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Bard Early College-Simon's Rock

Founded in 1966 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Bard Early College—Simon's Rock (Simon's Rock) was the first college to admit high school age students (usually around age 16) and guide them to Associates and Bachelors degrees. Over a half-century later, Simon's Rock is the only residential early college in the United States that is also a co-ed four-year liberal arts college. Simon's Rock has approximately 400 undergraduates. Of these around 300 are first and second-year students pursuing the Associates degree; the remainder are upper-class students completing the Bachelors.

Simon's Rock students have the option to continue towards the Bachelor's degree or to transfer into another college or university. Associates degree graduates have had success in transferring into some of the most selective colleges and universities in the US and abroad, including Ivy League schools. This is a strong validation of Simon's Rock's academic rigor, given the competition for the limited numbers of seats in the junior classes at these schools. Retention at the most selective schools is exceptionally high. It's quite common for these schools to retain anywhere from 90 to 98 percent of their freshman classes into the junior year.

Simon's Rock attracts highly motivated 10th and 11th grade high school students who believe that they are ready to tackle a college experience *and* a liberal arts college curriculum. The admissions team also considers applicants who academically qualified and promising, but also underserved by their high schools. Those who apply to Simon's Rock for the Early College more often than not self select the school, comparing it with public and private residential and non-residential schools that have advanced academic offerings as well the opportunity for early admission into a more traditional college close to home.

The admissions cycle for Simon's Rock is longer than it is at more traditional colleges. Applications are considered up to June 1st, a month past the traditional deposit date for the more conventional schools. Neither the ACT nor the SAT are required for admission though applicants do submit scores from these standardized tests. AP scores may be submitted, but only a 5 will be considered for entry into a more advanced early college class.

The acceptance rate for the class that entered in 2015 was 89 percent. Among those who submitted ACT or SAT scores, the range for the middle 50 percent of the class was between 1250 and 1400 (out of 1600); for the ACT Composite the range was between 28 and 30, though very few submitted scores. While the students admitted were amply qualified, Simon's Rock lost just over a quarter of the first-year students who entered in 2015.



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In 2016, Simon's Rock launched Bard Academy, which considers applications from eighth and ninth graders who believe that they are prepared to do college-level work. The first entering class for the Academy had 20 students. The next class will have 60. The Academy curriculum is modeled after a similar program at the non-residential Bard Early College High Schools located in seven US cities. However, while students who attend the non-residential high schools receive a high school diploma and apply to colleges during the senior year, Academy students spend their junior and senior years pursuing the Associates degree at Simon's Rock.

Costs

Simon's Rock is quite expensive. Tuition and fees were approximately \$51,800 for the most recent academic year. Room and board is just over \$14,000.

The college met just over two-thirds of need during 2015-16. The average need-based scholarship was just under \$32,000. The average merit-based scholarship was just over \$17,200.

The average indebtedness of student borrowers in 2015 was not separated between Associate's and Bachelor's degree graduates, but the average was just over \$24,000. This is quite reasonable for a private college, when considering only graduates who earned the Bachelor's degree. Only six percent of the graduating students had to borrow from a source other than the Federal Government.

Curriculum

The major academic selling point for the Early College program is very small, seminar-style classes, much like a liberal arts college or the honors college program at a larger school. The academic program is quite writing intensive in all majors, as if the students have moved from the 10th or 11th grade into a college classroom. It is also quite hands-on in the sciences. Laboratory, library and greenhouse facilities are more impressive than students would find in a more advanced high school setting.

Because Early College students in the "lower division" are as likely to transfer as they are to remain at Simon's Rock, the curriculum for the first two years follows the distribution requirements for a more traditional college—one course each in Arts, Mathematics and Natural Sciences as well as two World Languages courses, the first-semester Writing and Thinking Workshop, two mandatory seminars and an additional writing intensive course..

Like most small liberal arts schools, Bard Early College faculty handle academic advising. The college assigns no more than 10 advisees to a faculty member; no more than five new students are assigned to an advisor. Faculty teach three classes each semester, as they might be likely to do at a small liberal arts college. The Early College



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has parent-teacher meetings over a Parent's Weekend, a blend of high school and college practices. However, after a student turns 18, the college follows the college-oriented practice of consulting the student first.

Those who stay at Simon's Rock "moderate" into a major, in the "upper division" as they would at Bard College in New York State. Simon's Rock students who maintained a 3.0 or better in the Associate's program also have the option to transfer to Bard's main campus and mediate there. "Moderation" is a process by which students seek faculty approval to declare the major, including a plan of study for the remaining two years towards the Bachelor's degree. Whether a student transfers to Bard or remains at Simon's Rock, their degree program includes a senior thesis which is bound and placed the college library.

Simon's Rock has also initiated [a number of study abroad and joint degree programs](#), most recently a Master's in Environmental Policy with Vermont Law School. Graduates who complete these programs have their thesis written in the third year, then transfer to the partner school for the remaining years of their degree program. There are also 3-2 arrangements for engineering degrees with Dartmouth College and Columbia University. The Early College has reported than students, on average, need 4 1/2 years to complete a Bachelors degree, whether they transfer or remain at Simon's Rock.

Community

No college community is similar to Simon's Rock. The vast majority of the students are not likely to turn 21 during their time on campus. The workload is demanding enough to keep students busy, and there are more than enough clubs and organizations to serve a very small student body. The college competes in only three sports against high schools as well as community colleges. The Early College allow students who are 18 and older—they would primarily be juniors and seniors pursuing their bachelors degrees—to have cars on campus.

While Simon's Rock competes with boarding schools and selective high schools for admissions, it looks more like a college campus. One exception: the library is located closer to residence halls rather than the academic buildings. Simon's Rock is a former estate, much like Bard. The Fisher Science Center and the Daniels Arts Center actually look quite similar to the science and art buildings at Bard. Given that the college was founded in 1966 and added new buildings over 50 years, there is no dominant architectural theme to the beautifully wooded campus.

Great Barrington is located in the Berkshires of Massachusetts, a major center of tourism and recreation in New England. Downtown Great Barrington looks much like a very nice college town that hosts a small college such as Amherst (MA), Saratoga Springs (home to Skidmore College in New York State) and Williamstown (MA). The



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college provides shuttle service into the downtown and will bus students to Bard's campus in Annandale-On-Hudson, New York as well as the Five College Consortium campuses (Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, Smith and UMass-Amherst) in Massachusetts. The downtown is more family and tourist-oriented, but there is plenty for younger college students under 21 to do.

Comforts

Bard Academy and Early College students live in separate residence halls and have their own academic schedules and rules about study and socializing. However, Academy and Early College students dine together, and Early College students serve as resident assistants in the Academy halls.

Simon's Rock has three first-year residence halls. One is all gender, one all-male, the third all female. The Academy halls are co-ed with alternating all-male and all-female floors.

With the opening of Bard Academy and the temporary closure of some aging Upper Division residence halls, Upper Division students were permitted to live off campus in Great Barrington. After renovations to the closed halls are completed all students will live on campus.

Connections

Simon's Rock has a very small alumni base since it is only 50 years old and it has always had a small enrollment. The Early College combines career development, transfer admissions advising and graduate/professional school advising, personalized given the academic program as well as the small size of the student body.

While half of the Associates degree recipients transfer to other colleges and universities, those who remain at Simon's Rock are more likely to move on to graduate or professional schools after they complete their Bachelor's degrees. Between 75 and 80 percent of a graduating class moves on to further education versus employment, the opposite of classes that graduate from more traditional small liberal arts colleges.

Conclusions

Simon's Rock gives exceptionally bright and motivated high school and early college students the true look and feel of a liberal arts college education from ages 14 through 20. The curriculum, similar to Bard's undergraduate program, is quite demanding for traditional (age 18 to 22) liberal arts college students, let alone those who would ordinarily be sitting (though probably bored or less challenged) in high school classroom.



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It will be interesting to see how the student community will change over time as Bard Academy students move into the Upper and Lower Divisions—and the Academy becomes the largest sending school for the Early College. Their adjustments to the workload may be better, since they will be better prepared to tackle it. But is the college prepared to ride the waves of emotions with 14 and 15 year old students and manage that within a mix of older classmates? That question cannot be answered at this time.

Simon's Rock graduates can get an earlier start on their life's work, even if they go on to further education. But the Early College is more expensive than most traditional private liberal arts colleges will be, and it has fewer amenities than most. Issues of costs and personal questions of college readiness aside, Simon's Rock has evolved into a successful model for a liberal arts college education, well beyond "proof of concept." After 50 years that cannot be denied.