

First Impressions: Lafayette College



Your guide for the journey to college.

Background

**Introduction to Lafayette
College**

Background

Founded in 1826 in Easton Pennsylvania, Lafayette College has one of the more interesting histories among national liberal arts colleges. According to the College's Web site, Lafayette was a manual labor school for the first seven years of its existence. For part of each day, students worked in the agricultural department (gardening, hauling manure, cutting hay, and digging potatoes) or in the mechanical department (making boxes, trunks, and agricultural implements) to make money for the College and to offset their tuition. In 1857, Lafayette became the first American college to establish a chair for the study of the English language. In 1866, the College established courses in civil and mining engineering.

Most important, Lafayette became coeducational in 1970. Today it remains a male-majority liberal arts college. This is extremely rare among selective liberal arts schools in the Northeast and MidAtlantic states. Only Amherst, Bowdoin, Trinity (CT), and Union (NY) remain male-majority along with Lafayette. Union and Lafayette are 53 percent male, according to College Results Online; the other schools are closer to being equally balanced between men and women. Interestingly, according to the same source, Lafayette has the fourth-highest four-year graduation rate among these schools behind only Williams, Bowdoin and Holy Cross.

In 2012, among these schools, Lafayette had the highest percentage of graduating seniors who earned degrees in the sci-

ences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); over 40 percent of the class had a major in one of these fields. Aside from Union College, there may be no other liberal arts school in the Northeast of Mid-Atlantic states that is more flexible in allowing students to combine a STEM subject with second major in a non-STEM one.

Lafayette is cross-shopped against many liberal arts schools, though for athletes the most serious competition come from its regional peers in the Patriot League, Colgate and Bucknell, as well as nearby Lehigh, which, while a sports rival, is a very well-endowed (more than \$1 billion) mid-sized (just under 5,000 undergraduates) major research university. Yet Lafayette and Lehigh have the oldest continuing football rivalry in the country; this season's game in Yankee Stadium marked 150 years of competition. However, Lehigh is more similar in undergraduate student body size, academic mix and research mission to schools such as Princeton (5,200 undergraduates) and Yale (around 5,400) than it is to a liberal arts college such as Lafayette.

It's not easy to get into Lafayette. Nearly 8,000 students applied to become part of the Class of 2018; just over 2,300 or 29 percent were accepted, according to the College's 2014-15 Common Data Set. The College offered approximately 1,800 applicants a place on the waiting list, but only 37 were eventually accepted. About half of the class, just over 300 students, was ad-

mitted through Early Decision, including recruited scholarship athletes. There is every reason to believe that Lafayette will become more selective, especially given its offerings in the STEM fields as well as opportunities for merit and need-based aid that are offered by few other national liberal arts colleges.

The SAT range of the class was between 1200 and 1400 (out of 1600) for the Math and Critical Reading sections of the exam. While just over 30 percent scored below 600 on the Critical Reading section of the SAT, only 17 percent did so on the Math. This is one school where test scores should not discourage students from applying, although an on-campus interview is strongly recommended.

Notable Lafayette alumni include Thomas J. Watson, founder of IBM; Joel Silver, producer of the movies series *Diehard*, *Lethal Weapon* and *The Matrix* and Joe Maddon, manager of the Chicago Cubs.

Costs

Tuition and Fees
Scholarships
Debt

2

Costs

Tuition and fees at Lafayette are approximately \$45,600 for the 2014-15 academic year. The College has held these increases to between three and four percent in recent years. Room and board costs just over \$13,500, high considering the tuition and fees and the College's location in Eastern Pennsylvania.

But Lafayette stands out in terms of scholarships and financial resources. It has an endowment of over \$700 million, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers, one of the largest among liberal arts colleges. Among the liberal arts schools in the Patriot League, only Colgate has a larger endowment to work with. The College also awards \$40,000 renewable Marquis Fellowships to 20 selected freshmen as well as \$24,000 renewable Marquis Scholarships to the next 15 percent of the class. According to the College's financial aid office, just over half of the entering class received scholarships or grants from their own funds. The College reports that it has been able to meet 98 percent of a family's demonstrated financial need. Few colleges in the U.S can approach this level of financial support for their undergraduate students.

While most financial aid recipients are expected to take out Stafford Loans, the average indebtedness for Lafayette graduates in 2013 was around \$25,300 according to the Project on Student Debt. While this is quite reasonable for a private selective liberal arts college, the average student borrower at Patriot League rivals Bucknell and Colgate owed less, the average student borrower at Holy Cross owed more.

The average parent borrower who took out a Federal Parent PLUS loan in 2011 borrowed approximately \$22,000, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* Parent's PLUS Loan data base, This was about the same as a parent of a student at Bucknell or Holy Cross, but approximately \$2,000 less than a Colgate parent.

Comforts

3

On-Campus Housing
Local Housing Market

Comforts

More than 90 percent of Lafayette's 2,500 students live on campus. The Greek system attracts just under a fifth of the men, but also more than 30 percent of the women, according to the College's 2014-15 Common Data Set.

Lafayette assigns first-year students to one of nine residence halls. Kamine, Marquis and Ruef Halls are exclusively for first-year students. Marquis is all female. Conway, the community engagement house, Easton, Gates, McKeen, South and Watson mix freshmen with upper-class students. Depending on the hall, some are co-ed by alternating floor, others by separate male and female wings on the same floor. No coins are needed for laundry. All halls are Wi-Fi enabled and have kitchens, though residents are expected to carry a meal plan. Some halls are air conditioned--this requires obtaining special permission--though others are not.

Lafayette has an impressive number of [Living-Learning communities](#) for a school of its size along with many other [special interest housing options](#). It should be quite possible for any student to find a group of friends with common interests here, more so than other liberal arts colleges. The College also owns off-campus housing to serve upper-class students. [Only 70 seniors may receive permission from the College to live in unaffiliated private housing](#). But given that Easton is not a semester break or summer home for most students outside of the academic year, it is better to avoid the headaches of a lease and live on campus.

Lafayette offers a variety of meal plan options for juniors and seniors in combinations of meals per week and "flex" dollars. A Carte Blanche unlimited meal plan and a 20-meal-per-week plan are available to all students. Both plans cost the same (approximately \$5,200 for the 2014-15 academic year) making the Carte Blanche plan the better value.

Community

Campus
Environs
School Spirit

4

Community

There are many activities in the Lehigh Valley for college students to do, mainly because there are so many colleges in the Valley. There are as many recreational opportunities in the Valley as there are in other college-oriented regions, including the [SteelStacks](#) concert center. But you need access to transportation to take you to them. While the Lafayette campus is in the heart of a historic district, it is also at the top of a hill above the downtown. Easton has attempted to revitalize its downtown. But the retail mix is oriented more towards adults, not college students. Entertainment opportunities are more likely to be on campus than in town. Fortunately, all students are allowed to have cars, though freshman cannot park them on campus.

The Lafayette campus is quite attractive, however, with an eclectic mix of building styles from the 19th through 21st Century. The arts facilities, fitness center and student center would be the envy of students at many larger schools. Grounds are very well-maintained. The College does an excellent job at showing respect for its history. With over 250 clubs and organizations, a large number for a school with only 2,500 undergraduates, most anyone can find a common interest. *The Lafayette*, a campus weekly, is the oldest college newspaper in Pennsylvania.

The College's [Clery Report for 2014](#) showed that burglaries have been a concern on campus. Like most colleges, drug and alcohol-related disciplinary referrals have been the most reported incidents at Lafayette. However, the number of reported incidents of burglary has actually exceeded the number of arrests for drug or alcohol-related crimes.

Lafayette competes in 23 Division I scholarship sports. Only Penn State, Lehigh and Bucknell, among Pennsylvania institutions, compete in more sports at this level. While the College's football rivalry with Lehigh extends 150 years, Lafayette's recent Patriot League successes have come in Field Hockey, [Lafayette has also been the runner up in the Patriot League Men's Basketball tournament for three of the past five seasons](#). Approximately 600 students, a quarter of the student body, are student-athletes.

Curriculum

5

Academics

Honors Programs

Experiential Learning

Curriculum

Lafayette offers [49 majors](#), more than most liberal arts colleges, including a dual major in Engineering and International Studies and four engineering fields: Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering.

The College is also unique in offering BA or BS degree options in its Math and science majors as well as Environmental Studies and Psychology. There are some unique minors as well including Aging Studies, Architectural Studies and Computational Methods, among several others. Students may also design their own major. It is easier to double major with the sciences and engineering at Lafayette than at most other liberal arts schools.

Lafayette offers an exceptional number of [experiential learning programs](#) for a small college. In addition approximately half of each class works with faculty on [research](#) or pursues a mentored independent study. Neuroscience majors can pursue funded research for 8 to 10 weeks during the summer, travel and living expenses included.

Beginning with the Class of 2016 Lafayette students pursue an outcomes-based [Common Course of Study](#). The curriculum is based on a list of more than 40 learning outcomes organized in eight categories of requirements—first-year seminar, general skills, global and multicultural, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, quantitative reasoning, and writing.

The approach is little different from other selective liberal arts colleges, though students who are not science oriented may take courses designated as Science and Technology in a Social Context that address a scientific or technological issue of timely importance but have no lab. These courses are offered in College's divisions of Natural Science as well as Engineering. Students who are curious about various aspects of engineering, including product design and development, but are interested in careers outside of engineering might find a good home at Lafayette.

Lafayette requires four courses per semester for all majors, excluding engineering where students will take five during their sophomore and junior years. This will help them in completing a senior design project in addition to going through the job search during the senior year. Students may also use courses to fulfill more than one requirement, although they are expected take courses in the humanities, social sciences and sciences as well as demonstrate second-year foreign language proficiency.

Interestingly, given Lafayette's depth in the sciences, the College does not have a joint degree relationship with a medical or dental school as other selective liberal arts colleges, including neighboring Muhlenberg and Patriot League rival Lehigh. However, Lafayette students are successful at gaining admission to medical and dental as well as a number of other health professions, and they have the appropriate advisors to help them.

Lafayette students gave their faculty an average rating of 3.82 (out of a possible 5) on RateMyProfessors.com and about the same as Bucknell (3.84), Colgate (3.79) and Holy Cross (3.81) students rated their faculties. However, they showed higher regard for their faculty than Lehigh students (3.68).

Small classes are the rule at Lafayette. There were only three classes with more than 50 students, according to the College's most recent Common Data set. Just over 87 percent of Lafayette classes have fewer than 30 students.

Connections

Alumni Relations
Career Services



Connections

Lafayette takes career development quite seriously. Each student is paired with a career counselor beginning freshman year. The student and counselor will be paired together for all four years to develop a “road map” using the school’s resources. The typical first step is for a student to “shadow” an alumnus after their first semester through an externship. Students can take externships during semester breaks at any time during their education. Career development, academic advising and preparation for further education are quite closely aligned at Lafayette, more so than at most other liberal arts colleges.

In 2013-14, according to the College’s literature, 135 employers visited campus, unusually high for a small school. The numbers may be helped by the high percentage of STEM students in the College, but the relationships certainly cannot hurt in helping students who pursue other majors. Lafayette is also one of 35 schools in the [Liberal Arts Career Network](#) that shares job postings. The College reports that 90 percent of its students use career services, exceptional for a liberal arts school.

Alumni loyalty helps as well. More than a third of Lafayette alumni have made gifts large and small to the College over the past two years according to the 2015 *U.S. News Best Colleges* guide, slightly higher than Patriot League rivals Bucknell but lower than Colgate. Among the more than 16,000 Lafayette alumni tracked in LinkedIn.com, nearly half work and or live in the New York or Philadelphia metropolitan areas. There are also approximately 900 alumni each in or around Boston as well as Washington DC and over 400 in or near San Francisco. The college is very well represented in Engineering, Education and Finance, among other occupations. The career center is also active in engaging Lafayette parents as volunteers.

In total, Lafayette has approximately 28,000 living alumni, large for a school of its size. [The College’s alumni association has nine regional chapters as well as several metro area chapters in the larger U.S. cities.](#) Lafayette’s location is also a major plus for alumni who return to visit as well as for the students who want to meet and network with them. It is one of the better located liberal arts colleges in the country for students who want to knock on doors in New York or Philadelphia while the regional economy in the Lehigh Valley is also improving and becoming more diverse as attractive alternative to the larger cities.

Conclusions

Summing up



Conclusions

Lafayette is unique among small, selective co-ed liberal arts colleges for its student interest in STEM subjects as well as a male-majority student body and high interest in Greek life.

Lafayette is also closer to New York City than most peer schools making it fairly easy for students to knock on doors and network with alumni. The alumni and parent networks are quite extensive for such a small school while career services are quite well developed. The campus is well maintained and was built up with tremendous respect for the College's history. Lafayette also does an outstanding job in guiding students towards a degree, better, in fact than many colleges with more selective admissions. It also offers full and half-tuition merit-based academic awards while many similar schools do not. Lafayette is also one of the smallest colleges in the country to compete in scholarship varsity sports.

But while Lafayette is located within a region that is on an economic upswing, Easton has not benefited as much from business and job growth as nearby Allentown and Bethlehem. There is a lot to do within the region, and as many student-oriented amenities as there are in larger college towns, but the activities are not within walking distance of the Lafayette campus. This may be the College's strongest negative though other liberal arts colleges such as Patriot League rival Holy Cross as well as Bates, Connecticut, Trinity and Union are not located within the nicest of cities.

Lafayette is also cross-shopped quite often vs. Lehigh. While these schools are in neighboring communities as well as Patriot League rivals, they are not similar institutions. A student seeking more options in engineering will find them at Lehigh. A student seeking to blend a liberal arts education with engineering while not have to share attention and resources with graduate students would find Lafayette a better fit. In addition, while there are many successful Lafayette alumni working in finance, Lehigh puts considerably more resources into a finance major as well as in integrating business with the liberal arts or engineering.

It's very hard to "go wrong" with Lafayette and its peers if you're serious about a liberal arts education and do your homework on the academics, the community and the campus culture. Lafayette shares several attributes with at least four Patriot League rivals: Bucknell, Colgate, Holy Cross and Lehigh. But it is a different school from any one of them. It's useful to know that before you commit.

Ed Quest's Report Card						
Lafayette College						

Four-Year/ Six-Year Grad Rates	Freshman Retention	Costs	Comforts	Community	Curriculum	Connections
A/A	A	B+	A	B+	A	A

Strengths	Weaknesses
Resources, especially in the sciences, are impressive for a small school	Easton is not the nicest of college towns though there is a lot for college students to do in the Lehigh Valley
Some very generous merit scholarships that you won't find at comparable liberal arts schools--and this school has the money	If your heart is set on an intensive business major, look at Bucknell , Lehigh or Muhlenberg
Closer to larger cities than Bucknell, Colgate, Hamilton, Union or the selective New England liberal arts colleges	High sticker price for those lower down in the admit pool.
Patriot League membership makes this a great liberal arts choice for the smart athlete--and you get a chance to beat Ivies and Lehigh in competition	If your preferences lean away from a "Greek-Jock" culture, you might want to look elsewhere.
Easy to combine a science or engineering with a second major as well as study abroad	You won't find a joint medical or dental admissions program as you might at Lehigh or Muhlenberg
Impressive career services and alumni network for a small school	
Very nice campus with tremendous respect for history	

The End



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