Randolph faces strong competition for students within Virginia, a state that has more public and private options, large schools and small, than any other in the U.S. Within Virginia, applicants consider public options such as the University of Mary Washington, Longwood University and Christopher Newport University. Lynchburg College and Emory and Henry College are the most similar private liberal arts schools. While Randolph faces such strong competition for students from in state, over half (55 percent) of the student body comes from Virginia, according to U.S. News Best Colleges guide.

When compared with these public and private options, Randolph out-performs the private schools, but does not perform as well as two of the public options: Mary Washington and Christopher Newport. Randolph College retains approximately 80 percent of a freshman class. Mary Washington and Christopher Newport retain 83 and 85 percent respectively. Further, while Mary Washington graduates around two thirds of its freshmen within four years, less than half of Randolph College freshmen finish their degrees on time. Graduation rates have trended downward since 2008. The College graduated around two-thirds of the students who entered in 2004.

Randolph is not overly selective. Historically, over 80 percent of the students who applied were offered admission. The middle 50 percent of the SAT range has been very broad, from just below 1,000 to just over 1,200 (out of 1,600) on the Math and Critical Reading sections of the exam. The median has been around 1,100. A very good student (3.5+ unweighted GPA) who might not receive merit aid from more selective public or private colleges can be more eagerly assisted here.

Costs

The value to Randolph College might be greater for students who come from outside Virginia, although the majority of the current students come from the state. It's very difficult for the College to discount down to the charges of Virginia state schools. Virginia residents paid just over $10,000 in tuition and fees to attend the University of Mary Washington, before scholarships are considered, and around $11,600 to attend Christopher Newport.

Tuition and fees for all Randolph students start at around $35,000, competitive with the out-of-state charges at many state schools outside of Virginia, and lower than many other private liberal arts colleges across the U.S. Room and board charges are just under $13,000. Out-of-state students who want a liberal arts education and also want a
small school could find Randolph to be an excellent value. There are many liberal arts colleges across the U.S that cannot or will not discount down to Randolph's *sticker price*.

According to *Big Future*, the College Board’s search site, Randolph awarded aid to all of the first-year students who had demonstrated need in 2012. This amounted to 91 percent of the freshman class. However, The College met the full need for only a third of its student body; the average was 83 percent of need. This is reasonable considering that the school starts with a lower sticker price than many other private liberal arts colleges.

Around a third of Randolph students qualified for a Federal Pell Grant, according to *College Results Online*, very high for a private school. Virginia residents in need also qualify for $3,100 Tuition Assistance Grants, renewable annually. The College awarded an average merit scholarship award of nearly $28,000 in 2012 as well as average need-based scholarship award of just over $24,000, according to *Big Future*, outside of funds available from public sources.

It is quite possible that the needier students from Virginia who qualified for Federal, State and institutional assistance had their need met, at least in terms of covering the tuition and fees. The problem is that costs rise at higher rates than financial aid awards, including scholarships, jobs and loans. The College’s retention rate, combined with the high percentage of students receiving aid, suggests that some students might have faced a growing gap between costs and aid that the students and their families could not cover.

According to the Project on Student Debt, the average indebtedness of Randolph graduates was approximately $12,600 for the student borrowers who graduated in 2013, lower than borrowers borrow at many public schools. However, over two thirds of the students who graduated that year need to take out loans while over a third needed to borrow from a source outside of the Federal Stafford Loan program. *Big Future* reports an average indebtedness of more than $33,000 per borrower for students who graduated in 2012. That’s on the very high side.

**Curriculum**

The *Randolph Plan* runs academic advising and career development advising in tandem over four years. First-year students take courses in four different disciplines in each semester. This helps them to fulfill distribution requirements as well as consider possible majors and minors. All students begin a work-in-progress resume during the freshman year. Between the faculty and tutoring services there is plenty of help and direction for the students who use it properly.

Randolph offers 39 majors, although several also have concentrations within them. There are 43 minors, several in pre-professional subjects as well as the liberal arts. Aside from the majors in the humanities, social sciences, mathematics and natural sciences, Randolph offers majors in Business, Classics, Communications Studies and Sport and Exercise Science. Randolph also offers two education options, one leading to certification to teach in elementary or secondary schools, the other leading to advanced study. Virginia requires teachers to earn a master’s degree within five years of beginning
work. Randolph offers an undergraduate program in curricular studies as well as the requisite advanced degrees. There are also several minors that you might not expect to find at a small school including Curriculum and Instruction, Equine Studies, Greek, International Economics, Multimedia Journalism, Renaissance Studies as well as Business and the more traditional liberal arts subjects.

Randolph takes some unique steps for a very small liberal arts college. Students interested in Mathematics, the sciences and Environmental Studies have the option of earning a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree in their major; the Bachelor of Science is more research focused for students who want to pursue advanced study in the major or another scientific field. Students may apply for up to $2,000 in grant funding for academic projects beginning as early as the sophomore year. Most liberal arts colleges ask students to wait until they are further into their major. There is also an eight-week summer research program with faculty that carries housing and a stipend.

Students who are interested in the visual arts or museum-related careers will really appreciate this school. Those interested in studying in Great Britain have the advantage of a unique academic partnership between Randolph and the University of Reading in London. The College’s Maier Gallery was a repository for American Art displayed at the National Gallery in Washington D.C. in order to keep paintings from falling into enemy hands during World War II, then later during the Cold War. While the gallery no longer fills this role, it provides students with interests such as art, art history, museum studies and non-profit management with exhibition and internship opportunities. Students also have the opportunity to intern at the National Gallery in London.

With a student-faculty ratio of 9 to 1, a very small student body and no graduate students delivering classroom instruction, Randolph students are not likely to be in a class with more than 25 students for the duration of their education on campus. The College reports an average class size of 12 students.

Randolph students hold their faculty in extremely high regard, giving them an average rating of 4.00 (out of a possible 5.00) on RateMyProfessors.com. Among the College’s closest competition within Virginia, only Emory and Henry College students held their faculty in equal regard. Students at the other schools (Mary Washington, Christopher Newport, Longwood and Lynchburg) gave their faculty an average rating of 3.7 or less.

**Comforts**

Randolph was originally designed as a women’s college where everyone lived on campus. While the College is co-ed, the same holds true today. The older residence halls on campus are connected to the student center or the dining hall through overhead walkways. The student center, Main Hall, also houses students on upper-level floors.

Given that Randolph is a very small school everyone lives in one of six residence halls, mixed among freshmen through seniors, encouraging a small community to bond. The College has no fraternities or sororities. The only times that students are likely to live off campus are during study abroad or if they commute from their parents or legal guardians homes.
Community

Being a very small school, and given its transition from an all-female to a co-ed college, Randolph has tried to maintain traditions—students still produce Greek plays, as one example—but also adapt them to the co-ed setting. The school’s song, for example, required no rewriting, other than to include the school’s current name.

The smaller the school, the more important it is for incoming students to find friends quickly, while still being cordial to the classmates who you’re not as close. In addition, the smaller the school, the more likely a student’s voice will be heard, and the more likely the students will be involved in the governance of the institution. As one example, the Randolph College student center features a game room that the students helped design. The College has done an excellent job in mixing study, meeting and leisure time spaces for students within a small campus. This is important because the campus is surrounded by a residential neighborhood with limited shopping close by.

The College has an Honor Pledge. At Randolph, the Pledge not only helps to manage behavior; it also implies trust between students, faculty and staff. For example, students are trusted to take take-home exams in their rooms or the library and complete them on time without assistance. This level of trust could only take place at a very small school.

Lynchburg, Virginia, Randolph’s home (approximately 76,000 residents) was the only major city in Virginia not captured by the Union Army during the Civil War. Both the College and the community value historic preservation quite highly. There are 40 sites in Lynchburg listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including 18 buildings on the Randolph campus itself. The community has also attracted major operations for Areva, a French-based nuclear and renewable energy firm, J. Crew and Genworth Financial, among others. There are plenty of recreational opportunities in the area for biking, fishing, hiking and mountain climbing, among other pursuits.

Lynchburg is also known as the home of the Thomas Road Baptist Church, the congregation founded by the late Reverend Jerry Falwell, who also led the Moral Majority, a conservative political action organization, through the early and middle 1980's. Falwell also founded Liberty Baptist College, which has evolved into Liberty University, the second-largest religiously-affiliated university in the United States (after Brigham Young University in Utah and Idaho). However, the greater community is not dominated by the political conservatism of Falwell’s church or his university.

Randolph also shares the community with Lynchburg College, a 2,100-student liberal arts school. Altogether, the area colleges have 20,000 students on campus, about as many as a community with flagship campus of a state university. However, the campuses are not physically connected together, nor do they offer cross-registration. It is common for Randolph students to drive or ride mass transit to the other campuses for social and community service activities as well as events. This has happened at the students’ initiative rather than any formal agreements between leadership or faculty on the campuses.
Randolph has a relatively safe campus, according to the College’s most recently [Clery Report](#), though there are three concerns. For one, there were five reported Forcible Sex offense in 2013, all on campus with all but one in the residence halls. This could represent more incidents—there were five total during the previous two years—or better reporting by the students and the College. Another concern is that were 96 or more reported Liquor Law Violations each year from 2011 through 2013, all subject to Disciplinary Referrals (though no reported arrests). This is a large number for a college that has significantly less than 1,000 full-time students, not all of them being on campus if they are studying abroad. The vast majority of these violations occurred in the residence halls. The third concern is that there was at least one reported incident involving illegal possession of a weapon each year from 2011 to 2013.

Randolph competes in 17 varsity sports at the NCAA Division III (non-scholarship) level. Equestrian is the most successful sport, and the College has some of finest riding and practice facilities in the country. It also produced its first national champion rider in 2014., and has produced 53 conference champions. Students who compete can board their own horse, if they wish. The men’s basketball team made the NCAA Tournament in 2013.

**Connections**

Randolph’s personalized approach is a tremendous help for career development as well as for students who are confident that they want to pursue further education. The downsides are that the student body is too small to attract much in the way of on campus recruitment outside of Lynchburg, and that the campus is too far from the larger metropolitan areas where students might want to work during the summer or after graduation.

Among the nearly 3,400 alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](#), just over 450 live and work in the Washington D.C metropolitan area. A nearly equal number live and work in either Richmond or Lynchburg. The fourth largest concentration are located in and around New York City. Pulitzer Prize winning author Pearl Buck is the College’s most notable alumnus. Political commentator Candy Crowley is another. Since the College did not graduate a co-ed senior class until 2011, the vast majority of Randolph alumni who are in the best position to be active as contributors to the College or as mentors to students will be women. This might be of interest to young women who aspire to success in a chosen field who want meet women who have achieved that success—but prefer not to go to a women's college.

Since Randolph is such a small school it collaborates with other colleges to help students connect with employers and jobs, in addition to making its own contacts. For example, the Career Development Center provides transportation to the University of Virginia’s Fall and Spring Job and Internship Fairs. The Career Development Center also participates in CHALLENGE with nine other Virginia colleges. This consortium will run a Federal agency Career Expo in November and also collaborate with other schools on Career Premier, a large job and internship fair that will take place in Roanoke in March.
Conclusions

There are small liberal arts colleges, then there are very small ones. The experience that students receive at Randolph College will be more personal, and possibly more rewarding, than those they would receive at many other liberal arts schools, provided that you found an academic program that satisfies your interests.

The Randolph Plan is a very sensible approach for school of this size, while an Honor Pledge helps to bond the students and relieve them of pressures to cheat found in less cooperative schools. A student who wants to work while finding a very supportive community will like this school. Randolph is also an attractive option for transfer students who found a larger school to be a bad fit, or want a more personalized transition from a community college.

The transition from an all-female to a co-ed liberal arts college has never been easy for any school that went through it. It requires a rethinking of mission as well as bold steps—including housing as well as a sports program—to recruit the male students who might be interested in coming. Randolph has a president who has led fine liberal arts colleges before. Since he arrived, he has helped to set the college’s finances on a positive direction. The College has also embarked on a long-term plan to grow enrollment past 1,000 undergraduates, presuming the school can add more housing.

But in prior years, Randolph has lost around a fifth of each freshman class. That’s 30 to 40 of approximately 150 to 200 students each year, hardly bonding for an already small group. There has also been a drop-off after the sophomore year such that more than 40 percent of the students who began their education at Randolph have not graduated on time or they have left the school. Costs might be one reason. Academics, in terms of options or rigor, might be another. A larger student body will raise revenues and provide students with more possible friendships. But more of these students will need to stick around.

Ed Quest’s Report Card: Randolph College

Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: C/C

Freshman Retention: C

Costs: B

Comforts: A

Community: B+

Curriculum: A

Connections: B