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Widener University

Founded in 1821, Widener University is located in Chester, Pennsylvania, a 20-minute drive from Center City Philadelphia. A small university with just over 3,000 full-time undergraduates, Widener has six undergraduate schools on its main campus: Arts and Science, Business, Engineering, Nursing and Human Services Professions. Widener offers 60 majors as well as 52 minors. Like Drexel, Saint Joseph's and Temple, all larger schools in Philadelphia, Widener offers cooperative education in several majors as well as accelerated pathways to further education, including a law degree.

Widener is not an exceptionally selective school. The average GPA for the class that entered in 2016 was just over 3.5. The middle 50 percent scored between 930 and 1130 on the SAT; for the ACT Composite they scored between 21 and 26. Seventy percent of the students who applied to join this class were accepted. Admissions to programs in Biochemistry, Engineering, Nursing, Physical Therapy, among others, are more competitive. There is no fee to apply. Only the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) is required to be considered for need-based aid.

Widener retained 82 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2015, good considering that Nursing is the most popular intended major while several other degree programs are quite demanding. The four-year graduation rate for the class that entered in 2010 was 42 percent, low for a private college. When considering that students also remained to pursue an advanced degree, the six-year graduation rate was 57 percent, also low. For comparison, West Chester University, a much larger public school nearby, had an 86 percent freshman retention rate, a 46 percent four-year graduation rate and a 70 percent six-year graduation rate.

Widener is a more attractive transfer option than the larger schools in around Philadelphia. Students can apply to transfer with as few as 12 credits or through articulation agreements with area community colleges. Transfer students represent about a fifth of the new students who enter in the Fall or Spring. And unlike larger schools, such as Drexel, Temple or West Chester, transfer students can be admitted to virtually any major at Widener.

Nearly half of Widener's undergraduate student body comes from outside of Pennsylvania but neighboring states such as Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey are well represented.

Costs

Widener will charge just over \$57,000 for tuition and fees, room and board. However, there are also many scholarships that could reduce these direct charges between \$15,000 and \$27,500, with opportunities for the very best applicants (3.85 or better GPA/



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1410 or better SAT) to pay no tuition at all. Scholarship recipients from outside Pennsylvania may find Widener to be a less expensive option than Temple, a state-related university, which charges non-residents in excess of \$30,000 for tuition and fees. Transfer students are also eligible for merit scholarships that range between \$10,000 and \$19,000.

Widener did not report average student loan debt information on its 2016-17 Common Data Set. Parents are encouraged to ask for this information when they visit the school and discuss academic options. Widener encourages students to pursue advanced degrees shortly after earning a bachelors in the their undergraduate field. That will result in a higher debt, but possibly a better employment opportunity.

Curriculum

Widener's academic attraction is the opportunity to pursue a degree that is more commonly offered at a larger school at a much smaller one, taking smaller classes. In addition, [co-op students can earn their degrees in less time than they would at Drexel or Temple](#) while building a similar resume.

The university is following through on this advantage by adding a degree program in Robotics within its College of Engineering. Other specialized programs within the university include Hospitality Management, Digital Media Informatics and Business Analytics. Virtually any major at Widener is also offered as a minor, excluding Early Childhood, Elementary and Special Education, Nursing and Robotics. There are also minors that are rarely found at a school of this size including Computer Forensics, Dance Performance, Forensic Accounting and Legal Studies and Analysis. There are also six engineering minors (Biomedical, Chemical, Civil, Electrical, Environmental and Mechanical). Within the education programs, the university operates its own charter school.

You won't find large classes at Widener as you might if you enrolled at Drexel, Temple or West Chester. *Eighty-seven percent* of all undergraduate classes offered in 2015-16 had fewer than 30 students. Only 17 classes had more than 50.

Widener students gave their faculty a rating of 3.6 (out of a possible 5.0) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#). That's about the same rating Drexel students (3.59) gave their faculty although students at Arcadia (3.73), LaSalle (3.73), Temple (3.7) and West Chester (3.75) held their faculty in higher regard.

Community

Widener is well located; it's an easy-on, easy-off to Interstate 95 between Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware. The university also provides shuttle service into Media, a well-to-do community for shopping and train service into Philadelphia. The downside is



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the surrounding neighborhood, a mix of small manufacturing businesses and row houses. The housing near the main campus gate is in a serious state of decay. However, Widener has been [an important player in Chester's economic development](#), including University Crossings, a [mixed use development](#) with apartments, retail, hotel and office space, among other projects. The university does an excellent job of [engaging students in community service](#).

The Widener campus is quite well maintained and easy to navigate and secure. Reported incidents of crime are fairly low, according to the university's [2016 Clery Report](#). Alcohol-related disciplinary referrals have been the most commonly reported campus crimes, though arrest for possession of drugs or alcoholic beverages were few.

Widener competes in 22 sports at the NCAA Division III level, including football, and also fields a competitive cheerleading team. The NFL Philadelphia Eagles held their summer training camp at Widener during the middle of the 1970s. The campus was depicted in the movie *Invincible*, the story of Philadelphia Eagle's tryout camp survivor Vince Papale, starring Mark Wahlberg.

Comforts

The university reported that 84 percent of the freshman class lived on campus in its 2016-17 Common Data Set. But it also mentioned that on-campus living attracted only 42 percent of the entire undergraduate student body. This does include transfer students who more likely came from the surrounding area. But it also shows that the on-campus community is small for a college that has around 3,000 full time undergraduates, even though [only seniors may live off campus](#) without requesting permission from the university. Greek life attracts some students, drawing 10 percent of the men and nine percent of the women.

Widener freshmen may be assigned to one of [eight freshman residence halls](#). The oldest were converted from barrack-style housing that was in use when the college was formerly the Pennsylvania Military Academy. Suite-style halls (small groups sharing a common bath) and apartments are also available to sophomores, juniors and seniors. Off-campus housing, however, might need to be a consideration for students who need to live near campus for clinical rotations, co-ops or internships over the summer. It is possible to live off campus to share a house or apartment for less than \$700/month, including utilities.

Connections

Among the more than 28,000 Widener alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](#), nearly 19,000 are based in or around Philadelphia. The alumni base gets geographically thin after that. There are nearly 1,900 registered alumni in the New York area and over 500 in and



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around Baltimore. While the base is quite regional, it is also extremely easy for Widener alumni to return to campus, and also to hire students and recent graduates.

Widener makes great advantage of its location to help its students find co-op, internship and community service assignments. It would be quite rare for someone to graduate without having one or two opportunities on their resume. The university also takes [leadership development](#) more seriously than other schools of its size.

Conclusions

Widener's location, smaller classes, academic mix, access to resume-building opportunities and generous scholarships make the university an attractive alternative to the larger schools in and around Philadelphia, especially Drexel, Temple and West Chester. But you might also want to have access to a car to get to work, venture into Media or West Chester or to explore all that Philadelphia has to offer.

Report Card-Widener University

4-Year/6-Year Graduation Rates: C/C

Freshman Retention: B

Costs: B+

Curriculum: A

Community: B

Comforts: B

Connections: A (Philadelphia area, Pennsylvania, Baltimore-Washington Corridor)/C (elsewhere)