

The Mission of the College

Student Handbook 2008-2009

Over the 184 years of its life, Kenyon College has developed a distinctive identity and has sought a special purpose among institutions of higher learning. Kenyon is an academic institution. The virtue of the academic mode is that it deals not with private and particular truths, but with the general and the universal. It enables one to escape the limits of private experience and the tyranny of the present moment. But to assert the primacy of the academic is not to deny the value of experience or of other ways of knowing. Kenyon's academic purpose will permeate all that the College does, but the definition of the academic will be open to recurrent questioning.

Kenyon's larger purposes as a liberal arts institution derive from those expressed centuries ago in Plato's academy, although our disciplines and modes of inquiry differ from those of that first "liberal arts college." We have altered our curriculum deliberately in answer to changes in the world, as an organism responds to its environment without losing its identity. Kenyon's founder gave a special American character to his academy by joining its life to the wilderness frontier. His Kenyon was to afford its students a higher sense of their own humanity and to inspire them to work with others to make a society that would nourish a better humankind. To that end, and as an important educational value in itself, Kenyon maintains a deep commitment to diversity. Kenyon today strives to persuade its students to those same purposes.

As a private and independent college, Kenyon has been free to provide its own mode of education and special quality of life for its members. Its historic relationship with the Episcopal Church has marked its commitment to the values celebrated in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but without dogmatism, without proselytizing. Because its faculty and students are supported by neither church nor state, the College must charge fees and seek support from donors. While this preserves Kenyon's independence, it sets unfortunate limits. The College's ambitions must be tempered by a sense of what is economically feasible.

As an undergraduate institution, Kenyon focuses upon those studies that are essential to the intellectual and moral development of its students. The curriculum is not defined by the interests of graduate or professional schools, but by the faculty's understanding of what contributes to liberal education. The faculty's first investment is in Kenyon's students. The College continues to think of its students as partners in inquiry, and seeks those who are earnestly committed to learning. In the future, Kenyon will continue to test its academic program and modes of teaching and learning against the needs of its students, seeking to bring each person to full realization of individual educational potential.

To be a residential college means more than that the College provides dormitory and dining space for its students. It argues a relationship between students and professors that goes beyond the classroom. It emphasizes that students learn and develop, intellectually and socially, from their fellows and from their own responses to corporate living.

Kenyon remains a small college and exemplifies deliberate limitation. What is included here is special, what is excluded is not necessary to our purposes. Focus is blurred when there is

dispersion over large numbers or over a large body of interests. Kenyon remains comprehensible. Its dimensions are humane and not overpowering. Professors, knowing students over years, measure their growth. Students, knowing professors intimately, discover the harmony or conflict between what a teacher professes and his or her behavior.

To enable its graduates to deal effectively with problems as yet uncalculated, Kenyon seeks to develop capacities, skills, and talents which time has shown to be most valuable: to be able to speak and write clearly so as to advance thoughts and arguments cogently; to be able to discriminate between the essential and the trivial; to arrive at well-informed value judgments; to be able to work independently and with others; to be able to comprehend our culture as well as other cultures. Kenyon has prized those processes of education which shape students by engaging them simultaneously with the claims of different philosophies, of contrasting modes, of many liberal arts.

The success of Kenyon alumni attests to the fact that ours is the best kind of career preparation, for it develops qualities that are prized in any profession. Far beyond immediate career concerns, however, a liberal education forms the foundation of a fulfilling and valuable life. To that purpose Kenyon College is devoted.

Goals and Objectives of the College

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I. General Liberal Arts Education

Kenyon is institutionally committed to promoting a liberal arts education. Skills are promoted and developed that are not only useful to any career but essential for a fulfilling and valuable life.

- a) Students acquire knowledge and understanding of fine arts, humanities, nature sciences, and social sciences.
- b) Students learn to use information technology and make sense of the information they find.
- c) Students learn to formulate ideas rigorously and communicate them effectively, in speaking and in writing.
- d) Students learn to understand a wide diversity of cultures.
- e) Students learn to assess arguments.
- f) Students learn quantitative skills and how to analyze data.
- g) Students learn to work creatively.

II. Overall Academic and Major Program

The academic program provides freedom within a common structure to promote balance and coherence, so students design truly liberal educations which are focused, expansive, and useful in the future.

- a) Students develop expertise in at least one discipline or area.
- b) Students organize courses so that study of one subject illuminates and is illuminated by study of another.

III. Relationships, Community, and Security

Fundamental to the Kenyon experience is that students and professors develop personal and long-term relationships. The personal contact between students and faculty that characterizes Kenyon stands as central to the Kenyon undergraduate experience. The consequence of student-faculty interaction is that student experience is not one of anonymity. The scale and rural location of the residential community heighten the importance of these relationships. Kenyon provides an environment that is aesthetically conducive to study and is safe and secure, so that students may direct their attentions to their academic life and extracurricular activities unhindered.

IV. Participation and Involvement

The opportunity to participate in campus life and the ease and comfort of participation are characteristic of Kenyon. The atmosphere at Kenyon promotes student involvement. Discourse among students is frequent, on both academic and nonacademic issues, and that discourse is enriched by the diversity of the faculty and student body. Students are active in producing their own experience, rather than being primarily receivers or observers. Doing, by oneself and with others, is Kenyon's recipe for learning.

V. Satisfaction and Accomplishment

Accomplishment of the first four goals translates into high levels of student satisfaction both at Kenyon and years later when former students reflect back on their Kenyon experience. It also translates into high levels of accomplishment for Kenyon graduates.