UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

Founded in 1819 the University of Cincinnati (UC) is a school with many firsts. Academically, the University of Cincinnati was the first university in the U.S. to establish cooperative education as well as the first university west of the Allegheny Mountains to establish a medical school as well as a pharmacy school. It also offered one of the first bachelor’s degree programs in nursing. Outside of academics the University is the birthplace of the steam-powered fire engine, the electric organ, the first orally-administered polio vaccine, the heart-lung machine and Benadryl, the first antihistamine.

The second-largest university, public or private, in Ohio, UC’s founding pre-dates Ohio State by more than half a century. Notable alumni include former President William Howard Taft, basketball star Oscar Robertson, architect Michael Graves, actor George Clooney, trumpeter Al Hurt and Ohio State’s head football coach Urban Meyer. Neil Armstrong, the first man to set foot on the Moon, taught here after retiring from NASA.

UC has historically been a regional university. Today, 85 percent of the undergraduate student body comes from Ohio. Of the remainder 11 percent come from other U.S. states, four percent from other countries. Just under a quarter of the freshman class are commuters who do not live on campus. However, the University is taking more aggressive steps to attract students from other states, targeting regions that have exceptionally competitive admissions for their arts, business, design and engineering schools. This has helped UC to attract more students from other states and metro areas including Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh and St. Louis.

UC stands out from other public national research universities by making cooperative education (co-op) mandatory to receive a bachelor’s in its engineering, design and information technology programs. Co-op is optional in the business, communications and nursing programs. Cooperative education requires that students alternate between school and full-time work in their major over the middle three years of their education. Co-op students go to school for five years, the first and last being full-time in classes. Only one period, the summer after freshman year, is a time out from school or work. As a result, co-op students graduate with at least 18 months of full-time work experience over five rotations where they work full time. They also have the opportunity to earn more money to help finance their education, depending on their academic program, than they would earn going to school on a more traditional college calendar as well as a more traditional pathway to graduation.

While UC does not require co-op for all majors, it does require every student to complete at least one experiential learning engagement outside of the classroom before graduation including internships, performance showcases (art, music, performing arts), research with faculty, clinical placements, student teaching, community service or study abroad. All students also do some form a senior capstone project under the direction of their major department.

Aside from co-op another attraction is the UC campus. It has a more suburban feel than other city universities. The campus is spread out over more than 470 acres, according the University’s Web site, larger than many city universities including private co-op schools such as Drexel and
Northeastern, more traditional city universities such as Boston University, George Washington University and NYU as well as public schools such as Georgia Tech, Temple and the University of Pittsburgh. It also has an eclectic mix of architectural styles from 19th century college buildings such as McMicken Hall to a traditional college green to the ultra-modern Recreation Center. The University even offers architectural tours separate from admissions tours, something you are not likely to see on a college campus. It has also, to no surprise, developed one of the most-respected undergraduate design programs in architecture and urban planning in the U.S.

Getting into UC depends in part on the choice of academic program. Admissions to the College—Conservatory of Music (CCM), the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning, the College of Engineering and Applied Science and the College of Nursing are exceptionally competitive. So is admission to the Honors Program. All require applications to be completed by December 1st; Musical Theatre students must apply a month earlier. Regardless of the major, students who want to be considered for merit scholarships must apply by December 1st.

Overall, UC accepted just over 75 percent of its applicants for the freshman class that entered in 2013. The SAT range for the middle 50 percent of the class that entered in 2013 was between 1040 and 1290 (out of 1600) while the middle range for the ACT was between 23 and 28. Those denied admission to one of the more competitive programs are offered “second-choice” admissions to the Division of Exploratory Studies where they can prepare to take on another major. And, unlike other large universities, Cincinnati does not favor or require direct admission into its business or engineering schools. Students who are interested in these subjects can enter undeclared.

Getting into UC, as well as the co-op program, might not be exceptionally difficult for most of the academic programs. But it's fair to acknowledge that applicants who are interested in Engineering have other choices among schools that also offer co-op. Among the public universities in Ohio alone, Bowling Green, Ohio State and Ohio University offer this option for prospective Engineering students. Other public universities in neighboring states that offer popular voluntary co-op programs include Penn State, the University of Pittsburgh and Purdue.

UC retained 86 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2013, a very good performance for a public university with a very large (24,400 undergraduates) student population. However, the school competes with Ohio State and Miami University of Ohio for students; those schools retain 93 and 89 percent of their freshmen respectively, according to College Results Online. Just over 60 percent of UC graduates graduate within five years. The six-year rate is 65 percent. By comparison, the six-year graduation rates at Miami and Ohio State exceed 80 percent. However, UC’s graduation rates are about the same as Drexel University, which is smaller, more expensive while also being very heavily invested in cooperative education.

There are two reasons for UC’s lower retention and graduation rates versus Miami and Ohio State: past admissions practices and co-op rotations. In drawing from a largely regional pool in the past the school had to admit weaker candidates from a much smaller market, Ohio students, in order to fill its freshman class. And, with respect to co-op rotations, UC is structured to allow a student to work full-time at five assignments versus three at other co-op schools. If a student decides to change their major as well as their college within the university—for example,
switching from engineering to business, that will add time towards completing a degree. A student would need to complete a different set of requisite courses to move into a co-op in a new major.

According to College Results Online just over a fifth of the freshman class that entered Cincinnati in 2007, many of whom would have graduated in 2012 if they did co-op, transferred out. Purdue is a valid comparison among the out-of-state schools that are cross-shopped with UC. It has similar majors as well as multiple options for co-op in business, technology and engineering. Purdue retains around 90 percent of a freshman class and graduates around two thirds within five years. However, around 40 percent of Purdue graduates earn degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics versus a fifth of UC grads.

While co-op is a major reason that students consider UC, an applicant has to consider the location versus the academic and employment opportunities as well as costs. UC and Ohio State, as one example, are comparable schools. They have many of the same degree programs. Both share the advantage of having no large-school competition in their own cities with respect to placing interns and co-ops in positions.

Neither Cincinnati nor Columbus, Ohio’s largest city and Ohio State’s home, have job markets for interns and co-ops that are as tight as those in cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. There are some advantages to one city over another—Columbus is a state capital, for example, while Cincinnati is a major league baseball and football town—but Columbus and Cincinnati are headquarters cities for major employers and medical centers as well as important cultural centers within their state. Ohio State is the more crowded school, and it has more students. But some will prefer the Buckeye brand to the Bearcat brand.

Costs

UC will charge Ohio residents just over $13,000 in tuition and fees for the 2015-16 academic year; non-residents charges are approximately $26,300. Both charges are quite reasonable not only compared to public universities but also to larger schools that have large co-op programs including Drexel, Georgia Tech, Northeastern and Purdue.

However, students are assessed additional fees after they declare a major that places them in one of UC’s undergraduate colleges. These fees will range between $215 (Allied Health Sciences and Arts and Sciences) to $750 (Design, Art, Architecture and Planning) a year, according to the UC Web site. Students should also present proof of health insurance. Otherwise they will be charged more than $2,200 for a policy.

But in addition to paying student fees during co-op assignments, a co-op student could be forced to pay for an extra year of housing, unless the co-op is close to home or the co-op wages cover all of the housing costs for the school year. Students enrolled in the College of Engineering, a science program or the business school, for example, should expect to earn enough to cover their housing costs. But students who take co-ops in other majors, including the communications or design programs, will probably not. With respect to architecture there is another consideration: some schools that do not have allow students to earn a bachelor’s and a master’s degree within five year’s versus only a bachelor’s. The opportunity to practice depends on state licensure
requirements. Some states may require the master’s degree. Students who go co-op pay for four years of tuition although they are also assessed student fees to maintain their full-time status and also be considered a student for tax purposes. Co-op earnings are excluded from calculations used to determine eligibility for need-based aid through the Federal Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA). Students who go co-op while qualifying for need-based aid will receive aid only for the semesters that they are in classes full time.

The University did not come close to meeting the full financial need for most students. On average, according to UC’s 2014-15 Common Data Set, the school met less than half the need for its full-time students. It’s fair to consider, however, that co-op earnings can make up for that, should the student choose the right major.

It helps to be the recipient of a Cincinnatus Award, a renewable scholarship that can be as much as a full ride (tuition and fees, room and board, book allowance) depending on where you rank not only in the admit pool for UC, but also for the college within UC that you choose. Those who receive the largest awards can actually graduate with a free education, plus most of their savings from co-op earnings. There are also awards that average $6,000 per year for out-of-state residents who would normally fall in the middle of the admit pool at schools such as Penn State, Pitt and Purdue per year. Other awards have out-of-state stipends, too.

Just under a quarter of the freshman class that entered UC in 2013 received a merit-based award. An in-state student who is in the middle of the pool at Ohio State or Miami University of Ohio could qualify for one at UC. An applicant to one of the more selective Big Ten public schools, Michigan or Illinois, would also be a competitive candidate for merit awards at UC.

UC graduates in the Class of 2013 who took out student loans, owed an average of $28,300, according to the Project on Student Debt. This is reasonable considering the popularity of co-op leads many students to stay at least five years. Ohio State graduates, as one comparison, owed, on average $26,500 over four years as opposed to five for most UC students. And, to provide comparison, neither Drexel nor Northeastern publish student indebtedness information.

Curriculum

UC is more than just co-op. The top seven percent of a freshman class is invited to pursue Honors while the school has a national model for service learning. There are more than 100 academic and professional learning communities on campus as well. The number of ranked departments is too long to post in a profile.

Degree programs that have received the highest accolades include Architecture, Creative Writing, Criminology, Environmental Engineering, Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Industrial Design, Interior Design, Musical Theatre and Nursing. There are 30 concentrations alone within majors such as Biological Sciences, Business, Geography and Journalism. The major differences between UC and Ohio State is that Ohio State has the majors in the agricultural subjects while UC has 14,000 fewer undergraduates.

Given that the University offers so many majors, it is quite likely that many students will have smaller classes the further they get into their degree program. However, students need to make
sure that required courses can be completed during the semesters they are on campus. Not every major will have all of its courses open during the fall, spring and summer terms. Over 400 of the more than 3,100 courses taught at UC had more than 50 students, according to the school's 2014-15 Common Data Set, around 13 percent. At Ohio State more than a fifth of the classes will be this large. According to U.S. News, over 40 percent of the classes at UC have fewer than 20 students, compared to fewer than 30 percent at Ohio State.

UC students gave their faculty a rating of 3.71 (out of a possible 5.00) on RateMyProfessors.com, lower than Ohio State students (3.83) rated their faculty, but about the same as Miami of Ohio (3.72) students regarded theirs. However, UC students had higher regard for their faculty than students at Drexel (3.59) and Northeastern (also 3.59) the major urban private research universities that are the most invested in co-op.

Community

UC has an urban campus with a suburban feel as well as an eclectic mix of older and modern buildings. While it is a state university, the design of the more modern campus buildings leaves the impression of a more expensive private school. The University has cultural and sports facilities that are attractive and well-maintained. CCM, the arts and music school, has state-of-the-art concert and performance spaces that would please any guest performer or speaker who came to campus. Nippert Stadium, where the UC Bearcats play football, will kick off a new season after renovations. The Recreation Center is also one of the most modern and up-to-date on a U.S. university campus, featuring a Lazy River swimming exerciser.

UC is also called the University of Seven Hills. The hills that form the campus help make it confusing to navigate. Entrances for many buildings, including the student center, do not open at the first floor. This is one campus that visitors should walk through at least twice to be sure that they know their way around. While the University blended the various architectural styles to enhance the appearance of the campus and make room for more energy-efficient buildings, it did not add significant amounts of green space. The campus design leaves the impression that the students are rarely outside, except to walk between buildings or go to football games. However, there is no traffic congestion on campus. Parking lots are placed at the edges; the newer decks appear clean, modern and secure. Unlike many state universities, UC allows all students to have cars, even freshmen who live on campus.

UC’s athletic tradition has been as a “basketball school” for more than half a century. Oscar Robertson is the school’s greatest basketball star. Robertson, who also did co-op, graduated with a degree in Accounting from UC, won an gold metal as a member of the 1960 U.S. Olympic team, two NCAA National Championships for UC (1961 and 1962), a NBA title with the Milwaukee Bucks, and a historic victory for NBA free agents in the courts. Robertson also became a successful businessman and served for a brief time as the Bearcats head coach. The University has a statue of Robertson in a Bearcats uniform at the entrance to the Lindner Athletic Center. While UC has not been as dominant at basketball as it was during Robertson’s day, it has still put very good teams on the court.
The football team has risen in stature though the Bearcats draw, on average, less than a third of the attendance one would find at Ohio State. The Bearcats have the tenth-best winning percentage in NCAA Division 1 play since 2007, better than more noted “football schools” such as the University of Georgia, University of Michigan, University of Texas-Austin and Notre Dame, while winning or sharing five conference titles.

It is also noteworthy that the more expensive private schools most comparable to UC, Drexel and Northeastern, do not play sports at the same level, nor do the have similar sports and recreational facilities on their campuses. Neither do other popular urban universities such as Boston University, George Washington University and NYU.

But UC, while fielding competitive teams in the major revenue sports, is not as much a “spirit and sports” school as Ohio State, or even a school with about the same number of undergraduates such as the University of California-Berkeley, University of Maryland-College Park or the University of Michigan. Only freshmen and fifth-year seniors are always taking classes on campus while many members of the remaining classes are on co-op during any given semester. They might be going to work in Cincinnati, but the demanding full-time jobs have long hours that will keep them off campus and less involved in school activities.

Considering the size of the student body as well as the urban location, the UC campus is relatively safe according to the school’s most recent Clery Report. Reported burglaries, for example, a greater concern on a city-based campus, dropped from 14 to only six from 2011 to 2013. Reported forcible sex offenses dropped from five to two. Near campus, the number dropped from 20 to four. There were only 13 drug-related arrests in 2013; disciplinary referrals trended down from 42 to 24. But arrests near campus rose from 38 to 85. Alcohol-related disciplinary referrals dropped from 268 to 176. There were only 11 alcohol-related arrests on campus and in the residence halls for in 2013. But there were 28 arrests near campus each year in 2012 and 2013. There were also eight arrests related to weapons possession, one on campus, the remainder near campus. The statistics leave an impression that the campus is safer than the surrounding neighborhood. This is a concern considering that three quarters of the student body lives off campus.

UC’s police department has also come under criticism from a local prosecutor after a campus police officer pulled over a male driver, 43 years old and unaffiliated with the University, for having a missing front license plate. The officer, Ray Tensing, pulled over the driver outside of the campus grounds, but near the campus. Tensing, who was dismissed, but has yet not been tried in court, shot the driver in the head for refusing to get out of his car. While no students, nor other UC employees were involved in the incident the verdict could have impacts on the law enforcement powers of campus police at colleges and universities all across the United States.

Cincinnati, the Queen City, offers pretty much anything a college student could want in a large city including major league sports and entertainment opportunities. The city is served by Amtrak as well as six airports within two hours of campus. It is home to nine Fortune 500 companies, most notably Proctor and Gamble, as well as offices for 400 others. The University has two hospitals on campus, while there are several others nearby.
Cincinnati is also far less congested than larger cities such as Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia or New York. You can actually own a car in Cincinnati, park it for a reasonable price and drive it. However, unlike the larger cities, Cincinnati offers only bus transportation (though with a student discount) for people who do not have access to a car. The city, however, is quite neighborhood-oriented, much like Pittsburgh. Local issues such as cleanliness, safety and recreation are often resolved at a neighborhood level. This combined, with a local interest in architecture and historic preservation, makes Cincinnati one of the better cities to be engaged in community service projects or urban design.

**Comforts**

UC can guarantee housing to all freshman who request it. But the University houses just under a quarter of the student body, on the low end for a school with over 24,000 undergraduates.

UC will charge between $10,800 and $12,200 for room and board in 2015-16, reasonable considering the school is located near the heart of a major city. The University has nine residence halls and apartment complexes, including Honors and Special Interest housing within both, unusual for a state university. Quality is tied to price. Dabney, the least expensive hall, is also the oldest design and not the nicest of residence halls. One apartment complex, Morgens Hall, recently reopened, providing 480 beds. UC allows first-year students to live in either residence halls or apartments, but they must purchase a meal plan. There are also two modern apartment complexes that are not university-owned but are university affiliated and advertised on the housing office Web site.

The University does not report a percentage of students who are members of fraternities or sororities, although it has 24 fraternities as well as 10 sororities. Greek life might be a good idea for students at a co-op school because it offers not only friendships, but also a less expensive housing option than off-campus apartments while in school as well as on co-op within Cincinnati. Unlike public universities that do not have large co-op programs, UC co-op students can expect to spend at least one semester on campus during a summer where they must take classes full time. This makes sublets more possible than they might be at other schools.

UC hosts a Student Safe Housing Fair to help students find off-campus housing as well as to help them consider the affiliated apartment complexes. Off campus its possible to find apartments for $500 per person per month, plus utilities, possibly less, quite reasonable for a large city. But given the crime statistics near campus, its best to seek advice to work with the on-campus advisors find the location that is safe as well as convenient.

**Connections**

UC advertises that it has more than 260,000 living alumni, a very large base not only for co-op positions, but also full-time employment. The largest concentration of alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](http://LinkedIn.com) live and work in Ohio’s major metro areas: Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland and Dayton. The next largest group live and work in and around New York City. According to *U.S. News* Best Colleges for 2015, UC has a higher alumni giving rate rate than Drexel or Northeastern, the two urban private universities that are also well invested in co-op.
Being a strong co-op school, career services at UC are excellent in terms of making contacts with alumni and local employers through events and on-campus job fairs. Co-op requires workshops as well as and interview preparation much like the process for finding full-time, entry-level jobs after graduation. In addition to the Cincinnati community, other cities: Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton, Indianapolis and Louisville are easily accessible by car.

UC is one school where students who work hard at their academics as well as their co-op or other experiential assignments will land where they want to go. They get a fairer chance to get a head start on a career at a reasonable price than they would at practically any other large university in the U.S., especially those who pursue a major outside of Accounting, the sciences or engineering.

Conclusions

UC is an excellent option for a student who is interested in co-op as well as an urban university. Cincinnati has a business community large enough to accommodate most co-op students—and UC is the only large school in the city. Further, the larger private schools that offer co-op, Drexel and Northeastern, are not likely to discount tuition and fees to UC’s charges to attract a similar student who can gain admission to all three schools. Finally, the campus has a suburban feel with the advantages of access to the business and entertainment community of a large city. And, living costs in Cincinnati are lower than they are in most other major U.S. cities. And the campus setting is quite attractive for an urban university, though the crime statistics point to concerns about the surrounding neighborhood.

For students who want to go co-op in any major outside of Engineering, the sciences, or Accounting, UC is a least-cost option for Ohio residents—and most non-residents as well. But Engineering students have many public options. Schools such as Georgia Tech, Ohio State, Penn State and Purdue have more Engineering alumni around the world while they also charge reasonable levels of tuition and fees to residents and non-residents. These schools also offer co-op, along with the option not to do co-op. Purdue even offers a four-year co-op option. You must do five years if you choose the University of Cincinnati.

Co-op is an advantage if you have some idea of an academic and career direction before you start college. It’s very difficult to present a strong resume to an employer if you present employment experiences in more than one major. It shows indecisiveness. That works to a student’s disadvantage when competing against UC classmates as well as peers from other schools who have shown through their academics and work experience that they are more serious about a particular career. UC has an excellent five-year program built around co-op as well as other fine degree programs, but the transfer-out rate is high. Either the school admitted too many students who could not do the work, lacked an academic direction, or decided that they preferred a more traditional college experience.

Co-op is a tremendous value if the wages can cover housing costs for three years and if you can earn a scholarship that significantly discounts the tuition. Or in the case of UC, you can start out with a lower sticker price. On these scores, plus the admissions statistics, UC is more accessible and affordable than practically any national research university that is well invested in co-op. But
if you want more of the “spirit and sports” atmosphere of a large state university, you might want to travel east towards Columbus or head west towards Lexington, Kentucky.

### Ed's Report Card: University of Cincinnati

- **4-Year/5-year/6-Year Graduation Rates:** Not relevant/C+/B
- **Freshman Retention:** B+
- **Costs:** A
- **Community:** A
- **Curriculum:** A
- **Comforts:** B+
- **Connections:** A