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Grove City College

Founded in 1876, Grove City College is a 2,500-student residential college located in Western Pennsylvania, approximately one hour north of Pittsburgh. While the college identifies as Christian, it is not affiliated with a denomination of the Catholic Church. Nor does it require its students to sign a Declaration of Faith, meaning adherence to a set of values or principles rooted in Christianity. While the college welcomes students of all faiths, its marketing and much of its student programming is Christian focused.

Grove City College refuses to accept Federal funds for any purpose, including student financial aid. The college attempts to maintain a reasonable sticker price as well as offer scholarships (merit and need-based), jobs and student loans (through a relationship with a private lender). The college has gone in this direction under the belief that government should have no influence in its business practices as well as its student affairs. The Pew Family, known internationally for the Pew Charitable Trust and founders of the Sun Oil Company (known to consumers as Sunoco), led the school through two generations from 1895 through 1971. J. Howard Pew, an alumnus who served as president from the college's Board of Trustees from 1931 through 1971, was one of the leading business executives of his time as well as one of the strongest advocates for free enterprise, active family participation in religion and limited government. The college's motto, *Faith and Freedom matter*, [follows through on Pew's public advocacy as one of the business leaders involved in the national Spiritual Mobilization movement that spawned after World War II](#)

Grove City College is not an exceptionally selective school aside from students who are interested in engineering. Nearly 80 percent of the students who applied to join the class that enters in 2016 were offered admission. Over 60 percent of the incoming class attended public schools. Less than a quarter of the class attended private or parochial schools while 13 percent were homeschooled.

Admissions are test optional for the liberal arts, test mandatory for business and engineering. The average SAT scores for the incoming class, among those who submitted scores, were just over 1200 (out of 1600). Engineering students would be expected to score over 650 on the Math section of the test and have taken the more rigorous math and science courses offered by their high school. Those who seek financial aid from the college must submit the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA).



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Grove City College does an excellent job at retaining and graduating a freshman class. The freshman retention rate has been consistently around 90 percent for several years. Just over three quarters of a class graduates within four years. These rates are impressive considering that Engineering and the Biological Sciences are among the most popular, as well as the more demanding, academic programs.

Grove City College is cross-shopped primary against Penn State as well as other Christian colleges. The high acceptance rate is more likely due to self-selection by interested students; the majority of applicants know of the school and are more than likely qualified to handle the academics as well as the campus and social settings.

Messiah College (PA), Cedarville University (OH) and Taylor University (IN) might be the most similar schools in terms of academic overlap although Taylor has fewer students (about 2,000) and Cedarville has many more (around 3,600) while Messiah has slightly more (around 2,800). Within Pennsylvania the most comparable non-Christian schools in terms of academic overlap might be Elizabethtown College, which has around 1,800 students, and Bucknell University, which has around 3,600.

Costs

Grove City College estimates its Total Cost of Attendance for 2016-17 to be just over \$27,500 including direct charges (tuition and fees, room and board), books (\$1,000), transportation (\$500) and other expenses (\$350). Upper-class students who would reside in on-campus apartments would pay approximately \$3,000 more. This is lower than the costs for a *Pennsylvania resident* to attend any one of the three public research universities (Penn State, Pitt or Temple) in their home state. This estimate is also less than Bucknell, one of the more similar non-Christian private schools in Pennsylvania would charge *for a single semester*. Grove City College's charges are also approximately \$8,000 lower for an incoming first-year student than they would be for Cedarville University (which accepts Federal financial aid) and around \$16,000 less than the charges assessed by Messiah College (which also accepts Federal financial aid), probably the most similar Christian schools.

This college favors a direction of maintaining a low sticker price with low (and often no) tuition discounting. The practice works well for a family that might prefer a small college but has a budget that would only allow them to cover costs (likely



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as a full pay family) for a much larger public university. However, the neediest families would pay less to attend better-endowed private liberal arts colleges that have more resources as well as the Federal Pell Grant, presuming that such colleges extend an offer of admission. [While Grove City College does not participate in the Federal financial aid programs, the college makes no online mention of non-participation in the scholarship programs offered through the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Authority.](#) This is significant: just over half of the student body are Pennsylvania residents who may qualify for these awards.

Last year Grove City College reported an endowment in excess of \$111 million to *US News* To offer a comparison, Muhlenberg College, which is also a private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, has about the same number of students. reported an endowment of approximately \$257 million in fiscal year 2015 according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers. [However, Muhlenberg works off an estimate total cost of attendance that will be more than double that of Grove City College.](#) In addition, better-endowed colleges will rarely discount down to Grove City's sticker price to help fill the financial need for most of their students. Messiah College, one of the more similar Christian colleges, has about 300 more undergraduates as well as graduate students, has an endowment of \$135 million, also according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers. However, this school works off a discounting model more similar to Muhlenberg; its estimated costs are \$16,000 higher than those for Grove City College.

Its very difficult to beat the value of the education for the sticker price, but Grove City College offers a very limited number of merit-based scholarships. There are eight Trustee Fellows selected from the incoming freshmen class; each receives an award equal to all direct charges (tuition and fees, room and board) provided they maintain a 3.4 GPA or higher. Another 24 Trustee Scholars receive merit awards of \$8,000 per year; renewal is also tied to maintaining a GPA of 3.4 or higher. There are also smaller awards: the Leadership Scholarship and the Dean's Scholarship as well as Achievement Awards for upper-class students.

[Student loans are handled through an agreement with a private lender, PNC Bank.](#) Borrowing limits are set at \$12,000 for the year for freshmen and sophomores, \$17,000 for juniors and seniors. The college states that "borrowers are required to attend 2 College-sponsored seminars on debt management. The first is held after receiving the first loan and prior to receiving any future loans.



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The second seminar is required for all second year students who have borrowed in order to borrow in the future.”

Most recently, the average student borrower borrowed just over \$36,000. This is approximately \$9,000 over the borrowing limit for the Federal Stafford Student Loan program, which the college does not participate. However, Grove City College is also a non-participant in the Federal Parent PLUS Loan program while Pennsylvania is not one of the most generous states for state scholarships. Were research done to consider *cumulative family debts* between Grove City College graduates versus similar private colleges that participate in the Federal student loan programs, it is possible that the results would show that a Grove City College graduate owed less. More than 40 percent of a class currently graduates with no student loan debt at all.

For comparison, in 2015, according to the Project on Student, Messiah College students who borrowed owed only slightly less (just over \$34,000) in debt, with 30 percent borrowing from a source other than the Federal Government while Penn State-University Park graduates who borrowed owed, on average, more than \$36,000. Graduates of Pennsylvania schools who have had to borrow will typically graduate with levels of debt in excess of \$27,000, the maximum that can be borrowed through the Federal Stafford Student Loan program.

Curriculum

Grove City College has a [majors list](#) similar to a much larger college or university with programs in business, education, engineering and the liberal arts. While it is ranked by *US News* as a National Liberal Arts College, only 17 majors (counting the Biblical Studies programs, but not counting pre-professional concentrations within several majors) are in pure liberal arts subjects. The college is split into two divisions: the Hopeman School of Science, which includes the science, engineering and mathematics programs, and the Calderwood College of Arts and Letters, which houses all of our liberal arts majors including business and education.

Students have the option of pursuing a traditional four-year bachelors degree or a five-year dual BA/BS in two majors of the students choice (outside of engineering), Electrical Engineering and a second major, Mechanical Engineering and a second major or Music and a second major. The college’s pricing makes such options more affordable than they might be at other private



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liberal arts colleges. The science, engineering and music performance facilities are quite impressive for a small school as is the library for all majors.

The college's [general education requirements](#) are similar to those of other liberal arts schools with two exceptions. There is a 15-credit Civilizations core as well as a two-credit course in Science, Faith and Society. The Civilizations core, with two additions, is a series of "great works and great thinkers" courses. One course in the Civilizations core, Civilization and the Biblical Revelation is based on Christianity; students may substitute the introductory survey courses in Religion in its place. There are three course options to fulfill the Science, Faith and Society requirement; one is taught from a Christian viewpoint. Engineering and science students are not required to take a foreign language; one year is required of all other majors. The business and economics programs will place more emphasis on free-market and/or Libertarian thinkers than those at other liberal arts colleges. The college is a repository for the research of Ludwig Von Mises, one of the most prominent Libertarian economists of the 20th century.

Students will see larger classes at Grove City College than they might at liberal arts schools of similar size. The college reported to *US News* that less than half of all classes (43 percent) had fewer than 20 students, while five percent had more than 50. Given the popularity of engineering and biological science programs, it is likely that the larger enrollments come in the introductory courses in subjects such as Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Mathematics (Calculus), Physics and Psychology. Given the degree options to double major, it would be a good idea to place out of as many introductory math or science courses as possible.

Grove City College employs faculty on year-to-year contracts; the college does not have a tenure-track career path for its professors. There are advantages as well as disadvantages to this approach. The major advantage for students is that the college would pay more attention to thorough and thoughtful teacher evaluations. The college also has more authority to set expectations for teaching as well as time that a professor could devote to research and interactions with students outside of the classroom. Grove City College offers no graduate degrees. The faculty are expected to not only teach but also involve undergraduates in their research. The disadvantage to this approach is that the college runs the risk of losing faculty to schools that might offer more security through a tenure-track position.



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Grove City College students gave their faculty a rating of 3.72 (out of 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](https://www.ratemyprofessors.com); they held them in the same regard as students at Taylor University (IN), a similar Christian school. By comparison, students at Cedarville University (3.81), also a similar Christian school, held the faculty in higher regard as did students at Messiah College (3.80). Grove City College students held their faculty in higher regard than students at Elizabethtown College (3.62) but in lesser regard than students at Bucknell (3.84), the most academically-similar non-Christian schools in Pennsylvania. Penn State-University Park students (3.71) held their faculty in nearly equal regard.

Community

Grove City College was founded in 1876; its campus is an extremely attractive mix of far more modern academic and residential buildings combined with extensively renovated older buildings, including Crawford Hall, the main administration building and Harbison Chapel. Visually, Grove City College is dominated by neo-Gothic architectural styles much like campuses such as Duke or Princeton. But unlike religious schools that have a Catholic or Jesuit affiliation, the campus is not dominated by religious statues or symbols outside of the chapel.

Campus buildings and grounds are exceptionally well maintained. It is fair to state that there is more respect for property at Grove City College than you would find at many other public or private liberal arts colleges. The athletic and recreational facilities are also among the best that students would find at a small school. The college maintains a “dry” campus. Students may drink off campus after they turn 21, but they may not drink or possess alcoholic beverages on campus. But the college has password protected its Clery Report; campus safety data was not accessible to the public from the college’s Web site.

The college is based in Grove City, a small town with around 8,000 residents that is just over an hour from Pittsburgh and about two hours from Cleveland. The town could be considered a college town. Dining and entertainment options are quite affordable to students—they’re more family oriented—and accessible within walking distance of campus and the downtown appears clean and safe. But those who come from larger cities, or suburbs close to cities, might find the location to be more isolated than they would like. However, it is also in close proximity to the Grove City Outlets, one of the largest outlet shopping centers in the US as well as Slippery Rock University, a state university with approximately 7,600 undergraduates.



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Grove City College competes at the NCAA Division III (non scholarship) level in 21 varsity sports. The college will add Men's Lacrosse as a varsity sport in 2018. The college is the conference powerhouse in men's and women's tennis, men's and women's swimming and men's cross country. Three alumni have competed in the National Football League. One, RJ Bowers, set the NCAA record for rushing yardage (at all levels Division I through Division III) that held from 2000 through 2007. A baseball alumnus, Gary Peters, was the American League Rookie of the Year in 1963. He made two All Star teams and won 124 major leagues as a starting pitcher for the Chicago White Sox and the Boston Red Sox.

Comforts

Grove City College has some of the most attractive and best-maintained residence halls that you will ever see on a college campus. Residence halls are single-sex facilities where visitation hours are enforced with three buildings dedicated to housing first-year students. While there are events and academic programs in the halls, the college has no living-learning communities or special interest houses that are found at other liberal arts colleges. Apartments are available to upper-class students. Anyone who does not come from within commuting distance of the college lives on campus.

The college has local fraternities and sororities established and managed by students who live in college-owned housing; they are not affiliated chapters of national organizations. Their charters come up for evaluation by the college administration every two years based on their contributions to the campus community as well as the academic performance of their membership. About a third of the student body are members of these Greek organizations. These organizations host campus academic and social events, though few would resemble parties found at similarly sized non-Christian liberal arts colleges.

Connections

Grove City College is more invested in career services than most similar-sized liberal arts colleges, in part because of the academic mix of the school, and in part because of the services the students receive. The job search is treated as a calling very early in a student's education; the college leverages its alumni base and employer relationships quite well to offer shadowing and internship opportunities.



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Students are introduced to career services at the start of the freshman year, beginning with a 90 minute introduction on the third day on campus as well as self assessments to help set direction. The college's career development center is larger and better-staffed than some schools with twice the enrollment while the faculty also maintain employer contacts for internships. The college also dedicates a separate position to education career services.

Last year, the career development center hosted 18 panels on campus to introduce students to contacts as well as professions and welcomed over 160 firms from 17 states to its job fairs. This is impressive considering that there are only 600 students in a senior class. About a quarter of a class will continue their education immediately after college; nearly half will have at least started to pursue an advanced degree within five years. Two strong measures of the career center's effectiveness: a base of 1,500 unique users (students who visit and use services one or more times), representing 60 percent of the student body as well as a 95 percent survey response rate. The college also participates in the March WestPACS job fair which connects students from more than 40 Pittsburgh area schools with over 200 employers.

Among the over 14,000 Grove City College alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), more than 4,000 live in or around the Pittsburgh area; more than 5,600 have a Pennsylvania address while more than 1,200 are in Ohio. There are also at least 500 alumni based in Washington DC, Philadelphia, Cleveland and New York City. [The college reports more than 27,000 living alumni; over 6700 are married to another alumnus.](#)

Conclusions

Grove City College appears to be a very well-managed school with excellent academics and student services that also has an exceptionally attractive and well-maintained campus. It is also an excellent value for the money, for a family that might otherwise be considering a much larger public university, especially to study business, education, engineering or the sciences. The return on investment in the degree can be about the same, or possibly better, given the level of attention that a diligent student could receive. Career services are excellent for a college of this size.

However, the college's refusal to accept Federal financial aid will make it a less attractive option for the neediest college-bound student whose family cannot contribute much, if anything, towards the expenses of earning a degree. The



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amount of student loan debt for any student will be higher, too. In addition, the location could be too isolated for students who prefer to visit and take advantage of a larger city setting.

A decision to consider Grove City College depends not only on community, costs and academics; it is also tied to a student's interests in considering, and possibly reinforcing their religious identity, namely Christianity. While students are not required to sign a Declaration of Faith to enroll, they are expected to become a part of a community that will openly discuss and practice their Christian faith whose members are more likely to hold conservative and/or Libertarian views on American politics and economics. Students who do not have this identity could expect to be part of a very small minority on campus. They will be welcome, but they must be willing to listen and be respectful to the majority view.

Report Card: Grove City College

- 4-Year/6-Year Graduation Rates: A
- Freshman Retention: A
- Costs: B+/ A for a "full pay" student who would attend a state school
- Curriculum: A
- Comforts: A
- Community: B+
- Connections: A