INTERVIEW
    WITH: Debbie Chachra
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FILE NAME: Olin FAQs Culture

FAQ: Olin has about 360 students and 45 full-time faculty. What is it like being at such a small school?

DEBBIE CHACHRA: So I really love that Olin is such a tiny school. My education was at large public universities with very large classes, and I didn't really get to know my professors, and I only knew some of my fellow students. Whereas at Olin, I certainly know all of my colleagues, and I know all of my students. And in fact, I know almost all of our graduates at this point. So it's really lovely to be able to know students as individuals. It means that we can sort of talk and interact with them that way. I think it's occasionally disconcerting for students, though, because there's no place for them to hide. If they show up late for class, we notice. If they miss a couple of classes, we typically will ask Student Life to check on them. So it means that they can't hide from us. But it also means that it's very hard for them to fall through the cracks.

FAQ: How much of the Olin Curriculum is project-based?

CHACHRA: A significant component of the Olin curriculum is project-based. And this starts in the first year. It starts with the first year of courses, including Design in Nature, the first-year

engineering course. That design course is one of a stream of design courses, and all of those courses are really built around project. They culminate in the senior design project, in which students do authentic engineering projects in teams. So projects are basically sort of infused throughout the Olin curriculum. In addition to these core courses, they are a number of other courses that involve projects. And these could be humanities courses as well as the sort of math, science and engineering courses. So while products don't appear in every course at Olin, they're definitely a significant component of the curriculum.

FAQ: Do Olin faculty do research?

CHACHRA: Olin faculty are significantly involved in research. So this can take a number of different forms. So some of our faculty are involved in disciplinary research, so math, science, engineering, where they do research, they get grants, they go to conferences, they publish in journals. A number of faculty, particularly humanities faculty, do research and write books, right, which is so typical for that discipline. And there's a corehead of faculty who are really involved in engineering education. So besides the sort of academic dissemination routes, this also includes going to conferences or running workshops. In addition to those modes, we have a number of faculty who are involved in consulting, which again, is pretty common for engineering schools. And then we have a number of faculty who do intellectual work that gets generated and shared with the public in a wide variety of ways. But across the board, Olin faculty are heavily involved in research.

FAQ: How and where do students learn technical content?

CHACHRA: Well, we're an engineering school, so they learn technical content pretty much

everywhere across the curriculum. In particular, though, because we tend to have a project

based courses rather than the sort of more traditional lecture, lab, problem set, final exam

based courses, the technical content that they learn, they learn in a situated way. They learn

the technical content that they need to carry out the work that they're doing. They learn to

evaluate the technical content as they find it, and they learn how to integrate it into the

project. So rather than learning technical content for its own sake, they learn technical content

in a way that they can actually use, and that they've already learned how to incorporate that

technical knowledge into their engineering practice. And they'll take those skills with them

after they graduate.

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