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Ithaca College (NY)

Founded in 1892 as a music conservatory in Ithaca, New York, Ithaca College has approximately 6,200 undergraduates enrolled in five schools: Business, Health Sciences and Human Performance, Humanities and Science, Music and the Roy H. Park School of Communications.

Ithaca is test-optional, though not an exceptionally selective school outside of majors such as Dance, Film, Music, Theatre, Occupational Therapy or Physical Therapy. Seventy percent of the students who applied to join the 2016 freshman class were accepted, according to the college's 2016-17 Common Data Set, Just over 1,200 were wait-listed, but only 23 eventually enrolled. The middle 50 percent of the class scored between 1090 and 1270 on the SAT and between 24 and 29 on the ACT.

Because of the college's academic offerings, it is considered more often against larger private schools such as Syracuse University as well as the home state universities where applicants reside. It's difficult to identify a similar school, public or private, because Ithaca does not offer engineering and is independent with no religious affiliation. Elon University (NC), with just over 5,500 undergraduates, comes close, but it also has a law school.

Ithaca retained 85 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2015, low for a private college that attracts very good students. For comparison, Syracuse retains over 90 percent of its freshman classes. The four-year graduation rate for students who entered in 2010 was 71 percent, very good for a school of this size that also has many specialized degree programs.

Costs

Ithaca is extremely expensive. The college will charge nearly \$43,000 in tuition and fees, approximately \$15,300 for room and board. Be sure to present proof of health insurance. Otherwise, the college will assess a charge of just over \$1,600 to provide it for your student.

The college, on average, met just over 90 percent of need for the freshmen who entered in 2016, eighty-five percent for the undergraduate student body as a whole. The average need-based scholarship was just under \$26,000. The average merit-based award was just under \$15,000; the largest awards are full rides. Just under a quarter of the student body had [merit scholarships](#), reasonable for a school of Ithaca's size.

But student loan debt was high for the class that graduated in 2016. The average indebtedness was just over \$41,000. Part of this could be attributed to graduates earning advanced degrees in the last year or two of their education. The college offers



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accelerated pathways to the MBA, the MS in Occupational Therapy and a doctoral program in Physical Therapy.

Curriculum

Ithaca offers 98 majors and 71 minors, more choices than many public and private universities that have much larger undergraduate student bodies. The College offers an Exploratory Program to help students who enter undecided on a major, although some programs such as Film, Music and Physical Therapy will only be open to freshmen.

Ithaca's general education requirements are similar to smaller liberal arts schools, with some twists. While all students must take courses in Creative Arts, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Diversity, Quantitative Literacy, Writing and a Capstone course as requirements towards a degree, they may select these courses within a choice of one of six themes: Identities; Inquiry, Imagination, and Innovation; Mind, Body, Spirit; The Quest for a Sustainable Future; A World of Systems and Power and Justice. Those who choose a degree program outside of the liberal arts must also take a set of Complementary Liberal Arts courses that support their major. Every student must also prepare a Portfolio of work in addition to a Capstone.

Ithaca's history has led to the development of some very strong academic programs, competitive with offerings from larger schools including all of the Communications and Human Performance programs as well as Music and Theatre. The college makes it easier to combine a business program with a major outside of business, and has designed some majors such as Emerging Media, Health Care Management, Integrated Marketing Communications, Sports Management and Theatre Arts Management that cut across different majors at different schools. Most of the majors are also available as minors, opening opportunities for liberal arts majors to add skill-based courses that are harder to get into at larger schools.

You will see a few large courses over the first two years at Ithaca, mainly because there are introductory courses required for several majors. In addition to introductions in subjects such as Biology, Chemistry, Psychology and Economics, the introductory Theatre History course is also likely to have large enrollments. But over 60 percent of all courses offered at Ithaca had fewer than 20 students. Nearly 90 percent had fewer than 30.

Ithaca students gave their faculty a rating of 3.71 (out of a possible 5.0) on RateMyProfessors.com, slightly higher than Syracuse University students (3.68) gave theirs. Considering that Ithaca is largely an undergraduate school, its ratings were around the same as several much larger schools including SUNY University at Buffalo (3.72), Penn State (3.71), Pitt (3.74), Rutgers-New Brunswick (3.74) and Temple (3.7).



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Community

Although Ithaca was founded in 1892, a campus visit will leave you wondering if the college was founded 70 years later.

The original music conservatory building, located in downtown Ithaca, was sold in 1972 as the current college campus expanded up Ithaca's South Hill. The current campus fronts Cayuga Lake on the opposite side of Cornell. While the older buildings, including some freshman residence halls, have no outstanding highlights, each school has its own building with state-of-the-art equipment for its academic programs. The music performance venues, theaters, laboratories and communications facilities are more impressive than you will find at many larger schools. Ithaca is as important a cultural center for its region as Cornell.

It's also rare to find a school that uses public art, water and light to make its campus into a more inviting and attractive community during warmer months. The campus is open; there is no security gate at the front. But it is also relatively easy to secure, with few streets to patrol. The college's [Clery Report](#) shows incidents of weapons possession from 2013 through 2015, something that you might not expect to see on a hilltop campus like this. Aside from this, disciplinary referrals for possession of drugs or alcohol were the most reported incidents of crime by far.

Ithaca, the city, has often appeared on lists of "best college towns." The reputation comes not only from the presence of Ithaca College and Cornell but also the abundance of recreational options for boating, hiking, skiing, and more. Graduate from either school and you're likely to own one or more t-shirts that state "Ithaca is Gorges." Between Ithaca and Cornell there are nearly 30,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional school students. Students at both schools rarely interact although they can visit each other's campus by bus.

Ithaca College is located closer to the city's downtown; its center is a pedestrian mall called Ithaca Commons. The Commons is undergoing renovations that have left several storefronts vacant while on-street and off-street parking are limited and metered. The major reasons for college students to come to the Commons are the already-renovated movie theatre and playhouse, as long as they're willing to ride the bus down South Hill or get a ride from someone and pool the parking charges. The bus service called the "T-Cat" is inexpensive. Fifteen dollars buys a block of 15 rides.

Ithaca competes in 25 NCAA Division III (non-scholarship) sports, including football, crew and sculling (for women). That's more competitive sports than you would find at much larger schools, including Syracuse, which offers scholarships in only 16. Outside of football, Ithaca competes in the Liberty League, considered one of the two "smart"



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sports conferences in the Northeast, along with the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC).

Ithaca has no Greek social fraternities or sororities. The campus bonds around events as well as student performances, of which there are many for a school of this size because of the strong performing arts programs. *The Ithacan*, the college weekly, is one of the more comprehensive newspapers that you will find at a mid-size school. It also publishes a unique Year in Review that is worth taking home from a campus visit. The college allows freshmen to have cars, but charges them a higher fee (\$500/year versus \$180/year for everyone else) to park on campus.

Comforts

Ithaca offers an optional [First Year Residential Experience \(FYRE\)](#) within six freshman buildings. The college also has a small number of [special interest communities as well as honors housing, quiet study and substance free living options.](#)

Altogether, Ithaca houses 75 percent of its undergraduate student body in residence halls and apartments. [Seniors can request permission to live off campus.](#) But it makes little sense to be obligated to a lease within a fairly isolated, college-oriented community. In addition, the college does not maintain an off-campus housing office.

Connections

Ithaca arranges “study away” programs in [New York](#) and [Los Angeles](#) through its academic departments in addition to arranging internships through its [Office of Career Services.](#) The number of [career-related events](#) is impressive, especially given the school’s isolated location.

Over a quarter (28 percent) of the 44,200 Ithaca alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](#) are based in or around New York City while over 5,000 remain close to their alma mater around either Ithaca or Syracuse. The Boston area is home base to over 3,900 alumni. Outside of New York State there are more than 1,000 Ithacans based in or around Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Washington DC.

Conclusions

Ithaca is a very good mid-sized college, especially for students interested in business, communications, education, health fields and the performing arts. But it’s also a very expensive one. It helps to enjoy the outdoors because Ithaca, the community, is quite isolated and at least an hour from any city. If you like the landscape and you can cover the costs, Ithaca College is worth a look.



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Report Card: Ithaca College

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