Cabrini University (PA)

Founded in 1957 as a women’s college, Cabrini University is a co-ed school with around 1,400 full-time undergraduates as well as 1,000 graduate students. The university is located in Radnor, a well-to-do suburb of Philadelphia, easily accessible to the city by inexpensive commuter rail service. Cabrini is a regional school. While 85 percent of the student body lives on campus, only 30 percent come from outside Pennsylvania, including the Philadelphia area. Central and Southern New Jersey send the second-largest number of students.

Direct charges (tuition and fees, room and board) were just under $44,000 for the current academic year, about the same that a non-resident student would pay to attend Penn State, Rutgers or Temple. A student who would be in the middle of the admit pool at any of these schools would be near the top of the admit pool at Cabrini. The university reports that the average financial aid package for students who entered in 2015 was $16,500 before state or federal grants or student loans were awarded.

While approximately $2,500 to $3,000 of a financial aid package could be a Work Study job, a cost reduction of $13,500 to $14,000 covers much of the difference between Cabrini and the resident charges of a much larger state school. However, the Project on Student Debt reported that 100 percent of Cabrini graduates in 2014 had to take out student loans, with an average student loan debt of nearly $36,000. This suggests that while Cabrini may be fairly generous in aiding its better students as well as those who might also qualify for the Pell Grant—around 40 percent qualified—or state scholarships, it may not be capable of meeting close to the full need for most students.

Cabrini loses about a quarter of a freshman class. However the four-year graduation rate has improved from 41 percent for students who entered in 2010 to 50 percent for those who entered the following year. Cabrini’s four-year graduation rate surpasses all of the schools in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education with the exception of Slippery Rock University (52 percent) which is over an hour from Pittsburgh. The change from college to university status, which happened in 2015, should help to continue to attract better students. The numbers also show that Cabrini must rely on transfer students to increase its total enrollment, and those students are more likely to be commuters.

Cabrini’s location is attractive compared to Philadelphia schools that are in rough urban neighborhoods (Lasalle and Temple) as well as other Pennsylvania State System schools that are located in more isolated places, including Cheney University (a Historically Black College) and West Chester University which are closest to Philadelphia. Applicants also consider Cabrini against other small colleges that have similar assets (some academic programs, location, access to mass transit), some (Neumann University and Rosemont College) charge lower tuition and fees.
Cabrini is not an exceptionally difficult school to gain admission, over 70 percent of applicants have been offered admission in recent years. Admissions are rolling; a decision will be rendered within four weeks after all required materials are received. The university also hosts immediate decision events—these are required a completed application package—as part of open house programs. Admissions are test-optional as well. Test scores are not required for consideration for merit-based aid. Cabrini requires only the FAFSA to consider students for financial aid. The university hosts FAFSA completion events not only to help applicants but also other high school and college students in the community.

What is the academic approach at Cabrini?

While Cabrini was founded by a religious sisterhood, it is considered an independent school. It has a unique social justice core that includes four courses, one taken each year, that is required of all students, regardless of their major. The other general education requirements are similar to other liberal arts colleges withe addition of a three-credit religion class. General education requirements can be filled within the learning community options as well as the choice of major and minor(s). Cabrini offers credit-bearing internship options for 2 to 6 credits, paid or unpaid.

Cabrini is subdivided into schools for Business, Arts and Media, Education, Humanities/Social Science and Natural Science/Allied Health. It is one of the first institutions of higher education in the US to require service learning within its degree programs. The university has very well developed programs in Communications, Education and Exercise Science, while more resources appear to be invested towards the Business programs.

You won’t see large classes here. Nearly 80 percent had fewer than 20 students; virtually none had more than 50. Students gave their faculty a rating of 3.73 (out of 5) on RateMyProfessors.com, the same rating that Arcadia University and La Salle University students gave their faculty, about the same as West Chester University (3.75) students rated theirs and slightly higher than Temple students rated theirs (3.70).

Cabrini’s Exercise Science program has two tracks, Health and Wellness and Sports Studies, and is also offered as a minor, a unique option at any college, especially one this small. Aside from the college’s proximity to Philadelphia, as well as well-to-do suburbs, another advantage of pursing the major at Cabrini is that the school has had a very successful athletic program, having won 32 President’s Cups and more than 100 individual and team titles in NCAA Division III competition in the Colonial States Athletic Conference. With Cabrini being a small school, competing in 18 sports, at least a quarter of the student body would be varsity athletes. The Nerney Field House, home for the basketball and volleyball teams, actually has more seats than there are students.
Cabrini is the second-largest institution for the preparation of teachers and the granting of education degrees in Pennsylvania. This is impressive considering that the state has 14 larger public universities that were founded as teacher’s colleges—and some were around for over a century before Cabrini opened its doors. Cabrini also grants advanced degrees in education at the masters and doctoral level. A bachelors degree student will have five field placements before beginning their student teaching in the senior year.

Cabrini offers five communications programs, including a Communications major with concentrations in Digital Convergence, Journalism and Writing, Marketing Communication, Visual and Sound Communication as well as a separate major in Digital Communications and Social Media. While the Digital Communications and Social Media program requires 57 credits, the others are also offered as minors that may be combined with a liberal arts or business program. At the same time students in all five programs may choose a liberal arts minor, a Graphic Design minor or one of eight business minors. There is more flexibility to build a communications program around career interests at Cabrini than there would be at a university with separate schools of business, communications and liberal arts, including professional development coursework that runs in addition to and in collaboration with the internship options.

The Business program has tremendous flexibility for majors and minors, including concentrations in Nonprofit Management, Public Administration and Advertising that combine business and liberal arts coursework. It is also possible for Accounting majors to graduate with a bachelors and a masters degree in five years, taking three graduate courses during the senior year and seven to complete the masters. There are other accelerated programs, towards the MBA (at La Salle University), a masters in Hospitality Management and Tourism (with Widener University) and a law degree (with Widener University). The downside: the programs are not accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). However, the university did not establish a separate business school until this past school year. It is quite possible for accreditation to happen in the future, especially for the Accounting program. Cabrini’s MBA partner, La Salle, has an accredited graduate business (but not separate for Accounting) school.

The university reports that 92 percent of graduates are either working or continuing their education full time within ten months after graduation. The admissions office reports that 70 percent of Cabrini students graduate having worked in at least one internship, though several majors offer opportunities for more than one. Of the nearly 9,000 Cabrini alumni registered in LinkedIn.com—out of around 20,000 total—more than 2,300 work in education. More than 6,700 live and work in and around the Philadelphia area.
What is the community like?

Cabrini’s 112 acre campus is heavily wooded, mostly modern and very easy to walk around. Parking is somewhat tight, considering that graduate students are commuters and first-year students are not allowed to have cars. The university provides shuttle service to the commuter rail train to Philadelphia, which has a very low ($4) fare, as well as the King Of Prussia Mall, one of the larger shopping centers in the US. Radnor has its own shopping center, too. But the downtown in nearby Wayne is the place to go for dining options.

About two-thirds of the student body lives on campus, including 85 percent of the freshmen. The university does not require students to live on campus, even in the freshman year. The approach to housing is to move students into more independent living situations for each year they are on campus. First-year students live in co-ed residence halls including those who choose the Living-Learning communities. Cabrini retains one vestige of its past in residence life: first-year students are not allowed to stay overnight in residence halls with a member of the opposite sex. Cabrini has 12 learning communities, eight of which are living-learning communities. These include the university’s Honors Program. The living-learning communities have between 14 and 18 students. The average course offered within a LLC has a student-faculty ratio of six to one, versus 11 to 1 for the university as a whole.

Sophomores may opt to live in one of seven houses while apartments are more available to juniors and seniors. Cabrini has one fraternity and one sorority; neither has their own house. It is more likely that a student who lives on campus at the start will continue to live on campus until graduation rather than move off. The campus borders an office park as well as another college, Eastern University. Living in Radnor or Wayne, both well-to-do communities would require access to a car, an added cost. While public buses serve Lancaster Avenue, the main road through Radnor and Wayne, they do not go on or close to the campus.

Liquor law violations were by far the most reported crime on campus from 2013 to 2015, according to the university’s Clery Report. Reported alcohol-related disciplinary referrals plummeted from 209 in 2013 to only 56 in 2015. Drug-related incidents were few, only four arrests total using the three-year period. There has been a slight rise in burglaries, 12 in 2014 and 11 in 2015 and there were two reported incidents of rape each year in the on-campus housing.

Conclusions: Cabrini is an attractive alternative for students who have been considering one of the majors that is also offered by a state university but would like to receive more attention from a faculty as well as the academic advising and career advising team. It helps, however, if they would like to live and work around the Philadelphia area.
Report Card for Cabrini University

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