsh Arts House, a theme house at the top of The Hill. The Coffee Haus features singer-songwriters, poets and other artists, many of whom are students, some of whom are local or national touring acts.
The Mead Art Museum

An expansive museum, tucked into the main quad and featuring more than 19,000 objects spanning 5,000 years of global culture: Mexican ceramics, Tibetan scroll paintings, an English paneled room, ancient Assyrian carvings, Russian avant-garde art, West African sculpture, Japanese prints, American and European paintings. Including work by artists as varied as Mary Ellen Mark, Andy Warhol, Takashi Murakami, Andres Serrano and more. A great resource for internships, summer research fellowships, and a host of concerts, lectures and midnight study breaks. Named for (and established with funds bequeathed by) architect William Rutherford Mead, Class of 1867, cofounder of McKim, Mead & White. Featuring a bookshop, Mr. Gad’s, summer research fellowships, and free Wi-Fi. Open till midnight four days a week.

Merrill Beach

A patio on the roof of Merrill Science Center. Chairs, tables, majestic views of the beautiful Holyoke Mountain Range. Note: not an actual beach.

Mr. Gad’s House of Improv

Student improv group. Attracts overflow crowds of students to its performances. The origins of the troupe’s name are revealed only to its members.

Moments of Meta-awareness

Such as this one, in which we reflect upon (and analyze, and take apart, and occasionally make sport of) the very nature of whatever it is that we’re doing. These moments are so characteristic of the way we think (self-aware and self-skeptical, disciplined and digressive) that we’re tempted to call them Amherstian, except no one on this campus would use such a term with a straight face. These moments can feel exasperating and circular, but we know from experience that they are a secret sign of progress, a necessary part of responsibly, carefully, substantively moving the world forward.

The Multicultural Resource Center

A space for guidance, activism and community, across and within cultures. Located in Keefe Campus Center, at the heart of campus. Note the symbolism—which is far more than symbolic. A multicultural, polyphonic student body is at the core of who we are.

NCAA Titles

Meaning national Division III titles. Our athletes have won 75 individual titles (in swimming and diving, tennis, and track and field) and 10 team championships. To be specific:

- Men’s basketball, 2013, 2007
- Women’s basketball, 2011
- Women’s ice hockey, 2010, 2009
- Women’s cross-country, 2007
- Women’s lacrosse, 2003
- Women’s tennis, 1999

The New Standard

“This is a community where your experience and your intellectual and personal character are respected—but also held to new and higher standards. Amherst has made me a better intellectual, but it has also challenged me to be a better person, with a greater sense of responsibility to my community—and an accompanying greater sense of hope.”

Kyras Ellis-Moore: junior; Albuquerque, New Mexico; double major in law, jurisprudence and social thought and sexuality studies; peer advocate of sexual respect; Amherst Dance; senator, Association of Amherst Students

The Natural Process of Bonding with a New Roommate

IRMA: “There are so many things I’ve grown to love about Lauren. She’s always entertaining. She knows what to say and when to say it. She’s patient with me; she listens to my annoying rants. I take her to La Causa events; she took me to New York—my first time there.”

LAUREN: “Irma not only puts up with my craziness, she actually seems to get a kick out of it. If I show her a weird Monty Python video that I find HILARIOUS, she will be right there laughing with me.”

The Octagon

A yellow building—technically an eight-sided polygon—on a steep hill overlooking the main campus entrance. Originally (in 1848) home to the astronomy and geology departments; currently home to the Black Student Union and the Gerald Penny ’77 Black Cultural Center. Also home to the burgundy-carpeted Babbott Room, a lovely place to attend a seminar or a reading.
The Open Curriculum

The open curriculum is one of the boldest, most productive experiments in higher education. It ensures that each classroom is filled with fully engaged students, committed to the topic at hand. We don’t have distribution requirements. We don’t have a core curriculum. What we do have is more than 850 courses (actually, thanks to our membership in the Five College Consortium, more like several thousand) and 1,800 students with the vision and the courage to choose the courses that matter most to them. And—crucially—faculty who are committed to serving as advisors and mentors during the course selection process.

Pathways Mentoring Program

A highly effective way to connect the past, the present and the future of Amherst. An alumni-student mentoring program, sponsored by our Career Center. It connects hundreds of active, accomplished alumni to current students. Alumni serve as mentors—experienced adults who can talk to students about academic, professional and life goals. The results: Alumni leverage their experience to help new generations of Amherst students; students think critically, strategically and deeply about their future; and good work (including, often, internships and jobs) starts to get done.

The Pioneer Valley

Our part of Western Massachusetts. It includes some of the state’s prettiest mountains and New England’s longest river; historic sites, ski resorts, white-water rafting, hiking trails; the city of Springfield, home to the Basketball Hall of Fame; and the town of Northampton, which is only 15 minutes from campus and like a sister college town to Amherst. The Pioneer Valley is home to more college students and cultural events than any region in New England outside of metro Boston. (Speaking of which: Amherst is 90 miles from Boston.) The Five College Consortium is here; the Iron Horse Music Hall is here (motto: “Music alone shall live”); the Montague Bookmill is here (motto: “Books you don’t need in a place you can’t find”); high-tech start-ups, entrepreneurial ventures and grassroots community projects are here. The people here tend to think broadly, work together, live close to the land and put new ideas to work, starting now. We call it the Happy Valley, and we are completely serious.

Pratt Field

The third-oldest NCAA football-playing site in the country—and now, thanks to a recent renovation, a high-performance, 21st-century marvel. Featuring a state-of-the-art turf field; an eight-lane, all-weather track that meets International Association of Athletics Federations standards; a 15,000-square-foot athletic building; and a new press box that looks like a classic press box but functions like the digital nexus that it is.

15. Overheard at a Town of Amherst Chamber of Commerce meeting: “We recently surveyed visitors to Amherst. What was the number-one thing they said about Amherst? It was the place they visited where they felt most like themselves.” Sounds like happiness to us.
How did modernization and westernization change Tokyo—and how did visual artists represent that change?

Jonathan Ramirez: “Westernization created a conflict for Japanese artists who searched for a balance between conventional artistic styles and new Western ideals. You can see the impact of westernization in the transformation of the way in which artists depicted Mount Fuji. In early depictions, they displayed the mountain as a symbol of national pride and portrayed its religious significance. As modernization arrived in Japan, artists set Mount Fuji in the background of their work. Their focus shifted to the westernized aspects of Tokyo—the railroads and consumer culture.”

Professor Morse: “Japanese artists were fascinated by Western modes of representation that were introduced to the country in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some incorporated Western elements (vanishing-point perspective, cast shadows) into works in traditional styles. Others worked in traditional formats such as the woodblock print, but in styles directly borrowed from the West. A third group enthusiastically embraced new processes such as lithography and photography, but trained their eye on distinctively Japanese subject matter. For each group, preserving something of their Japanese cultural identity was of crucial importance.”

Jonathan Ramirez: sophomore; Wyckoff, N.J.; double major in economics and (soon) art and the history of art; participant in Amherst College Athlete Bible Study; outfielder for varsity baseball

Sam Morse, Howard M. and Martha P. Mitchell Professor of the History of Art and Asian Languages and Civilizations, faculty liaison to the women’s ice hockey team
Rao’s
A café on a side street a few blocks from campus. So popular, and so congenial to, say, writing a research paper, that it essentially functions as an annex to the library.

Research
Done at an exceptionally high level, using state-of-the-art resources, often in collaboration with (or with the mentorship of) a professor who a) understands why this experience matters, b) is committed to giving you the time and the attention to make the most of it and, maybe most importantly, c) treats you like a partner in a shared enterprise, like someone who’s capable of making a meaningful contribution to the world’s body of knowledge. Which you are. 16

Respect
We’re committed to fostering a culture of respect on campus. Our community-generated Honor Code sets out standards of integrity in and out of the classroom. We work together to build trust and mutual understanding in every arena—personal, social and academic.

A few events, organizations and centers that help do that work: the Amherst Men’s Project, the Cadigan Center for Religious Life, the College Council, ConsentFEST, the Multicultural Resource Center, Peer Advocates of Sexual Respect, Pride Week, the Queer Resource Center, Student Health Educators, the Women’s and Gender Center.

The Rilke/Salomé Bathrooms
The men’s and women’s bathrooms on B Level of Frost Library, whose walls students have covered with excerpts from the letters of Rainer Maria Rilke and the diaries of his intellectual and romantic partner Lou Andreas-Salomé. Not to be confused with the Joyce bathroom (in Johnson Chapel, featuring excerpts from Ulysses) or the Rowling bathroom (in Chapin Hall, featuring quotes from the Harry Potter books). It’s not graffiti; it’s love.

Rosanne Haggerty ’82
Internationally recognized leader in housing and community development. Founder of Common Ground Community and Community Solutions. Won a MacArthur Fellowship (“genius grant”), as well as a Jane Jacobs Medal for New Ideas and Activism.

Study Abroad
About 40 percent of our students study abroad, choosing from more than 200 programs around the world, from Cuba to Sri Lanka, from Mali to Madagascar, and including an exchange program with Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. Doshisha was founded in 1875 by an Amherst graduate—which tells you something about the depth of our commitment to international experience. And because 10 percent of our students are international, and we live in a region with thousands of other international college students, just being here is a little like a study-abroad experience.

The Spring Concert
The highly anticipated evening each year when a big-name musical act comes to campus—as do hundreds of fans from all around the Five College Consortium. Headliners in recent years have included Icona Pop, Mike Posner, and Macklemore and Ryan Lewis.

Theme Houses
In which groups of students who share an interest live together on the same residence hall floor or in the same house. And host events related to that interest. And engage as fully as possible with that interest. Current theme houses: Asian Culture House, Charles Drew House (Black culture), cooperative living, health and wellness, La Casa (Latino culture), Marsh Arts House (home of the Marsh Coffee Haus), plus many languages (French, German, Russian, Spanish).

16. Case in point: Austin Sarat, the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Jurisprudence and Political Science, recently published, with four Amherst students, Gruenewald Spectacles: Botched Executions and America’s Death Penalty. He wrote in the introduction (and has said to media, such as C-SPAN): “While the conventions of publishing required that my name appear alone on the front cover, our collaboration is manifest on every page.”
Three profound sentences about exploring the building blocks of the universe

PROFESSOR LEUNG: "The molecule doesn’t lie."17
HANNAH: "Research doesn’t happen overnight."18
JOEY: "There’s no answer key for the questions we’re asking."19

17 "You might not know what it’s saying, but it doesn’t lie. So you make hypotheses that must be checked against the results of your experiments. With Joey and Hannah, we’re investigating the manner in which two molecules interact and trying to understand the relative importance of several competing effects on the nature of the interaction. I expect students to think creatively about their work, to test their thinking against the data, to work together and support each other. Science is best done collaboratively.”
—Helen Leung, the George H. Corey 1988 Professor of Chemistry

18 "When I started in the lab, I had no special technical training or expertise. Now I’m working on my own research project with cutting-edge equipment and the mentorship and support of truly excellent professors. I’ve spent more than a year on my project—and it’s nowhere near complete. No one has previously studied my complex, and I’ve been able to work on almost every aspect of a rotational spectroscopy research project. I feel such a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the work—which probably explains why I’m planning to continue it this summer.”
—Hannah Tandon; sophomore; San Marino, Calif.; chemistry major; volunteer with Amherst College Emergency Medical Services

19 "We create the answers ourselves. My senior thesis looked at the complex between vinyl chloride and HCl. And I found results that were highly surprising. Previous work on the topic had found that these complexes were planar, but my work showed that the HCl is actually located above the plane of vinyl chloride. This was unexpected and cool, and, as you might imagine, it makes us question what we know about these complexes. So now we’re less sure of what’s going on—but we’ve also created a new opportunity.”
—Joey Messinger; senior; Berkeley, Calif.; chemistry major
Take Your Professor Out, in which a group of classmates can take their professor to dinner in the Town of Amherst, and the College pays. There’s also TYSO, for students to dine out with college staff—the custodian who looks after your dorm, the cook who serves up your lasagna in the dining hall, the librarian who locates research materials for your thesis. An all-but-guaranteed bonding experience.

Undergraduate College
We’re an undergraduate college—that’s an essential part of our identity as an institution and our work in the world. Professors come to Amherst because they want to teach and work with undergraduates. Our students have access to opportunities (conducting research alongside renowned professors, using state-of-the-art equipment, publishing in major journals, attending national conferences) that in a university setting would typically be reserved for graduate students.

“Use-value doesn’t diminish intellectual value.”
What chemistry professor Sheila Jaswal said in a recent conversation. Meaning: It’s possible to do work that is both immediately applicable in the wider world and theoretically mind-blowing. She also said: “Asking the fundamental questions moves things forward in ways we can’t foresee.” And then she said: “I’m excited by the marvel of life and what we don’t know about it.” Good conversation. Great professor.

Valentine Dining Hall
Known to its friends as Val. A centralized dining hall offering a range of dietary options, with food sourced from local farms, including our very own Book & Plow Farm. Home of the Val-Sit, an informal contest to see how long you can hang around in Val, talking with friends, after you’ve finished eating. Because the real reason to come to Val is to be together.

Visionaries Such as Madeline Janis ’82
Janis is one of the country’s most effective grassroots activists. She co-founded the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, which spearheaded the passage of one of the first living-wage laws in the United States. She created a landmark community-benefits agreement that balances private development and community health. She also led campaigns to create green jobs and reduce pollution. She’s a model of (as the Los Angeles Times put it) "idealism backed by hard, practical politics."

Visiting
A fantastic idea. We’re 90 miles west of Boston, 150 miles north of New York City and accessible by plane, bus and train. Take a student-led tour, attend an information session, observe a class and walk around town. Find out more: amherst.edu/visiting.

Wildlife Sanctuary
Open fields, wetlands, woods, plantation pines and ponds—500 acres (yes, 500 acres) of natural bliss, literally part of campus, so you’re never more than a short walk from its glories. Highlights: the Fort River, a trail system, downy woodpeckers, brown thrashers, a drumlin, two tulip trees and the Book Tree.

Wolff Fitness Center
Eight thousand square feet of top-shelf cardiovascular, Bodymaster and free-weight equipment, in the heart of our athletics complex. One of the most actively (in every sense of the word) used spaces on campus.

X Factor
Commonly described as “a variable in a given situation that could have the most significant impact on the outcome.” Described here as our alumni. They’re leaders in industries and communities around the world. They also have a considerable impact on the lives of our students. They serve as mentors, offer internships, give presentations on their work and generally make sure that Amherst students have the resources and support they need to become the next X factor.
“Yes!”
What we say to unexpected ideas, sudden revelations, counterintuitive arguments—and to the will and the sweat needed to bring them into the world.

Zoetic
We absolutely love words, so feel free to use these next time you play Scrabble: Zastrugi (which you will see on campus), Zarzuela (which you will hear and taste on campus), Zyzzva (which you just might study on campus). Zaniness (which you will definitely meet on campus), Zeniths (which you can absolutely begin to reach on campus). And zoetic, as in vital, or living. As in being a student at Amherst. As in Amherst.
Amherst, at a glance

1821
Founded

52:48
Male to female ratio

850
Courses

38
Majors

U.S. students of color: 43%

International students: 10%
Dual-citizenship students: 5%

40%+
Students studying abroad
Study-abroad programs: 200+

48
States represented

55
Countries represented

16
Average class size

1,800
Students

30
Number of first-year seminars:

22,000+
Active Alumni

60%
Students receiving financial aid from Amherst

Demonstrated financial need met: 100%

35%
Students with a double major:

85%
Alumni attending graduate or professional school within 5 years:

Student-faculty ratio: 8:1

52:48
Male to female ratio

Seniors graduating with honors theses: 43%

Classes with fewer than 30 students: 90%

Open
Curriculum:

Student research opportunities: Hundreds

52
States represented

55
Countries represented

The Five College Consortium: Available courses: 6,000+
Students within a 10-mile radius: 30,000
Items in the libraries: 11 million+

Amherst College students taking courses through the Five College Consortium: 50%

Amherst College students taking courses through the Five College Consortium: 50%
Legend

Where to find information about 18 important topics:

Academics, 2, 8, 15, 19, 22, 23, 29, 33, 35, 40, 43, 46, 48
Admission, 5, 48
Alumni, 5, 6, 12, 16, 22, 24, 31, 32, 36, 40, 44, 49
Arts, 10, 16, 21, 32, 33, 36, 38, 45
Athletics, 6, 7, 36, 38, 41, 49
Career Center, 12, 22, 29, 40
Diversity, 12, 16, 32, 38, 45
Faculty, 2, 5, 19, 22, 25, 33, 35, 36, 43, 44, 46, 48
Financial Aid, 5, 13, 16, 22, 48
Five College Consortium, 2, 23, 40, 45
Internships, 2, 5, 8, 12, 23, 29, 38, 40, 49
Location, 6, 12, 40, 44, 49
Open Curriculum, 2, 5, 36, 40
Majors, 36
Research, 2, 5, 8, 16, 23, 25, 35, 36, 44, 46, 47, 48
Student Life, 5, 10, 12, 16, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 36, 38, 39, 40, 44, 45, 49
Study Abroad, 45
Visiting, 48, 49