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### Western New England University

Founded in 1919 in Springfield, Massachusetts, Western New England University combines the academic offerings of a comprehensive university with the more personalized educational approach of a smaller college. Originally an extension of Northeastern University's business school, Western New England has accredited undergraduate programs in Accounting, Business, Engineering and Pharmacy and a law school, much like a larger state-supported university, it has fewer than 2,800 undergraduates and approximately 1,000 graduate and professional students. To date, nearly half of the student body comes from Massachusetts.

Given the academic interests of the students, it is difficult to identify a similar school. The University of Hartford, located less than an hour away, has nearly 5,000 undergraduates. The University of New Haven has over 4,000 as does Roger Williams University (RI). Manhattan College (NY) has just under 3,000 undergraduates and offers programs in business, health professions and engineering, but not pharmacy. Quinnipiac University, located in western Connecticut, offers considerable overlap among majors, but is a mid-size school with more than 6,500 undergraduates. The University of Rhode Island, which has just under 13,000 undergraduates, might be the most similar school in terms of location as well as breath of academic programs as well as median high school GPA (3.30 for the larger school vs. 3.25 according to *College Results Online*) and median SAT scores (1060/1600 for the larger school vs. 1070/1600)

Students who consider Western New England typically apply to the state universities in their home states as well as speciality schools, mainly in New England. A prospective pharmacy student, for example, might consider Western New England versus the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, the University of Connecticut or the University of Rhode Island. A prospective business student might consider the university against not only the state universities, but also Babson, Bentley, Bryant and Roger Williams within Massachusetts and Rhode Island. A prospective engineer might consider Western New England against the University of New Haven, the University of Hartford, Roger Williams or Wentworth Institute of Technology located in Boston as well as a larger state school.

Western New England retained 77 percent of the students who entered in 2014, according to the university's 2015-16 Common Data Set. This retention rate is lower than the rates for the state universities in the New England states, the lowest (on a main campus), [excluding the University of Maine \(76 percent\)](#). About a fifth of the class will transfer to another institution by the end of their sophomore year. Approximately half of the students who entered in 2009 graduated within



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four years; this class entered two years before the first group of pharmacy students arrived on campus in August, 2011. Pharmacy students spend six years on campus; their degree path takes them to a doctoral degree. The pharmacy and engineering students are among the best in a class. Currently 92 percent of the first-year engineering students return for their sophomore year, as do most of the pharmacy students.

While the retention and graduation rates could be better, the addition of the Pharmacy program (it will graduate its first class in 2017) as well as major investments in the science and engineering facilities—over \$50 million has been spent—might serve to attract a more successful student body. In addition, this is one of the smallest schools in the U.S. to offer accredited Accounting and Business programs. Bentley and Bryant are larger (4,200 and 3,100 undergraduates) schools. Their business programs are also likely to be more competitive in the classroom.

Western New England is not an exceptionally selective school. Admissions are test-optional. Those who do not submit test scores must write an additional admissions essay. In 2015 the university offered admission to just over 5,000 of the 6,200 students who applied to join the freshman class, an acceptance rate of 81 percent. The incoming class had 719 students. The yield rate, the percentage of admitted students who decided to deposit, was 14 percent. There were 75 pharmacy students in the most recent class. In addition, there were 240 (out of approximately 760) freshmen who had participated in robotics at their high schools, though not all chose the sciences or engineering as their academic direction. The university offers two exploratory programs for students who were undecided on a major, one is for students who are totally undecided, the other for students who might be undecided between science and engineering.

### Costs

Next year the university will charge approximately \$34,900 in tuition and fees; engineering students will be charged approximately \$36,300. Room and board will be approximately \$13,200. These charges are reasonable for a private university and are competitive with the out-of-state students charges at the flagship state schools in New England, with the exclusion of the University of Maine, [which is cutting non-resident tuition and fees to match the charges of the flagship universities in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in order to recruit students from those states.](#)

Western New England [grants merit-based scholarships using a grid that is fairly easy to understand.](#) A typical admit (3.3 GPA/1000 SAT) would qualify for a merit award of \$13,000, renewable with a 2.7 GPA or higher. This makes the university even more price competitive versus the non-resident charges of the public schools as well as private colleges. The very best applicants from Massachusetts



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could pay less than they would to attend the state university provided that they qualified for a state scholarship or Federal grant as well as the largest merit award, which is \$18,000 per year. Nearly 30 percent of students who graduated in 2014 qualified for a Federal Pell Grant according to the Project on Student Debt. On average, the university met 73 percent of need for students who qualified for need-based financial aid, according to its 2015-16 Common Data Set. This meant that many students were left with a gap that was not likely to be filled with a merit-based award.

The university did not report student debt information for the Class of 2014 to the Project on Student Debt or to *Big Future*, the College Board's search site.

### Curriculum

Pre-professional preparation is the true strength of this school. While there are [nearly 50 majors](#), only 14 could be considered liberal arts subjects. There is no foreign language study at all, unique to any college. The programs in Communications and Criminal Justice offer multiple concentrations. Students who are interested in combining science and Criminal Justice can major in Forensic Biology or Forensic Chemistry.

There are more options in the business program than one might expect at such a small school; the same goes true for engineering. The program in Sports Management is highly regarded, even within a region where two other schools (Springfield College and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst) offer their own programs. There is also a weekend 'Shark Tank' competition where investors review student-driven business plans. All of the business and engineering programs offer an accelerated Bachelors/Masters option. There is also a 3+3 option to earn a law degree after six years as well as a unique joint degree in engineering and law that can be earned over the same amount of time.

The best value is to complete an accelerated program, especially for students who have some advanced placement courses and qualify for the more generous financial aid awards. Any savings in the undergraduate education can be applying to borrowing for the master's degree or a law degree, or the case of pharmacy students, the doctorate. The opportunity to save a year of tuition and fees as well as living expenses in a graduate program is a strong value proposition that few schools this small can offer.

The university advertises a student/faculty ratio of 12 to 1, lower than mid-sized or larger schools that offer similar academic programs. Even freshman engineering classes are small and hands-on. Students are more likely to be taught by professors, since the university grants no doctorates outside of the pharmacy program. Seventy percent of the classes taught at Western New England in 2014 had fewer than 20 students. None had 50 or more. Students



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carry a five-course load here, mainly because the pre-professional programs are accredited and carry their own required courses.

Western New England also takes peer-to-peer advising quite seriously, a necessity given the demands of the university's pre-professional programs and the lack of graduate students to work with the undergraduates. Peer-to-peer advisors, all undergraduates, receive 160 hours of volunteer training before they work with first or second-year students.

Western New England students gave their faculty a rating of 3.67 (out of a possible 5.0) on [RateMyProfessors.com](http://RateMyProfessors.com), slightly lower than students at the University of Rhode Island (3.72) which has the most similar mix of academic programs, but also a much larger student body. Western New England students held their faculty in about the same regard as students at the University of New Haven (3.69) and Quinnipiac University (3.70) though in slightly lower regard than peers at the University of Hartford (3.72). But they also held them in higher regard than students at Bentley University (3.58), Bryant University (3.58), Roger Williams University (3.58) as well as Wentworth Institute of Technology (3.44).

## Community

While Western New England is less than 100 years old, most of the academic buildings follow a design theme of "New England style" academic buildings designed a century before. The exceptions are the engineering building, the recreation center and the science building, all of which were recently constructed or renovated. The campus is easy to navigate and well maintained though the surrounding neighborhood has little to offer college students who live there. Access to a car is helpful to visit students who attend other colleges in the Springfield area—there are seven other schools less than 30 minutes away—or to travel to other destinations including the Berkshires, Hartford and Boston. The Five College region, including Amherst, Northampton and South Hadley, also has much to offer socially and is less than an hour's drive from campus.

The university takes student government seriously. It has a leadership role that is much like a Greek community would have on other campuses, only this school has neither fraternities nor sororities. Each class has a class council that coordinates events and programs for their class; there is a campus-wide student senate as well. Freshman council leadership is selected through interviews by university staff; the other class councils are elected. There are also competitions between the undergraduate residence halls that have become traditions, including the Bear Olympics and "The Rock," where student events are advertised.

Drug and alcohol-related disciplinary referrals were the most reported crimes according to the university's Clery Report. There were 112 and 294 respectively



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in 2014, high considering that less than 1,800 students live on campus. However, there were no drug-related arrests and only two arrests related to liquor law violations. The university is apparently taking the lead on resolving these crimes. There were three incidents of weapons possession reported on campus, two in university-owned housing. There were also four reported incidents of sexual assault as well as two reported incidents of dating violence.

Western New England competes at the NCAA Division III (non-scholarship) level in 19 sports, including football. The Golden Bears have won 19 [Commonwealth Coast Championships](#) in just the last eight years since Western New England's admission to the conference for the 2007-08 season. They have won five championships each in baseball, men's lacrosse and men's soccer. The football team concluded its season with a loss to Johns Hopkins in playoff competition following a 10-1 regular season and a #19 ranking at the Division III level.

### Comforts

Western New England does not require freshmen to live on campus, through 85 percent choose to do so. There are four freshmen halls: Berkshire, Franklin, Hamden and Wyndham as well as the first two floors of Commonwealth Hall which is quite modern and very nice. The freshmen halls have five learning communities, two devoted to leadership, one to engineering and sciences and one is related to creativity. A fifth learning community for women in science and engineering will open in 2016-17. Freshmen live either in double rooms or larger rooms designated as triples for the academic year.

Western New England also allows sophomores to form their own learning communities within suites in Le Rivier, also one of the more modern halls on campus. Students who choose this option plan the learning community's agenda, including service projects, with the help of resident and faculty advisors. There are apartment living options for juniors and seniors. These assignments are made by class year as well as GPA. The university also allows students to live on campus during the summer if they are doing research for faculty or pursuing internships nearby.

This is one school where students either come from the area or live on campus. Currently, about two thirds of the undergraduates live in university-owned housing. The surrounding neighborhood is not attractive though it becomes more residential as one passes by nearby Springfield College.

### Connections

Career development is taken quite seriously, given the abundance of pre-professional programs. All first-year students take a seminar that includes resume development, shadowing, assessment and career exploration as well as academic instruction. Like most colleges, Western New England assigns the



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seminar instructors to be advisors to first-year students. Sophomores can be matched with mentors through a Connections program in either the Fall or Spring. This includes two four-hour shadowing experiences. Internships are encouraged, even for freshmen and sophomores, although only juniors and seniors may take them for academic credit. The career development center assigns counselors by college; they will develop relationships with the faculty as well as students and employers. The career development center runs fall and spring career fairs on campus; the most recent one attracted 51 employers. It also participates in a spring career fair with seven other area colleges that attracts over 90 employers. Western New England is the only school within this group that offers engineering as well as the most comprehensive business program.

While Western New England is not a large undergraduate school it has over 20,000 alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com). Approximately 7,300 live and/or work around Springfield or Hartford, Connecticut. About 4,400 live and/or work around Boston while more than 2,300 are based around New York City. MassMutual, based in Springfield, is the largest employer of Western New England graduates. The insurance companies clustered in Hartford: Aetna, Cigna, The Hartford and Travelers are also major employers. The alumni giving rate, an average percentage of alumni who have made contributions to the university over the past two years, as reported in *US News*, has been a very low six percent.

## Conclusions

Western New England University offers students an opportunity few other schools will offer: to earn degrees in challenging programs within a more personal setting than they would experience at a mid-sized (3,000 to 8,000 undergraduates) private school or a larger private or state university. The university can house virtually everyone who asks for on-campus housing.

The students take more responsibility for building a campus community than peers at other schools. The better students also appear more than willing to take responsibility for supplementing their academics with work experience; they do not wait until their junior year to find internships. The Springfield and Hartford metro areas are also large enough to employ Western New England students during the school year as well as the summer, provided that they have access to a car. While there are other colleges in the area, only one comes close to matching Western New England's academic breadth, the University of Hartford, which is a mid-sized school.

Students are less likely to run into the large "gate keeper" classes that force students out of programs in engineering, the sciences or the health professions at larger schools. However, unless they are among the very best students from Massachusetts, they are quite likely to pay more for the education than they



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would pay to receive it from their home state university. On the other side, the attention from faculty and career counselors will be much greater for the Western New England student.

The physical location of the campus is a major problem, specifically the neighborhood surrounding the campus. But this might be less important for commuters as well as students who have access to cars. There are more recreational and social opportunities within an hour of campus than students will find at most other colleges. Amherst, a very nice college town, is about 40 minutes from campus. Hartford, which has many entertainment and employment options, is about an hour away.

If you want to earn a business, engineering or pharmacy degree, there are many options. However, most of them require attending a larger school and possibly paying more for the opportunity if you are looking at attending a state school as a non resident. Western New England occupies a niche that will become more important in higher education in years to come: a smaller school that has the breadth and pre-professional training, but not the impersonality, of a larger one.

### **Report Card: Western New England University**

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