Knowing Amherst
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.

1. Unlike your lifelong journey, this book is arranged alphabetically. It also includes a legend at the back, with guidance on finding information about topics that might be especially important to you.
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. As one of only a handful of schools following a policy of need-blind admission for both domestic and international applicants, we admit students based on academic achievement, personal accomplishment and potential to contribute to and benefit from our extraordinary campus community, not on a family’s financial situation. And 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. An integral part of the mentoring and internship resources available through our Career Center. All together, an active force for good, in the world and on campus.

The Amherst Student

One of many student-run publications. Established in 1888, The Student is the oldest weekly college publication in the country. Written, produced and published by an all-volunteer team of dedicated Amherst students, committed to conscientious reporting and quality writing.

Amherst (the town), Massachusetts

Home to more than 35,000 politically engaged, culturally aware people; excellent coffee; friendly 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

Ph.D. in chemistry from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Distinguished Professor of Life Sciences at Northwestern University and pioneering interdisciplinary scientist working at the crossroads of biochemistry, molecular biology and cell biology. Conducts research that many knowledgeable people (those in Three föhr) believe will of specific change the way we treat a variety of diseases.

Athletics

We have the oldest athletics program in the country, we competed in the first intercollegiate baseball game, and we have won 13 NCAA team championship titles (eight in this decade). Our students have won 80 NCAA individual titles and 37 Academic All-American awards (19 since 2010). Roughly 30 percent of our students play on our 27 Division III teams, and about 80 percent are involved in intramural or club sports. We sponsor a comprehensive leadership program for student-athletes; regular cross-team dinners to discuss topics of local, national and world significance; and a liaison program with our Center for Community Engagement to connect teams with the local community.

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.”

Beneski Museum of Natural History

Three floors of exhibits, more than 1,700 displayed objects and tens of thousands of specimens available to students, scholars and researchers across campus and around the world. All housed in the supermodern Beneski Earth Sciences Building. Highlights: an extraordinary collection of dinosaur tracks, including “Noah’s Raven,” the first confirmed evidence of a dinosaur found in North America; one of the premier vertebrate paleontology collections in New England; a dazzling mineralogy collection; and the skeleton of a Columbian mammoth, unearthed by Professor Frederick Brewster Loomis, brought to Amherst in 1925 and now the inspiration for Amherst’s first official mascot, the Mammoth.

3. In 1889, against Williams. We won, 73-32, allegedly in 26 innings. Good game.

Becoming the Future

The world is changing, and so has the east side of campus, transformed by the addition of a cutting-edge, interdisciplinary Science Center and four new residence halls linked by the Greenway, a sustainably designed 12-acre landscape of gardens, trees, stone walls, recreation areas and performance spaces. Opened in fall 2018, the 255,000-square-foot Science Center houses state-of-the-art labs, classrooms and offices for teaching and research in biology, biochemistry, biophysics, chemistry, computer science, physics, astronomy, psychology, neuroscience, math and statistics, as well as spacious, light-filled common areas. An integrated home for the interconnected sciences and a destination for the entire Amherst community.

Biddy Martin’s Office Hours

The president of the College holds regular office hours, open to all. A scholar and a sports fan, Biddy can talk about almost anything, from German literature to football. She’s also very good at listening.

Book & Plow Farm

A farm-to-table movement, right here on campus. A thriving, 50-acre agricultural endeavor—originally conceived by students—that now annually provides more than 20,000 pounds of fresh produce to Valentine Dining Hall, engages students in collaborative farming projects, serves as a research site, co-facilitates an environmental studies course, sponsors an annual food justice week, participates in a local community-supported (CSA) market and provides a natural space on campus to connect with our food, our land and each other.
Book Tree
A hollow tree in the Wildlife Sanctuary where students have placed 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 instrumental and choral 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 performers, who frequently offer masterclasses for Amherst students when visiting campus. On the program this year: Brazilian singer Luciana Souza with guitarist Chico Pinheiro; the eclectic contemporary sextet yMusic; virtuosic violinist Leila Josefowicz with pianist John Novacek; the Grammy-winning Parker Quartet; and innovative pianist Dan Tepler, whose music integrates computer-driven AI algorithms with jazz improvisation.
Carnivals/Festivals
In fall and winter and spring. When 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
Officially, the Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning. A place to consider and clarify how your education, skills, interests and values can align with a meaningful career. Offering the resources and advising needed to help you shape your path forward through internships, jobs, skills workshops and alumni mentoring. Provides financial support for summer experiences related to personal, professional and academic goals. Lays the groundwork for successful practical outcomes. Home to the Amherst Careers-In Program, Alumni-in-Residence Program, Houston Internship Program, Meiklejohn Fellows Program and much more. Ready for use as soon as you step on campus. An information hub, a career community, a lifelong benefit.

Center for Community Engagement
A resource for people who want to put their education to work for the common good by linking practical, experiential projects with theory, self-reflection and community interaction.

Offers opportunities for students and faculty to connect learning inside and outside the classroom. Supports student involvement in community-based research, partnerships and experiential learning courses, such as “Shakespeare in Prison,” which is taught in a correctional facility and enrolls both Amherst students and facility residents.

Charles Drew ’26
Received M.D. and Ph.D. degrees from McGill and Columbia Universities. 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 elimination of the discriminatory practice of excluding the blood of African Americans from plasma-supply networks. One of those heroes who do the hard, practical work of blazing trails. One of our residential theme communities, dedicated to black culture, is named in his honor.

Cost of Attendance
It’s in the mid-$70,000 range, including tuition, room and board, student fees, travel, books and supplies, health insurance and personal expenses. Significantly, the majority of our students pay less—often far less—than the cost of attendance. Under our need-blind admission policy, about 57 percent of our students received financial aid last year and our average financial aid award was more than $58,000.

5. 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 and Connections of the Liberal Arts

To us, a liberal arts education—an Amherst education—is rooted in practices and skills that are at once timeless and urgently needed: effective communication, strong writing ability, insightful problem solving, deep knowledge, and creative, analytical thinking. This is an education that allows you to be flexible and nimble, to change and adapt to new information and new opportunities, wherever you find them and wherever they lead you. In a world that is endlessly renewing itself, this is an education that is endlessly relevant, in the studio, in the laboratory, in the boardroom and beyond.
Dancing and Stepping at Amherst College
A selective performance group, affectionately called DASAC. Presents biannual, student-choreographed productions incorporating hip-hop, break, jazz, step and street dance genres—among the most popular cultural events on campus. Other popular options include Amherst Dance, the Salsa and Bachata Club, Intersections Dance and the Argentine Tango Club. And thanks to the Five College Dance Department, students have access to dance programs across the Consortium.

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.

Diversity
An engine of innovation. The natural condition of the modern world. And, not coincidentally, a foundational part of an Amherst education. By any measure, we’re one of the most diverse liberal arts colleges in the country. Among our students, 45 percent self-identify as U.S. students of color. About 10 percent of our students are international, from more than 55 countries; another 5–10 percent are dual citizens, who have been raised and educated abroad. Typically, about 60 percent of our students qualify for need-based financial aid, 23 percent are Pell Grant recipients and 16 percent are in the first generation of their families to attend college. We believe that a great intellectual community should look like the world, and with every incoming student, that community comes to life here.

Eisenberg Native American Literature Collection
Officially named the Younghee Kim-Wait/Pablo Eisenberg Native American Literature Collection. With more than 2,000 books (and counting), one of the world’s most comprehensive private collections of writing by and about Native Americans, reaching from the 18th century to the present. Includes fiction, poetry, biography, memoir, histories, philosophical tracts, sermons, manifestos and more, from such authors as Samson Occom, Mourning Dove and Louise Erdrich (to name just a few). An extraordinary academic resource acquired by Amherst in 2013 through the generosity of Younghee Kim-Wait ’82.

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.
A fairly typical written exchange between a professor and a student in a course called “Metaphilosophy”

PROFESSOR GENTZLER: “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. A place of artistic creation, collaboration and celebration.
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. Our financial aid packages don’t include loans—we’ve replaced them with scholarship grants—so our students can graduate with no debt.
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 spectacularly 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; sustainable living; arts and performance; social justice and leadership). 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 no more than 15 other first-year students and a professor for interdisciplinary exploration of a specialized topic. You analyze it, think critically about it from all sides, discuss and debate it, write about it. You experience what learning at Amherst is all about.

The Five Years After Amherst

What happens in those years? Within six months of graduation, the vast majority of our graduates have started jobs, graduate study or professional school. An unusually high percentage are offered major fellowships—Churchill, Fulbright, Gates, Goldwater, Marshall, Rhodes, Watson—that fund serious research and other important creative work around the world. They use the resources of our Career Center to discover opportunities and connect with alumni in myriad professional fields. In launching their careers, 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 project in Sierra Leone. So, the question isn’t just “What happens in those five years after Amherst?” It’s “What happened in those four years at Amherst?”

The Five College Consortium

The official name of the phenomenal result you get when you put four outstanding colleges and one major university (Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, Smith and the University of Massachusetts Amherst) within a 10-mile radius of each other. You get 10 museums and a library system with more than 11 million items. You get more than 30,000 students and cross-registration opportunities for 6,000 courses. You get more than a dozen specialized certificate programs (in, for example, ethnomusicology, international relations and sustainability studies). You get an untold number of collaborative clubs, performances and projects between students and faculty. You get a generally limitless sense of possibility.

Fulbright Recipients

Over the last decade, the Fulbright Students Program—one of the most prestigious and competitive educational award programs in the world—has recognized Amherst for its unusually high number of award recipients. Within the cohort of bachelor’s degree-granting institutions, Amherst has consistently been named a “top producer” of Fulbright recipients, who go abroad to conduct a year of study, research or teaching in pursuit of shared international understanding.

1. Stylishly deconstructed as learn / explore / activate / participate.
2. You choose one seminar from a list of dozens. Recent seminars have included “Secrets and Lies,” “Progress,” “The Value of Nature,” “Transformative Ideas,” “Space and Place,” “Manifestos” and “Finding Your Roots: Narratives of Self and Community.”
3. Which is helped considerably by the PVTAs, the free Five College bus system.
4. Let us not forget our other libraries, dedicated to math, music and science. We love them, too!
Green Amherst
We’re serious about creating a sustainable campus as part of a sustainable world. Under our transformative Climate Action Plan, we are committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. We’ve developed ambitious programs in composting, green building design, environmentally friendly cleaning products, single-stream recycling and carbon reduction. And we’re powered by an innovative cogeneration plant for the simultaneous production of electricity and heat, a process that results in more efficient energy conversion and lower environmental emissions. Our Office of Environmental Sustainability and Department of Environmental Studies collaborate to integrate campus sustainability initiatives with research and teaching on campus, and provide off-campus internships to develop informed, innovative leaders of environmental change.

Harold Varumus ’61
Former director of the National Institutes of Health, president of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, director of the National Cancer Institute and recipient of the Nobel Prize in medicine. These are the kinds of things you can do with a degree in English from Amherst.¹³

How Marisa Parham Conducts Research on the Digital Frontier
Professor Parham’s research focuses on texts and technologies that problematize assumptions about time, space and bodily materiality. “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, professor of English, current director of the Immersive Reality Lab for the Humanities, former director of Five College Digital Humanities

Humanistic Inquiry
The Center for Humanistic Inquiry hosts seminars, performances, exhibitions, conferences and workshops, provoking conversations across disciplines on subjects local and global. This year’s theme? How “home”—as a place and concept—has evolved and manifested differently across cultures and through history.

Humphries House
One of our residential theme communities and a student-run cooperative. Residents collectively prepare communal meals, maintain the residence, and organize campus and house events that are sometimes refined (annual wine and cheese reception for faculty), sometimes happily not. They make key decisions together, and generally serve as an ongoing experiment in collaborating to produce something surprising and enlightened. Everyone calls it “the Zu.”

¹³. He wrote his thesis on Charles Dickens.
Internships

Thousands of opportunities, many established through our network of dedicated alumni, parents and friends of the College and accessible through our Career Center. Our hallmark Houston Internship Program[14] is designed to provide students with substantive, meaningful, paid summer internships across a broad spectrum of career fields in the U.S. and abroad. It offers comprehensive support including preparatory advising, skills development and assistance throughout the internship cycle. One more step in creating a portfolio of skills, experiences and networks that can provide a competitive edge in an eventual job search and access to an expanded array of practical outcomes.

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, attend a noncredit course at Amherst (such as “Introduction to Book Binding,” “Celestial Navigation,” “Creative Writing Residency,” “Mapping Geographic Data” or “Cooking from Memory”) and generally embrace the joys of winter.

[14] Named in honor of Charles Hamilton Houston, Class of 1915, who went on to become the first African-American editor of the Harvard Law Review, a dean at the Howard University School of Law, an acclaimed mentor to a generation of African-American lawyers (most notably Thurgood Marshall) and a chief architect of the legal strategy that laid the groundwork for the Supreme Court’s landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954.
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, The Hunger Games: Catching Fire and the HBO series Westworld. Also an activist for sustainable development and 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.15 Accomplished with the expert guidance of our Career Center and the experience gained through internships.

Some jobs taken by recent graduates:

Financial Analyst, Ecolab
Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senate Account Strategist, Google Fellow, The Huffington Post Associate Consultant, Bain & Co.
Research Fellow, National Cancer Institute Solar Development Analyst, SunEdison Teacher, Teach For America Investment Banking Analyst, J.P. Morgan Web Developer, LinkedIn Media Planner and Buyer, Havas Media Software Developer, Epic Systems

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 Antonin Scalia to Ruth Bader Ginsburg, from Dan Brown ‘86 to Ta-Nehisi Coates. 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 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

Entrepreneurial co-founders of Vera Solutions, which builds cloud and mobile tools to help social service organizations collect, organize and learn from data to promote transparency, accountability and effective social change. Named to Forbes’ “30 Under 30: Social Entrepreneurs” list.

15. An impressive example: Risalat Khan ’13 co-founded a start-up in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that used urban rooftop aquaponics to provide food to the city’s residents. Now a global environmental activist, addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and other existential challenges. Spoke at the 2018 World Economic Forum, as part of the Global Shapers Community.
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; our student-run WAMH radio station; Schwemm’s Coffee House; the multipurpose McCaffrey and Friedmann Rooms for meetings and performances; plus the Center for Community Engagement, the Center for Diversity & Student Leadership, the Center for International Student Engagement, the Multicultural Resource Center, the Queer Resource Center, and the Women’s and Gender Center. It’s the center of centers.

Keri Lambert ’13
One of 96 Amherst alumni who have been awarded a Watson Fellowship. Traveled to Ghana, Tanzania and Malaysia to document the experiences of farmers, fishermen and factory workers and study “how the production of goods consumed on a global scale affects people locally in their day-to-day lives.” Also a three-sport captain and holder of an NCAA National Championship title in the 3,000-meter steeplechase.

Kirby Theater
A state-of-the-art 384-seat theater, featuring computerized lighting and sound equipment, a refurbished fly system, a stretch-wire lighting grid, 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 faculty and student productions, year-round.

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

Lengthening Your Cultural Horizon
Some of the most active student organizations on campus are affinity groups, including the Asian Students Association, the Black Students Union, First Generation Association, Indigenous and Native Citizens Association, QuestBridge Low-Income Community, 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 create and perform skits and song-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.

Anderson’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.” Anderson met every week with his faculty 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: “Anderson refined his string writing with great care and patience, and—best of all—with an unfailing vision of how he wished the instruments to combine expressively.”

Anderson Gray: senior; Woolwich, Maine; English and music double major; resident of Marsh Arts House; club hockey player
Little tiny zebrafish and the people who study them

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 40 majors. Typically, about 45 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
- Classical Civilization
- Classics
- Computer Science
- Economics
- English
- Environmental Studies
- European Studies
- Film and Media Studies
- French
- Geology
- German
- Greek
- History
- Interdisciplinary/Independent
- Latin
- Latinx and Latin American Studies
- 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 Conference (NESCAC) championships, qualifies for the NCAA tournament, captures an NCAA National Championship 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 community 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
Named for its founder, renowned architect William Rutherford Mead, Class of 1867. An expansive museum, tucked into the main quad and featuring more than 19,000 objects spanning 5,000 years of world culture: Mexican ceramics, Tibetan scroll paintings, 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 and Andres Serrano. A laboratory for innovative, interdisciplinary research and teaching, incorporating original works of art across academic disciplines. A visually stunning venue for concerts, lectures and midnight study breaks. A dynamic hub for a vibrant community.

Mr. Gad’s House of Improv
Legendra student improv group. (The origin of the troupe’s name is revealed only to its members.) Attracts overflow crowds of students to its performances, offering interactive antics and miscellaneous mayhem. Making Amherst laugh since 1989.

The Multicultural Resource Center
Born out of student activism, a space of guidance, growth, awareness and community, across and within cultures. Located in Keefe Campus Center, at the heart of campus, which is far more than geographic symbolism. Diversity—including a multicultural, polyphonic student body—is at the core of who we are.

Meiklejohn Fellows Program
An initiative of the Career Center, providing generous resources, opportunities and support to low-income and/or first-generation students. Meiklejohn Fellows benefit from guaranteed funding for summer experiences (such as internships and research), as well as specialized advising, programming and career development support to enhance professional preparation and foster a sense of belonging to a community-within-a-community. A reflection of the College’s commitment to the foundational principle that all Amherst students should have access to the opportunities needed to gain the knowledge, skills and experiences that contribute to success during college and beyond.

NCAA Titles
Meaning national Division III titles. Our student-athletes have won 80 individual titles and 13 team championships. To be specific:
- Men’s soccer, 2015
- Women’s basketball, 2013, 2007
- 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.”

Kyra Ellis-Moore: junior; Albuquerque, N.M.; double major in law, jurisprudence and social thought and sexuality, women’s and gender studies; Peer Advocate of Sexual Respect; Amherst Dance; senator, Association of Amherst Students

New Roommates
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.”

IRMA: “Once, after a stressful day of classes, I came home and saw Lauren standing in the middle of the room, and she says, ‘Hey, Irma, wanna see me dance High School Musical?’ And she just starts dancing and singing ‘We’re All in This Together.’ Totally made me forget my stressful day.”

LAUREN: “One night we stayed up until, like, three in the morning talking to each other in Spanish. We both had class early the next day, but neither of us wanted to stop talking. There was so much laughing, we probably woke up the neighbors.”

Lauren Carter: first-year; Queens Village, N.Y.; member of Rhythm and Shoes; proud resident of Stearns 308

Irma Zamora: first-year; Santa Ana, Calif.; tutor at El Arco Iris; proud resident of Stearns 308

The Octagon
A yellow building—technically an eight-sided polygon—on a steep hill overlooking the main campus entrance. Inspired by Orson Squire Fowler, Class of 1834, a proponent of the mid-19th-century “octagonal architecture” movement. Originally (in 1848) home to the astronomy and geology departments; currently home to the Black Students Union and the Gerald Penny ’77 Black Cultural Center. Also home to the two-story, 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 1,850 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.

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 press box that looks like a classic but functions like the digital nexus that it is.

Putting Students and Alumni in Touch

Whether participating in Career Center offerings (like the Alumni-in-Residence Program and the Amherst Careers-In Program), engaging with alumni at Homecoming, or reaching out directly through the Amherst Alumni Directory, current students can easily connect with our tight-knit community of active, dedicated alumni. The goal? Effectively linking the past, the present and the future of Amherst. The result? Alumni leverage their experience to help new generations of Amherst students; students receive valuable, real-world advice; and good work (including, often, internships and jobs) starts to get done.
How did modernization and westernization change Tokyo—and how did visual artists represent that change?

JONATHAN: “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
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. Some of the events, organizations and centers that help do that work: the Cadigan Center for Religious Life, the College Council, the Multicultural Resource Center, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion, Peer Advocates of Sexual Respect, Pride Week, the Queer Resource Center, Student Health Educators, the Women’s and Gender Center.

Residential Life
We guarantee housing for all students for all four years. Nearly all our students (98 percent) reside on campus, and all first-year students live in dormitories on our First-Year Quad, right in the heart of campus. Our 34 residential buildings range in size from 10 to 125 students, and several of them include theme communities. The latest additions to our housing options are the Greenway Residence Halls, four sleek, eco-friendly buildings linked by bridges and a central courtyard, tucked into the hillside and offering iconic views of the Holyoke Range. Not just a place to live, but a center of community and a home away from home.

Research
An undergraduate college experience that embraces serious research across the disciplines. Done at an exceptionally high level, using state-of-the-art resources, in collaboration with a professor who understands why this experience matters, is committed to giving you the time and the attention to make the most of it and, maybe most importantly, 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. 

The Rilke/Salomé Bathrooms
The 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 and admiration.

The Singing College
That’s one of our nicknames, and for good reason: We have enough singers in our student body to populate a Chorus, a Glee Club, a Concert Choir, a Gospel Choir, a madrigal ensemble and—at last count—six a cappella groups. And enough fans of singing to fill the seats of Johnson Chapel at their shows.

The Spring Concert
A 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 DRAM, Chelsea Cutler, The Main Squeeze, No Coast and A$AP Ferg.

Theme Communities
Students sharing an interest, living together and enriching the educational, cultural and residential life of the campus. Current theme communities: Asian Culture House, Charles Drew House (black culture), Humphries House (cooperative living), Health and Wellness Quarter, La Casa (Latinx culture), Marsh Arts House (home of the Marsh Coffee Haus), Sylvia Rivera Community (queer and trans culture), plus the language houses—Chinese-Japanese, French, German, Russian, Spanish.

Rosanne Haggerty ’82
Internationally recognized leader in housing and community development. Founder of Common Ground Community and Community Solutions to restore deteriorated hotels and other residences for occupancy by low-income and homeless persons. Won a MacArthur Fellowship (“genius grant”), as well as a Jane Jacobs Medal for New Ideas and Activism.

SURF
Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship. Sophomores and juniors spend the summer immersed in hands-on, collaborative research with faculty in biology, chemistry, physics, biochemistry/biophysics, neuroscience, geology, environmental studies, psychology, computer science, mathematics and statistics. Exceptional research experience, on-campus housing, a weekly stipend and connections to a vibrant vanguard community of scientists. SURF’s up!
Three profound sentences about exploring the building blocks of the universe

PROFESSOR LEUNG: “The molecule doesn’t lie.”

HANNAH: “Research doesn’t happen overnight.”

JOEY: “There’s no answer key for the questions we’re asking.”

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
“Use-value doesn’t diminish intellectual value.”

A quote from chemistry professor Sheila Jaswal (who also teaches the innovative, interactive course “Being Human in STEM”). 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. Works cooperatively with local community shelters, charities and survival centers to provide donated food throughout the year. 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.

The 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, whitewater 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 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 has 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.

Visionaries such as Madeline Janis ’82

One of the country’s most effective grassroots activist, committed to building an equitable, sustainable society. Co-founder of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, which spearheaded passage of one of the first living-wage laws in the United States. Most recently, co-founder and director of Jobs to Move America, dedicated to the creation of economically secure, climate-safe jobs for all working people.

Wildlife Sanctuary

Open fields, wetlands, woods 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.

Wolf 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

50:50
Male-to-female ratio

Courses
850

Majors
40
plus interdisciplinary/independent majors

Seniors graduating last year with honors theses: 38%

57%
Students receiving financial aid from Amherst last year
Demonstrated financial need met:

100%

Curriculum: Open
Student research opportunities: Hundreds

First-year retention rate: 97%
Six-year graduation rate: 96%

Student-faculty ratio: 7:1

Students graduating last year with more than one major:

45%

1,850
Students

Distribution of class size last year

2–9 32%
10–19 39%
20–29 17%
30–39 6%
40–49 3%
50+ 2%

22,000+
Active Alumni

Number of first-year seminars last year:
34

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

Where to find information about 20 important topics:

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Statement of Non Discrimination: Amherst College does not discriminate in admission, employment, or administration of its programs and activities on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex or gender (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity), age, disability, genetic information, military service, or any other characteristic or class protected under applicable federal, state, or local law. Amherst College complies with all state and federal laws that prohibit discrimination, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, Title IX, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Equal Pay Act and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act. Inquiries should be addressed to the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Amherst College, P.O. Box 5000, Amherst, MA 01002 5000.

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