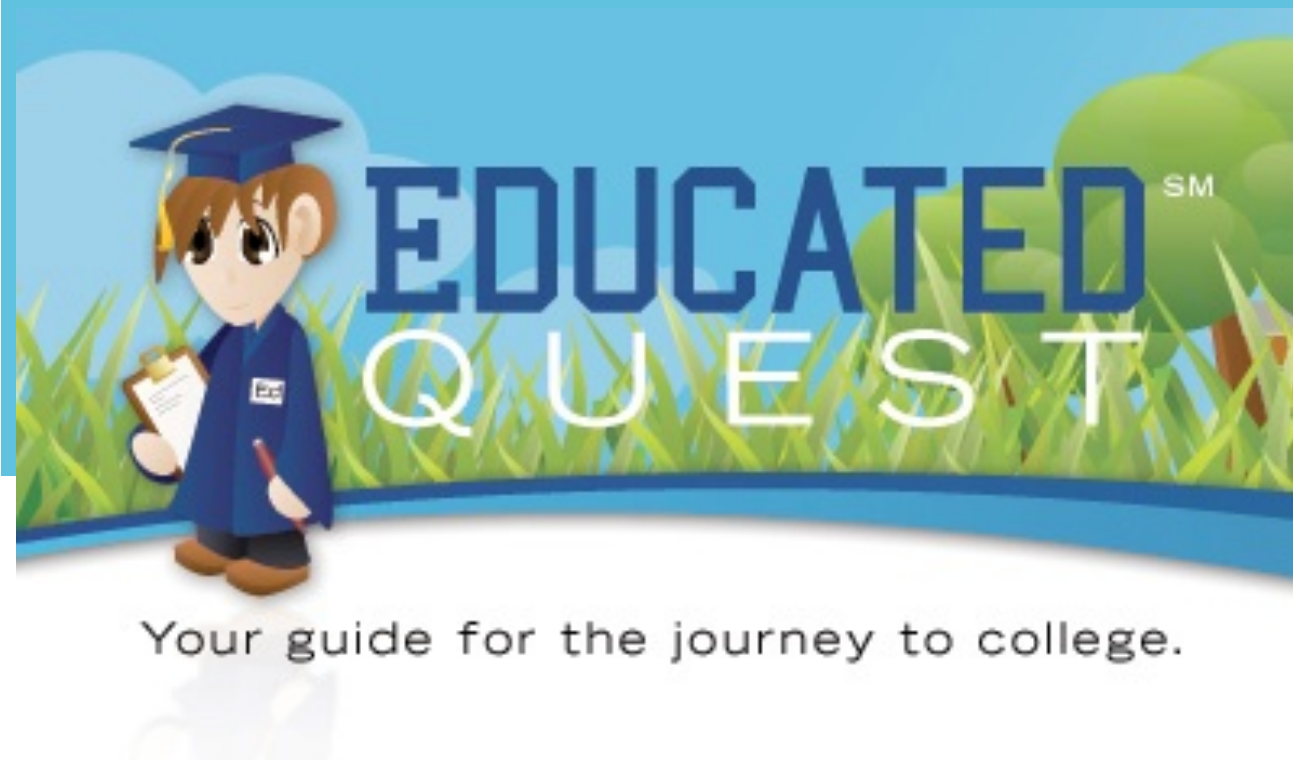


A Short Visit: Parsons, The New School for Design



Background

Introduction to (school)

Background

Parsons, the New School for Design has an extraordinary history of “firsts” in the design world:

- It was the first school to offer education in Fashion Design (originally called Costume Design) in 1904;
- It was the first school to offer education in Interior Design, also in 1904;
- It was the first school to offer education in Advertising and Graphic Design;
- It was the first U.S. art and design school to have a campus abroad in Paris, in 1924, and will soon have a campus in Mumbai, India;
- It is the first art and design school to be associated with a reality television show, *Project Runway*; and,
- It was the first, and still the only, private art and design school to affiliate with a private national research university, in 1970 when it became the largest academic unit of The New School, now New School University.

Parsons has also combined art and design education with thoughts on social change.

- In 1965 Interior Design graduates mounted A Place to Live, an exhibition that proposed alternatives to substandard urban housing;
- Since 1998, The Design Workshop has provided pro bono design-build services to deserving nonprofit client;
- Parsons has partnered with The Fortune Society to develop services to help previously incarcerated individuals re-enter society and build fulfilling lives; and, among other examples,
- Parsons students with the Milano The New School for Management and Urban Policy for the JP Morgan Chase Community Development Competition.

The academic options at Parsons are so vast, they cannot be summarized here. There are 17 undergraduate majors, and each is also a minor. While students must submit a portfolio for admission, they do not need to declare a major until after freshman year. All students complete a freshman design core that covers Space and Materiality (Crafts), Time (Photography and Video), Drawing and Imaging. All freshman also take an Integrated Studio and Seminar, a course that combines writing, reading, critical thinking and design. Students must also attend two University Lecture series programs during a semester and take liberal arts courses. However, there are no science or math requirements, even for architecture majors.

Parsons ties to New School University link the art and design school to a national research institution that was founded in 1919 as an alternative to traditional universities, with an open curriculum, minimal hierarchy, and free discussion of controversial ideas. In 1933, The New School for Social Research gave a home to the University in Exile, a refuge for scholars forced from Europe by the Nazis.

The University promotes itself as a “progressive” institution with education in the liberal arts, art and design, theater, music, public engagement and social policy research. Faculty of the University have included faculty have included Woody Allen, W. H. Auden, Rynn Berry, W. E. B. Du Bois, Josef Frank, Robert Frost, Martha Graham, Saul K. Padover, Leo Strauss, Eric Hobsbawm, Hannah Arendt, Eloise Harrington, Erich Fromm, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Alumni have included actors Woody Allen, James Baldwin and Marlon Brando, among others, as well as Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, and Tennessee Williams.

As a result of Parsons’ affiliation with the University, students have the option of earning two Bachelor’s degrees, a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Parsons and a Bachelor of Arts in a liberal arts major. They may also minor in liberal arts subjects to complete the BFA. Parsons and Eugene Lang (New School University’s liberal arts college) also live in the same residence halls.

New School University has recently completed a University Center complex that includes classroom and lecture spaces for all undergraduate and graduate students as well as a finer student dining environment than one would expect in a college setting. Designed by New York-based Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, the University Center was selected this year [as one of the Nine Best New University Buildings Around The World by Architectural Digest](#). This is the University's signature building on a multi-block city campus within brief walking distances from Greenwich Village and Union Square. The campus is distinctly urban though it is not separated from city life by any formal boundary such as a campus gate (like Columbia or Fordham) or a landmark (like Washington Square Park at the center of NYU in the Village).

However, the lack of boundaries is an advantage. In Parsons' majors, a student's mind must be on the work. Three or more unexcused absences from a class is grounds for failure. In addition, while judging arts might be considered subjective, faculty expect students to stick to fundamental principles and not cut corners on projects. Parsons does have a Dean's List as well as Parson's Scholar merit awards that carry financial rewards. In addition, unlike most colleges and universities, the large majority of faculty at Parsons are part-time; they work at their craft. The faculty member who likes you may also be one who hires you as an intern or employee. Parsons complements this with career services that are focused on making connections as well

as helping artists become freelancers or entrepreneurs. Unlike career counselors at a more traditional college or university, Parsons' staff are specialized on the needs of artists. It is quite possible to graduate from Parsons having held internships or taken on freelance work from the freshman year onward.

Notable Parsons alumni include fashion designers Donna Karan, Mark Jacobs and Isaac Mizrahi; filmmaker Joel Schumacher; artists Norman Rockwell and Edward Hopper; and, graphic designer Paul Rand (the Apple logo), among many others.

Competition and Costs

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What does it take to get in?
Who decides to go?
What other schools do
applicants consider?

Competition and Costs

The choice between Parsons and other schools depends on the major desired, making it too difficult to summarize a considered set of competitors. Parsons is [one of 43 members of the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design \(AICAD\)](#). Applicants often cross-shop Parsons against these schools. Other AICAD members within New York include The Cooper Union, Pratt Institute and the School of Visual Arts. Of these schools, The Cooper Union has the clearest cost advantage over Parsons; its tuition and fees are close to half Parsons' charges. However, across all disciplines--the Union offers Engineering as well as Architecture and Art--it is an exceptionally selective school. [In 2013, only 8 percent of all applicants were admitted.](#)

Within the fashion design programs, New York is also home to the public Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). FIT, like Parsons, also grants degrees in Marketing Communications, Graphic Design and Photography, among other subjects. Like Parsons, its founding dates to industry interests; the school was founded by two important figures in the apparel industry during World War II: Mortimer C. Ritter, a tailor and educator, and Max Meyer, a retired cloak and suit manufacturer and union organizer. FIT, like Parsons, also has ties to progressive roots. Its student center is named for David Dubinsky, one of New York's most powerful labor leaders during the 20th century while at the helm of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

The student who is most likely to succeed at Parsons appears to be someone who wants to make a living from their art by becoming quickly immersed in it, as opposed to pursuing an art major within a liberal arts college or an arts school within a larger university that also imposes general education requirements. FIT, for example, requires its students to complete 30 credits of liberal arts courses; this is a requirement that the State University of New York system imposes on all of its colleges and universities. As a result, for example, a Fashion Design degree at FIT requires 144 credits, more than Parsons requires for their degree.

The downside of the Parsons experience is failure. It is easier to transfer into a setting such as Parsons' or pursue an Associates degree here after earning a Bachelor's degree in another field than it is to try to transfer out. It appears quite feasible for the student who wants to go from Parsons to Eugene Lang, New School University's liberal arts college; the arts courses could help fulfill requirements in some of their majors or they can organized into a minor. Eugene Lang College allows up to 30 credits (of 120) to be outside of the liberal arts. However, Eugene Lang is also expensive; tuition and fees are only about \$1,500 less than Parsons, while living costs are the same.

The successful student also needs to become quickly acclimated to New York City, because the city is a canvas and campus. Considering direct charges (tuition and fees, room and

board) are approximately \$60,000; the costs of the academic program (especially the right laptop) and city life can push the cost of attendance past \$70,000.

Although 75 percent of Parsons' students receive need-based aid, and merit-based scholarships are also available, it's doubtful that the school can discount down to the prices charged by Cooper Union or FIT. Even if a student receives a full-tuition scholarship, there are many other costs to cover, and they cannot be covered by student loans alone.

Conclusions

Summing up

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Conclusions

Parsons is a place that you cannot visit only once, especially if you are not familiar with New York City. Design schools attract students with eclectic interests, however, few of them are also located in eclectic neighborhoods, especially one that is among the most expensive places in the world to live. It's best to visit at least twice before you commit. There are less expensive educational options, even in New York City as well as less eclectic settings to study art or design.

Even the very best student will need at least \$25,000 to \$30,000 to cover room and board as well as costs for supplies and living expenses. This is about as much as many state universities charge their in-state resident students for all of their direct charges: tuition and fees, room and board.

Parsons stands out for its history and connections. It has the longest experience as an art and design school in Fashion Design, Graphic Design and Interior Design. Thanks to the success of *Project Runway*, Parsons' reputation has only been strengthened in the fashion world. It also helps that Parsons is affiliated with a university; they have more options to combine the liberal arts with the design professions that their peers at other design schools.

However, New School University is true to its roots in social equity and progressive public policy. Artists who share those views and want to bring them into their design philosophy will

be very happy at Parsons. Those who are more neutral or conservative might find the academics, the social environment and the neighborhood to be less to their liking.

It is fair to say that Parsons is to the design professions what MIT is to engineering or Wharton is to business; it is the most recognized privately supported institution in the U.S. It has also been a globally focused institution longer than others in the design professions. Students who do well here will be known and respected, if they earn the respect of their teachers. Faculty relationships are probably more important here than they are at MIT or Wharton. The faculty are working and students are deliberately required to go to class. Those who come to Parsons with the discipline to work and be judged can succeed. This is not a school for slackers. You might be taking classes, but it will feel more like a quick jump from high school to the world of work than any traditional college experience.

Ed Quest’s Report Card

Parsons, The New School for Design

Costs	Comforts	Community	Curriculum	Connections
C	B	A	A	A

Strengths	Weaknesses
You can’t beat the New York location if you want to work in a design profession	The New York experience is expensive and has tremendous distractions
If you’re the best student, employers will really know your name	If fashion is your passion, FIT is much cheaper, and you’re still in New York
Your teachers might actually help you find a job; they’re working in your industry, too	You jump from high school to the real world faster than at most schools; no “college experience” here
Who’s who of alumni in the design professions	If your politics lean conservative or towards inaction, look elsewhere
University Center is more “resident-focused” than you might think for a city school	
It’s part of a university where you can take other classes, unlike other private design schools	
If you dread math and science mixed with your art, fear not. You don’t have to take them	
You can take all or part of the education in Paris	

The End

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