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Albright College (PA)

Founded in 1856 in Reading, Pennsylvania, Albright College has 1,850 undergraduates enrolled in 50 degree programs. The college advertises that there are more than 150 possible combinations for majors, and that two-thirds of graduates will have a degree with a double or triple major.

Just over sixty percent of Albright students come from Pennsylvania, although Maryland and New Jersey are also well represented. This is one of the most diverse small private colleges in the US. Just over a fifth of the undergraduate student body is African American; more than ten percent are Hispanic. The college hopes to slowly grow the undergraduate student body to 2,000 from the current 1,850.

Admissions to Albright are test-optional although students are encouraged to submit scores when they help with admissions. The college is relatively selective—just under half of the students who applied to be in the current freshman class were accepted—and did not need to go to a wait list. The middle 50 percent of students who entered in 2016 scored between 960 and 1150 on the SAT; the average high school GPA was 3.3. Applicants are admitted to the college, not to a major.

Albright is one of many small private colleges in Central Pennsylvania although it is closer to Philadelphia than most of them. While it is not strongly similar to any one school in the region, it overlaps with academic programs offered by Alvernia University, Elizabethtown College, Lebanon Valley College, Susquehanna University and York College of Pennsylvania. The school is also likely to be considered against Penn State's main campus as well as its residential Commonwealth campuses along with several universities (Kutztown, Millersville, Shippensburg and West Chester) in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

Albright retained 78 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2014-15, the last year data is available. This was a significant improvement over the classes that entered in 2010 (74 percent) and 2011 (71 percent). The college graduated half of the class that entered in 2010 within four years, but slightly less than half (48 percent) of the class that entered in 2009. Three of the nearby Central Pennsylvania schools: Elizabethtown, Lebanon Valley and Susquehanna, have done better at retaining and graduating their freshman classes. All have retained at least 80 percent of their recent classes, and graduated at least two-thirds of their first year students who entered in 2009 and 2010 within four years.



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Costs

Albright charged approximately \$53,000 for tuition and fees, room and board in 2016-17, an increase of around four percent from the prior year. [The charges for the 2017-18 academic year will increase by slightly less, to be just over \\$55,000.](#) The college advertises that it will meet 100 percent of demonstrated financial need, requiring the FAFSA, but not the College Board's CSS Profile. It will admit students need-blind when the academic record clearly indicates an admissible candidate.

Incoming students are considered for [renewable merit-based scholarships](#) ranging from \$23,000 to \$32,000/year. There are also additional awards for eleven students who want to pursue STEM research with an emphasis on environmental issues as well as talent-based awards in the fine arts, journalism, music and theatre. The college does not require a minimum GPA to renew a scholarship, [only that recipients remain in good academic standing.](#) This is a rare practice among small private colleges.

Most Albright students could not avoid student loan debt. Among students who graduated in 2015 who took out loans, the average Albright borrower owned approximately \$30,800, according to the Project on Student Debt. However, this amount is slightly less than the maximum that a student could have borrowed (\$31,000) to complete their bachelors degree in five years under the Federal student loan program. This does show that the college is willing to support the student who may need more time to complete the degree.

According to the Project on Student Debt, the percentage of Albright students who needed to take out private loans (17 percent) was lower than it was for state schools such as Kutztown (27 percent), Millersville (22 percent) and Shippensburg (21 percent) and West Chester (20 percent). All of these schools also have four-year graduation rates that are significantly lower than Albright's.

Curriculum

Albright's [General Education Curriculum](#), required of all new students, is similar to most liberal arts colleges, with two major differences:

- First and second-year students are required to participate in at least 16 Experience Events, including lectures, performances or exhibitions on campus.
- First and second-year students who are undeclared may opt to participate in the college's [Alpha Program](#). About a quarter of new students enter Albright undecided on a major. The Alpha Program combines specialized academic advising with career-related workshops and other events to introduce undecided students to the college's resources. Alpha students may also opt to take a credit-bearing Career Decision Making course.



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The college makes it relatively easy for students to apply courses used to fulfill general education requirements towards a second major or a minor. Courses are counted as single “units” rather than credit hours. Thirty-two units are required to complete a degree. Although Albright is a National Liberal Arts College—more than half of all degrees are granted in the liberal arts—[nearly half of the school’s majors](#) are in pre-professional subjects. The only graduate program is a Masters in Education, also available in a 4+1 option for Albright undergraduates.

Albright has some unique programs that you are not likely to find at most other small colleges. This was the first college in the US to offer an undergraduate degree in [psychobiology](#), a popular option for students interested in health care or medicine. Other unique programs include Child and Family Studies, Classical Languages (Greek and Latin), Digital Design and Media, Fashion (Design, Merchandising, Costume Design), Game and Simulation Development, Music Business and Public Administration and Policy Analysis. The college’s [Honors Program](#) offers an even more personalized experience. The most popular majors are in Business, the sciences, Psychology, Sociology and Criminal Justice.

Students are not likely to have many large classes at Albright. Less than one percent of all classes during the 2015-16 school year had over 50 students; over 60 percent had fewer than 20. Albright students gave their faculty a rating of 3.6 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#), a slightly higher rating than their peers at Lebanon Valley College (3.69), Susquehanna University (3.69), Millersville (3.69) and Shippensburg (3.70), about the same rating as their peers at Alvernia University (3.74) and Kutztown University (3.74).

Community

The Albright campus was built into a hill above the residential and business center of Reading, a city of nearly 100,000 residents, fifth-largest in Pennsylvania. Students are likely to cross only one well-trafficked street (13th Street) to walk to Roessner Hall, the newest academic building, and the athletic facilities. Aside from Roessner, a sleek glass building housing Business, Communications and Political Science programs, the campus is largely a mix of red brick designs from the late 19th century and the 1960s. The college has moved more in the direction of renovating interiors in the older buildings, rather than aggressively pushing new construction. Albright has also has modern theatre and art spaces although the exteriors are showing their age. [Reported incidents of crime](#) are few considering that there are nearly 1,600 students living on campus.

There is virtually no place to go immediately off campus. The surrounding area is largely residential, a shopping plaza and manufacturing businesses. There is a lot to do in Reading including minor league baseball, shopping, an arts/boutique district (Penn



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Avenue) with some stores run by Albright alumni, and the Santander Arena for concerts and minor league hockey, among other events.

It helps to have access to a car or have a friend who owns one. A parking permit costs only \$25. Philadelphia is only an hour away by car and accessible to Albright students by Amtrak trains as well as buses. Hershey and Harrisburg are also within reasonable driving distance of campus. The college has shuttles to help students get around off campus (Mall Monday, Target Tuesday, Wal-Mart Wednesday, among the optional journeys). But if you can take the car to Albright, bring it with you.

Albright competes in 23 NCAA Division III (non-scholarship) varsity sports, high for a small school. Half of the undergraduates will compete in either varsity or club sports on the 118-acre campus. The college was a dominant power in its conference in women's basketball and football this past season. In addition to sports, Greek life is relatively popular, involving over a third of the undergraduate student body. But none of the social fraternities or sororities have their own houses.

Comforts

Albright houses 1,550 of its 1,850 undergraduates. The college will open a new upper-class, suite-style residence hall with 250 beds (Rockland) this fall to make more room for incoming and continuing students to live on campus. With the opening of the new hall, Albright now requires all resident students to live on campus. Residents currently represent about two-thirds of the undergraduate student body. This, combined with extensive arts and athletics programs, will help to build a stronger campus community.

With the exception of 150 Honors students, who share an upper-class ([Mohn Hall](#)) residence hall, the college assigns all-first year students to a quad in [Krause, Crowell, Smith, and Walton Halls](#). Walton has one all-female floor; the remainder of the freshman-only halls are co-ed. This past year, just over 150 first-year students resided in triple rooms; the rest lived in doubles. Albright has an arts living-learning community, Artists Residing Together, for first-year students as well as the Honors community in Mohn Hall.

While Albright has only the two living-learning communities, the college takes the unique step of assigning two resident assistants—most schools assign only one—to each floor to provide more support to new students and team up for floor programming. The college employs 51 resident assistants as well as nine leaders who serve as a hall director.

Albright offers pod-style (8 double rooms, one triple sharing a common bathroom and laundry facility), suite style (3-6 rooms, full kitchen, two bathrooms), apartment-style living options for upper-class students and eight special interest houses, each a single-family home with 3 to 6 residents.



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Connections

Albright's [Experiential Learning and Career Development Center](#) works with first-year students early in the education. [The office is especially well engaged with students in the Alpha program who are undecided on a major.](#) It also engages students early in resume development through the first-year seminar classes as well as “house calls” into the residence halls, teaming up with faculty and staff.

Albright uses experiential learning practices through classes as well as off-campus internships. Students in Business, Political Science and Public Administration and Policy engage in consulting projects with local firms and local governments. Albright students may also participate in “Lion’s Lair,” a campus-wide business plan competition. The college also partners with Reading Health in a Medical Scribe program, among many other education-business partnerships. The most popular program, [the Albright Creative Research Experience \(ACRE\)](#) offers students the opportunity to do funded research during the college’s January term or the summer, receiving free housing as well as a stipend and funding for supplies and travel. There is no minimum GPA required for students to submit a proposal for ACRE, and students may apply more than once.

The college runs its own career fairs for majors in Accounting, Education, Government/ Non-Profit/Social Services as well as for all majors. It has also participated in the Lehigh Valley Collegiate Career Expo, a regional job fair that attracts 140 area employers, for the past 17 years. Albright has also been quite successful in aiding students towards admissions to medical school and the health professions, working through a faculty committee that conducts mock interviews and issues a supplemental recommendation letter.

Among the approximately 11,400 Albright alumni registered on LinkedIn, more than 5,700 are based around Reading or Philadelphia. There are also nearly 1,600 who live and/or work around New York City as well as more than 1,000 in other Central Pennsylvania communities including Lancaster, Harrisburg and York and more than 500 in the Baltimore-Washington Corridor.

Conclusions

Students who are seeking a small college setting combined with an ethnically diverse student body will like Albright. The college has made admirable commitments towards student life and success as well as financial aid. There are also some very interesting programs that you are not likely to find at a small liberal arts college.

Albright makes it easier to enter undecided than most small schools and offers considerable flexibility to choose more than one major or minor. Albright is also more supportive of its athletic programs than similar schools and offers more than enough



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opportunity for students to become engaged as well as employed on campus. There's more to do near campus than most college students would expect, provided that you have access to a car.

But Albright's retention and graduation rates, while improving, are below those of neighboring private colleges that offer some similar programs, although they are better than nearby larger public schools in the Pennsylvania State System of High Education. Albright might be an easier school to enter undecided on a major than most of its neighbors. However, those who are comparing common academic programs between Albright and similar neighboring colleges should compare them closely and ask questions about curriculum and connections. These vary between schools.

The Report Card for Albright College

Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: C/C

Freshman Retention: C+

Costs: B

Curriculum: A

Community: B

Comforts: B+

Connections: B+ (Central Pennsylvania and Philadelphia area)