
College of the Holy Cross: Profile

One of the best liberal arts colleges in the United States, Holy Cross is highly respected for its superior undergraduate academic programs, accomplished faculty, and the intelligence, imagination, and achievements of its students. It is also renowned for its enthusiastic and well-supported commitment to the principle of educating men and women for others, in a community that generates a strong feeling of belonging and a vital sense of loyalty.

As a Jesuit college, Holy Cross takes its place in a 450-year tradition of Catholic education that has distinguished itself for intellectual rigor, high academic standards, and religious and moral sensitivity. Academic life at Holy Cross is serious and challenging; it is also exciting. This excitement is one of discovery: students discovering new things in literature, science, the arts, mathematics, and religion; professors discovering new things through their research, in their laboratories, and in the libraries. Student-professor exchanges in the classroom, as well as in countless informal settings, are at the center of academic life at Holy Cross. Because the student body is 100 percent undergraduate and relatively small, the opportunity for individual attention is readily available. Students know their professors. Professors know and take a genuine interest in their students.

The College recognizes that its professional and talented faculty members constitute the particular ingredient that ultimately shapes the educational experience. They are widely respected in their academic specialties. Many have national reputations for their research and publications, creative performances, recordings, and exhibitions. Almost all of the nearly 300 full- and part-time faculty members hold doctoral degrees from some of the finest universities here and abroad. They conduct research supported by grants from foundations, government agencies, and private sources.

Holy Cross faculty members also are dedicated to excellence in teaching and to service. They strike an appropriate balance between the transmission of knowledge and the investigation of new ideas. This ensures that the classroom is vital and that scholarly research is meaningful. It is the faculty that leavens the whole and is largely responsible for the reputation of Holy Cross as an excellent liberal arts college.

Holy Cross is a place to learn how to learn, and not a place to seek job training. The fundamental purpose of the College is not to train students for specific occupations, but to inform the mind and to foster clear thought and expression through the balanced study of the arts and the sciences.

A distinguishing and all-important characteristic of education at Holy Cross is the emphasis placed upon the service of faith and the promotion of justice. As a Jesuit college, the cultivation of intellectual, social, religious, and ethical refinement is not an end in itself. Rather, this means educating young people to be truly concerned about human welfare, about making our economies more just, and about placing men and women in public office who are honest and honorable. It has as its purpose the education of men and women who in their family life will be examples of Catholic ideals and practice and who will be leaders in their parishes and in their communities.

Founding

The oldest Catholic college in New England, Holy Cross was founded in 1843 by the second bishop of Boston, Benedict Joseph Fenwick, S.J., who gave it the name of his cathedral, the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, along with the seal and motto of the Diocese of Boston.

From the start, the Bishop entrusted the direction of the College to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus. The beginnings were very modest: one wooden building, a half-finished brick structure, and 52 acres of land.

Today the College is a large educational complex, complete with chapel, libraries, a modern science center, classrooms, residence halls, football stadium, baseball stadium, hockey rink, and campus activity center, spread over 174 sloping acres. It is a community of 2,800 students, roughly half of them men and half women. Few classes exceed an enrollment of 40, and most average 18–20. The atmosphere this community of scholars creates is frequently described as welcoming and friendly, where students receive encouragement and support from classmates and professors.

Coeducational since 1972, Holy Cross enrolls a student body of young men and women of proven accomplishment. Almost all of them have been graduated in the top 20 percent of their high school classes. Most live in 10 residence halls on campus. These are run by the Dean of Students Office with the help of students who organize the many activities through their House Councils. Students, elected by their peers, represent their classmates at faculty meetings, on major College committees, and in a consultative capacity on the appointment and promotion of faculty.