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Delaware Valley University

Founded in 1896 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Delaware Valley University (DelVal) is a small, largely pre-professional college with approximately 1,700 undergraduates. The school attained university status only recently in 2015.

DelVal was founded by Joseph Krauskopf, a Reform Jewish Rabbi, as the National Farm School. Krauskopf believed in “science with practice,” the idea that students should learn through hands-on work on the farm as well as through classroom instruction. The school was all-male until 1969 after programs in biology, business, chemistry and food science were added to its academic offerings. Today, more than half of DelVal students pursue a degree program related to agriculture or environmental studies.

DelVal is not a difficult school to get into. More than three quarters of the students who applied to be part of the current freshman class were offered admission. Applications are taken on a rolling basis; a decision can be rendered in 4 to 6 weeks after all materials have been received. An SAT score above 900 and a B average are sufficient to gain admission.

Slightly more than a third of the students who were accepted to Del decided to come, high for a school this small. One reason might be the draw of the unique academic programs. There are 15 agriculturally-related undergraduate majors (out of 25 undergraduate majors total) that college-bound students are more likely to find at a much larger school. Within Pennsylvania only Penn State and Temple (on its Ambler campus) offer similar majors.

DelVal is the perfect school for a student who is seriously interested in these subjects but does not want to attend a larger state university. It does not have the equipment and labs that the larger school will have for students who progress through the major, but the instruction will be more personal. The university owns over 1,000 acres of property, including barns and greenhouse space, where hands-on instruction is the rule, part-time jobs are also available.

The downside about having so many unique degree programs, but also few majors, is the freshman retention rate. DelVal lost more than a quarter of the freshmen who entered in 2013. The university graduates just over half of a freshman class on time, not impressive for a small private college, though only two public institutions in Pennsylvania do better: Penn State’s main campus and the University of Pittsburgh.

While it is quite possible to switch between similar programs, for example, Agribusiness to a general business degree or Landscape Architecture to Horticulture or Turf Management switches totally away from the original major could be more difficult. In



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those cases, to might not be worth paying the higher tuition over transferring to a state school.

Costs

DeVal charges approximately \$35,200 in tuition and fees, a lower sticker price than most private colleges of this size. Room and board add another \$12,500. The tuition and fee charges are about twice those of Penn State or Temple, which also offer similar majors. However, the student who can also get into those schools can also receive a renewable scholarship to DeVal that would range between \$19,000 and \$21,000 a year. The university does not state the GPA required to maintain the scholarship on its Web site. Those who are quite serious about one of the majors might find DeVal to be the better buy, as long as they can complete the degree on time.

Those who can't might find the debt difficult to manage. According to the Project on Student Debt, the average student who graduated in 2014 with loans owned approximately \$39,700. Eighty-two percent of the class had some debt. Thirty-six percent needed to borrow from a source other than the Federal Government.

The university has held annual tuition and fee increases to around \$1,000 a year since 2011-12 according to *College Navigator*, the search site managed by the U.S. Department of Education. This is fairly reasonable for a private college. Room and board charges annually rose between \$400 and \$600 for each year as well.

Curriculum

DeVal is divided into three schools: Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Business and Humanities and Life and Physical Sciences. They collectively offer 25 undergraduate majors, more than half in agricultural and environmental subjects. There is also a certificate in Organic Farming that can be part of a degree program.

Outside of these majors the Biological Sciences, Business and Criminal Justice are popular programs. DeVal also offers a unique program in Agricultural Education for teaching in secondary schools along with options for teaching Biology, Chemistry or Social Studies. While DeVal does not offer a general Psychology major, it does offer a BA in Counseling Psychology for students who want to work in the mental health arena and/or go on to graduate study in counseling or social work.

With so many majors tied to introductory courses in biology and chemistry, those courses are likely to be larger than they could be at schools of similar size. DeVal advertises a student-faculty ratio of 15 to 1, high for a school with fewer than 1,800 undergraduates, though lower than schools such as Penn State or Temple. Class sizes will be small after declaring a major.



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DelVal students gave their faculty a rating of 3.7 (out of a possible 5.0) on RateMyProfessors.com. There is no similar private school to compare with DelVal. Students at Penn State's main campus gave their school the same rating. Those who reported from Temple University's Ambler campus, which offers more similar majors to Del Val, gave their faculty a rating of 3.57. In addition, DelVal's four-year graduation rate has been better than Temple's.

Community

DelVal is located in Doylestown, within Bucks County, a well-to-do suburb of Philadelphia that is also close to the New Jersey border. The campus itself is not immediately near the commercial center of Doylestown though it is served by a train to Philadelphia. DelVal allows all students to have cars; they are a necessity for working at internships off campus or going to student teaching assignments. Doylestown is a very nice place; it is in one of the more agrarian regions of Pennsylvania. It is also a popular home for discount shopping. But it is not really a college town.

The campus is exceptionally well maintained thought it is much larger (around 250 acres for the built-up spaces for academics and student life) than schools that have a student body of a similar size. It appears to be easy to patrol and secure.

DelVal is a school that prefers to discipline its own, according to its most recent Public Safety Report. There were few reported arrests for any crime on campus. Even liquor law arrests, the most commonly reported arrests on any campus, were low. There were only six in 2012, none in 2013 and 2014. However, there were 10 reported incidents of hate crimes, the majority being religious-related from 2012 through 2014; these are rarely reported by colleges. But overall crime is trending down on this campus. Disciplinary referrals for alcohol-related crimes declined from 204 in 2013 to 94 in 2014. That's a significant drop considering that more than 900 students live on campus.

DelVal participates in 14 sports at the Division III (non-scholarship) level and fields club teams in cheerleading, equestrian and Ultimate Frisbee. According to the athletic department, DelVal had had 126 student-athletes earn All-America honors based on their performance at a NCAA Championship or as selected by an organization officially recognized by the NCAA. In addition, DelVal has 11 Academic All-Americans and 25 Scholar All-Americans. The vast majority of the university's athletic champions are in wrestling, about a fifth in football. In 2015, Del Val produced 4 All-American wrestlers; two more were Scholar All-Americans.



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Comforts

DelVal has four freshman-only residence halls as well as one that is shared between freshmen and upper-class students. Approximately 400 freshmen, the vast majority of the class live on campus. The freshman halls are corridor-style—several rooms sharing a common bathroom—with mostly double rooms though triples and four-person rooms are also available. The university also has four upper class-only halls. two are corridor-style, two are suite-style (small groups between two and six people sharing a private bath). DelVal owns only two on-campus apartments, one tied to a freshman-only residence hall, the other to an upper-class hall.

Unlike most small residential colleges, DelVal does not require students to live on campus. Apartments are available near campus; it is possible to rent an apartment for about the same charges, even less, than a student would pay to live in a residence hall on campus. Apartment living is an attractive option for continuing students who might be taking classes, working at jobs or doing research on campus during summer months.

DelVal requires all students who live in the residence halls to carry a seven-day unlimited meal plan with flex dollars that may be used at the Pub in the student center or the Starbucks cafe' in the Life Sciences building. DelVal plans to keep its main dining hall open 24 hours, including a Starbucks kiosk, beginning in the spring of 2016.

Greek life is not very popular at DelVal. There are only three fraternities and no sororities. The fraternities do not have housing on campus.

Connections

About 70 percent of the 7,300 DelVal alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](#) live and/or work in the metropolitan areas encompassing New York or Philadelphia. This is no surprise given the school's location and the home communities of the undergraduate student body. About 60 percent of the students come from Pennsylvania according to data that the university supplied to *U.S News*.

DelVal is located in a region where there are not only many agribusinesses; there are also pharmaceutical companies that manufacture animal health products. Among the alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](#), Merck, a Fortune 500 pharmaceutical firm, was the most-mentioned employer. Teva Pharmaceuticals, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Janssen Pharmaceutica also received several mentions.

DelVal reported an average alumni giving rate of just under eight percent for the past two years to *U.S. News*. That's very low for a private college. It reflects on the low endowment, approximately \$32 million for Fiscal Year 2014, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers.

The university integrates career development with academics under the term Experience 360 or 'E360' for short. Each degree program has its own credit-bearing and non-credit E360 requirements which would include:

- Academic Career Exploration Experience
- Academic Internship
- Student Teaching for Secondary Education majors
- Student Research
- Study Abroad
- Leadership Development Program
- Community Service
- Civic Engagement

Students take more experiential learning credits at DelVal than they might at other schools. There is a two-semester introductory sequence to introduce students to experiential learning. Successful completion of that sequence opens doors to the Career Exploration, Student Teaching and Internship programs. DelVal allows students to pursue research with faculty as early as the start of the sophomore year.

The integration of career development and the majors works well when students can commit to a major early, or they want to change to major that requires similar courses during the sophomore year. Since DelVal has a relatively high yield rate combined with rolling admissions, as well as so many programs related to agriculture and the environment, it is fair to presume that most students enter with some idea of a possible major. However, the low retention rate suggests that students who cannot find a match among the majors as a freshman will leave as early as possible.

Conclusions

DelVal is a nice alternative to a large public university—for those who are serious about the academic programs that the university offers. It promises more personalized and hands-on instruction as well as opportunities to build a resume while in college, and appears to make good on the promise for the students who come to work. It is located in a very nice community within an agricultural region, but also close to a major city by car or train. Anyone who visits would find DelVal to have a small, but friendly community.

However, DelVal is not the best option for students who are neither decided nor serious about an academic direction. It offers fewer options in the liberal arts than other small schools or does it have the breadth in areas such as business and education that you might find at a state school. And, while DelVal is a small school, the introductory courses in subjects that are common to several of the majors such as Biology or Chemistry could be larger than most students would expect.



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Those who love animals or plants and want to get their feet wet and their hands dirty will love DelVal. Yes, there are academic programs for those who don't. But the community is dominated by those who do.

Report Card: Delaware Valley University

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