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Smith College

Founded in 1871 in Northampton, Massachusetts, Smith College is one of America's Five Sisters. Like its peers (Wellesley, Barnard, Bryn Mawr and Mount Holyoke) Smith is a highly selective women's college. A liberal arts college, Smith has 2,500 undergraduates and less than 400 graduate students.

Smith offered admission to 37 percent of the applicants for the Class of 2020, yet the college accepted 57 percent of those who applied Early Decision. The first-year students who were admitted through Early Decision represented 40 percent of the class. The college also wait listed nearly 900 applicants, but offered admission to only one. The acceptance rate dropped to 32 percent for the Class of 2021 as more students applied for the same number of seats. Eighty percent of the student body comes from outside Massachusetts while 14 percent comes from outside the United States. Either California or Massachusetts is likely to be the largest sending state for new students during an admissions cycle.

Smith has test-optional admissions, although those who submitted scores score high. The average SAT score for the class that entered in 2016, among those who submitted scores, was 1350. The average Composite for those who submitted ACT scores was a 30. Well-written essays really help including the answer to the supplemental question for the college. The current question: "If you could star in a movie, what would it be?" Interviews are optional, but strongly recommended.

A freshman class will typically have 650 students, and not lose too many. Ninety-three percent of the freshmen who entered in 2015 returned for their sophomore year, excellent for any school of any size. Eighty-six percent of the students who entered in 2010 graduated in four years, among the best of any college in the US.

Smith students consider not only the other four sister women's colleges, including Mount Holyoke which is only ten miles away, but also the more selective coed liberal arts schools and small/mid-sized research universities such as Columbia.

Costs

Smith has a very high sticker price but also very generous financial aid. The college's resources are impressive. Smith reported an endowment of approximately \$1.8 billion in 2015 to the National Association of College and University Business Officers, second only to Wellesley among women's colleges and ahead of schools with far larger student bodies such as Carnegie Mellon and Tufts.

This year the direct charges (Tuition and Fees, Room and Board) are close to \$67,000. But the college reports that it will meet 100 percent of demonstrated financial need after considering the FAFSA, the CSS Profile and supplemental information. The average need-based scholarship for the 2015-16 academic year was nearly equal to full tuition and fees. The number of merit-based scholarships, while limited, averaged approximately \$15,500.



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The average indebtedness of student borrowers who graduated in 2015 was approximately \$23,900, lower than debts for in-state graduates of many state universities, let alone private schools. Nearly 40 percent of the class graduated with *no debt at all*.

Curriculum

Smith has an “open curriculum.” With the exception of one “writing-intensive” course in any subject, students may choose any course they want from the more than 1,000 in the college catalog, though many advanced courses will require introductory work. [A quarter of a graduating class will opt for a more structured curriculum to graduate with Latin Honors.](#)

Incoming first-year students are assigned a Liberal Arts Advisor to help them to choose their first and second-year courses. The college assigns no more than 10 students to a Liberal Arts Advisor and no more than 20 to a major advisor. Nearly two-thirds of a first-year class enters undecided on a major, so advising is critical to student success and retention.

Smithies may also take courses, even majors, concentrations or certificates through a Five College Consortium that includes Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Approximately 60 percent of Smith students graduate having taken at least one course at one of the other Five Colleges. They may also take courses at other selective private colleges through [The 12 College Exchange](#). The college also offers coursework at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut. Smith also runs four programs for study abroad, including one that leads to a Masters degree in International Relations at the University of Geneva in a fifth year. Over half of Smithies will go abroad for a summer, semester or year as juniors.

Smith offers [50 majors](#) and makes it fairly easy for students to carry [a major and minor, complete a major and a Five College Certificate or double major.](#) The choices of [majors, minors, concentrations and special programs](#) are much like the offerings of a college of arts and sciences at a much larger school. Smithies can even earn a General Engineering degree within a liberal arts education and carry a minor, something few schools offer. Between 80 and 90 percent of Smithies will also complete research projects (some funded) with faculty.

Smithies have very high regard for their faculty, giving them a rating of 3.91 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#). Locally, they also benefit from having access to classes taught by highly regarded faculty at Amherst (4.0). Hampshire (3.88) and Mount Holyoke (3.88). Smith also compares well to the other Five Sister women colleges: Barnard (3.8), Bryn Mawr (4.0) and Wellesley (4.0).

Smithies are more likely to be in small classes than larger ones. Nearly 70 percent of all classes offered during the 2015-16 academic year had fewer than 20 students. Less than four percent had more than 50.

Community

Smith has an eclectic look to a beautifully landscaped the campus, mixing 19th, 20th and 21st century building designs around a downtown, a hill and a lake. The campus feels expensive but also quite supportive of student life, whether it for socializing, study or even peace and quiet.



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There's only one major street to cross, though it's also the main street in Northampton. While Northampton is a small town, its downtown a small version of Greenwich Village in New York City, it is also close to Amherst, where there is more for college students to do. Smithies may travel to the other four of the Five Colleges via free public bus transportation by presenting their ID.

Political attitudes on campus and the surrounding community appear to lean left. But there are so many opportunities for students of varied viewpoints, national origins and orientations to make connections among the 30,000 students in the Five Colleges. There are also 150 clubs and organizations at Smith, more than you will find at most colleges this size. Smithies may also join clubs and organizations at any of the other schools in the Five College Consortium. The college has also maintained traditions including Friday Teas, Julia Child recipes in the dining halls—she is an alumna, Class of 1934—and Mountain Day, a beautiful fall day when the president of the college cancels all classes. Smith competes in 12 varsity sports, though it is not really a “spirit and sports school.”

There were reported incidents of sexually related crimes on campus in the college's most recent [Clery Report](#). Burglaries have the most-reported crime while drug and alcohol-related incidents were few for a school of this size where nearly all students live on campus.

Comforts

Smith operates on a “house system” where incoming students are mixed with continuing students in residences that are home to between eight and 100 people. The college's excellence in historic preservation on campus extends to the older residence halls. A graduate of the Class of 1968 is as likely to feel at home as a member of the Class of 2018. The college has 13 dining halls on campus, some within residence halls.

Virtually every Smithie will live in the houses for all four years, but most will not live in the same one through the duration. Rising sophomores are guaranteed residence in the house where they lived during the first year. But they must enter into a lottery system if they would prefer to live in another house.

Connections

[A list of notable Smithies](#) reads like a “who's who” among leading women in American history. The geographic diversity of alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](#) is no less impressive. Among nearly 30,000 registered alumni, over 5,000 are based around Boston or Western Massachusetts and nearly 5,000 are in or near New York City. There are also more than 1,600 alumni based in or around San Francisco and Washington DC. Smith alumni are quite loyal to their alma mater. The college reported to US News that one-third of Smith alumni make a contribution to the school.

The college's career development center also maintains its own database with over 40,000 contacts. It also shares job leads with the career centers at Amherst and Mount Holyoke. The selection of [career fairs](#) open to Smithies is impressive for a liberal arts school. Smith also guarantees every student one [paid internship experience](#). The college will provide a \$3,000 stipend for an approved internship experience in the US, \$4,000 for a similar experience abroad.



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However, it is quite common for students to find paid internships or research positions on their own.

Conclusions

It's really hard to fault a school like Smith that puts considerable resources behind an undergraduate student body to help them to succeed.

While other liberal arts colleges, public honors colleges and schools of arts and science within larger universities offer similar academic choices and career development opportunities, few institutions work as hard as Smith to aid individual students while also bonding a community through residence life and campus traditions.

A prospective Smithie first needs to be open to the opportunity to attend a women's college, then visit to find out if she can adapt to an open curriculum as well as the house system. Smith is one of the very best liberal arts colleges in the US. But it is not for every woman.

Report Card: Smith College

- Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: A
- Freshman Retention: A
- Costs: A
- Curriculum: A
- Community: A
- Comforts: B+
- Connections: A