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Purchase College of the State University of New York (SUNY-Purchase)

SUNY-Purchase has been off-promoted as the performing arts college of the State University of New York. Founded in 1967 by the late Governor Nelson Rockefeller, the college welcomed its first students, a class of junior transfers in 1971, and admitted its first freshman class a year later. Today, SUNY-Purchase has approximately 4,200 students. While Purchase was constructed with the arts in mind, around 60 percent of the students are enrolled in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences. That school also offers six majors that cross into the arts, including the BFA program in Film. The School of the Arts offers 20 majors, including the BA in Arts Management. But, unlike many colleges of this size and smaller that place a strong emphasis on the arts, Purchase requires all applicants to submit ACT or SAT scores.

Purchase is relatively selective, accepting less than half (most recently 41 percent) of the students who applied to enter the freshman class in 2015. While the numerical profile (3.1 average GPA, 1070/1600 average SAT, 24 average ACT) suggests that the college accepted fairly average high school students, However, admissions to the conservatory programs (Dance, Music and Theatre Arts) and the visual arts programs (especially Film) are talent based and exceptionally competitive. Purchase students come from 39 states and 33 countries, according to the admissions literature. About a fifth of the student body are non-residents, making Purchase the most geographically diverse college in the entire SUNY system.

Purchase is a cost-effective choice for students who want either the conservatory or liberal arts education but also want to go to college within a reasonable commuting distance of New York City. Tuition and fees for residents are less than \$8,300. Non-residents pay just over \$18,000, not much more than residents of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey or Pennsylvania would pay to attend their home state universities. This college also makes it easy for students to find work on campus, whether they qualify for Work Study or not, an added plus for a school that is already reasonably priced. Students who graduated in 2015 who had to take out loans borrowed, on average, just over \$29,000, a little high for a state university that does a fine job of managing costs.

One reason for the debt might be time to graduation. It is difficult to transfer out of a conservatory-based education into a liberal arts education, and vice versa, because each area has its own introductory course and graduation requirements. SUNY also imposes a system-wide set of liberal arts core requirements. [While these would be easy for a liberal arts student to meet—they are essentially the same as other liberal arts colleges and SUNY schools](#)—visual arts and conservatory students are required to take math and science courses, which would not be required in other similar programs. The good news is that resident students may take these courses at another SUNY campus close to home during the summer months. In addition, every student must complete a senior project, regardless of their major, worth eight credits towards the degree, an unusual, but potentially rewarding requirement for a state college.

Purchase retained 82 percent of the students who entered in 2015, but slightly less than half (49 percent) of those who entered in 2009 finished in four years. The six-year graduation rate was 59 percent, which suggests that a fairly high percentage transferred out or did not finish. By



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comparison, SUNY-New Paltz, the closest system campus to Purchase, graduated 56 percent of its freshmen on time.

It's hard to find a public college that is similar to Purchase although there are smaller private liberal arts colleges, Gettysburg College (PA) and Lawrence University (WI) as two examples), that have a liberal arts college and a conservatory on campus. Ithaca College, which does not have a separate conservatory for the arts, is probably the most similar school for academics with overlap in art, communications, film, music and theater as well as most of the liberal arts majors. The Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts are public, also offering conservatory-based programs. However, neither school grants liberal arts degrees as Purchase does.

Purchase students gave their faculty a rating of 3.78 (out of a possible 5) on RateMyProfessors.com. They gave their faculty higher marks than students at Gettysburg (3.66) and Ithaca (3.71) although students at Lawrence (3.94), MassArt (3.88) and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts (3.85) rated their faculty higher. Most classes at Purchase will be small, as they would be at a liberal arts college, excluding introductory courses with as many as 85 students that would be required for several majors. Only three percent of the classes taught in 2015-16 had more than 50 students.

The location of this school is a major advantage for those who want to find work in New York City in internships or full-time employment. It is also fairly easy to get into New York, about 35 minutes from campus, plus a free ride on a college-run shuttle bus to the Metro North White Plains station. However, the round trip is \$23.50 (\$17.50 off peak), expensive if you are not used to commuting to a city. Purchase is also a very good school to gain training on campus to work in arts administration or entertainment-related communications. It is home to a major regional performing arts center as well as the Neuberger Museum of Art, the very first building that was constructed on campus, and the 10th largest university art museum in the US. Students may also explore interests in study abroad through over 600 programs offered at Purchase and the rest of the SUNY system.

While Purchase has a very short history of producing graduates vs. similar schools as well as other SUNY campuses, it has supplied considerable talent to the arts community as well as the media. Among the nearly 16,000 alumni registered in LinkedIn.com, nearly a quarter work in the visual and performing arts and more than ten percent work in the media and communications. The base also includes nearly 1,800 entrepreneurs, impressive considering that the college has never offered a business degree. Over 11,000 alumni live and work in or around New York City. While the base drops off considerably after that, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boston are the next most popular labor markets for Purchase graduates. Actors Edie Falco and Parker Posey are among the school's most notable alumni.

What are some other things that make Purchase different from other colleges?

Purchase students are not all activists or artists, but their community appears to be politically liberal, socially accepting and appreciative of creativity. It helps to enjoy the performing arts to have a successful social experience at Purchase, even if you are not a Dance, Music or Theatre



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major, mainly because these programs represent a larger share of the student body than they would at most other colleges. The admissions office also reported that the college had the highest percentage of students who were registered voters among any college in the United States.

The students fund the college's student center (called "the Stood") and have more control over arts and entertainment programming than they might at other colleges. The students are apt to create their own events; most recently, they started a Zombie Prom. Unlike most college student centers, the Stood is not in the academic or residential center of the campus. It is a former airplane hanger on the outskirts instead.

The housing goes by names such as Big Haus, Crossroads, Farside and Fort Awesome while most colleges name their residences after former administrators or prominent donors. Purchase has an optional First Year Experience as well as choices for learning communities where students live together and take two classes together. The college launched theme housing for transfer students this year as well as options that include Gender-Neutral, Wellness and Cultural Immersion. Purchase also allows students to contract to live on campus during the summer or on breaks. About a third of the students live off campus, including commuters. The on-campus housing is a better value not only for convenience, but also because the housing market in the surrounding area is quite expensive. In addition, since Purchase is smaller than other SUNY schools, the market to sublet a rental apartment is also smaller.

Those who are looking for a leafy green campus might want to look elsewhere. Purchase was constructed through the late 1960s and early 1970s, though new buildings, including residences, the main administration building and student stores, were added after 2000. There is a tremendous amount of undeveloped property between the campus and its access roads. The road network is extremely simple, the parking fairly generous. Drug and alcohol-related referrals also trended down between 2012 and 2014, according to the college's [2015 Clery Report](#) while the college also reported 21 incidents of Dating Violence in 2014, the first year such a report was given. The college also reported an equal number of burglaries for that year.

Conclusion: Purchase is the best buy for any student who enjoys and/or wants to work in the visual or performing arts and also wants to go school near New York City.

Report Card for SUNY-Purchase

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