

College History and Background

Whitman College traces its roots to the 1830s. In 1836, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman established a mission and a school near Walla Walla to teach the Cayuse Indians to read and write their native language. Later, the couple provided assistance to Oregon Trail travelers. However, the Whitman's were killed in 1847, and fellow missionary Rev. Cushing Eells resolved to establish a school in their honor. The Washington Territorial Legislature granted a charter to Whitman Seminary on Dec. 20, 1859. College courses were first offered at Whitman in 1882 and on Nov. 28, 1883, the legislature issued a new charter, changing the seminary into a four-year, degree-granting college.

The college has remained small in order to facilitate the close faculty-student interaction that is essential to exceptional higher education. In 1914, Whitman became the first college or university in the nation to require undergraduate students to complete comprehensive examinations in their major fields. The installation of a Phi Beta Kappa chapter in 1919, the first for any Northwest college, marked Whitman's growing reputation.

One of Whitman's most recognizable campus landmarks is the clock tower atop Memorial Building, which was constructed in 1899. Among recent construction projects are Stanton Hall and Cleveland Commons, the upgrade of the Sherwood Athletic Center and the Glover Alston Center, along with the renovation and expansion of Maxey Hall, Penrose Library, the Hall of Science and Harper Joy Theater. Newer buildings also include the Fouts Center for Visual Arts, the Baker Ferguson Fitness Center/Harvey Pool, the Welty Center (health and counseling services) and the Reid Campus Center.

The campus is one block from downtown Walla Walla, a city of 32,000 in southeastern Washington. The town's setting among golden wheat fields shadowed by the Blue Mountains provides countless opportunities for outdoor pursuits. Named one of the nation's top 25 "small town cultural treasures" and cited by *Sunset* magazine as having the best Main Street in the West, Walla Walla is known for its art galleries, symphony orchestra, community theater and premium wineries. Whitman sponsors dance groups, operas, musical soloists, film festivals and performances by the college's excellent music and theater departments. The college hosts nationally recognized lecturers in science, letters, politics, current history and other fields.