



Stuart L. Nachbar
College Counselor
Member: HECA, NACAC, NJACAC, PACAC
322 Windsor Court
Ewing, NJ 08638
(609)406-0062
stuart@educatedquest.com
www.educatedquest.com

University of Rochester

The University of Rochester (UR) lands on the lists of many college-bound students who are looking for an “academically serious research university.”

An independent (non-religious) university with around 5,400 undergraduates, UR is most similar to schools such as Carnegie Mellon, Case Western Reserve, Johns Hopkins, Tufts and middle-sized Ivy League schools such as Brown, Harvard, Princeton and Yale. All of these schools have separate schools of arts and science and engineering; some also offer an undergraduate business program. They all offer opportunities to take advanced courses and pursue research as undergraduates in highly regarded graduate programs. However, none of these schools competes at the highest (scholarship) level in all of their varsity sports. Johns Hopkins, which, like UR, has a high profile music conservatory as well a highly praised medical school, is probably the most similar university.

UR welcomes between 1,300 and 1,400 first-year students. In 2016, more than 16,500 students applied to become part of the incoming first-year class. Thirty-five percent were offered admission. A third of the incoming class was admitted through Early Decision. The next year, more than 18,000 students applied for essentially the same number of seats. The university reported that the average SAT scores have exceeded 1400 (out of 1600) on the Critical Reading and Math sections of the SAT for the very first time. Admissions to UR, however, are “test-flexible.” The university will accept not only the ACT or the SAT. AP, IB and SAT subject tests, among other exams, are accepted as well.

UR is considered to be an exceptionally selective school. However, it is less selective than schools that could be regarded as its peers. One issue is yield, the percentage of accepted students who decide to deposit and join the first year class. While UR admitted between 30 and 35 percent of its applicants, only 23 percent of the students who were admitted for 2016 decided to come. With the exception of music conservatory students who attend the Eastman School of Music, UR admits to the university’s School of Arts, and Sciences and the Hajim School of Engineering, but not to a specific major. Between 30 and 35 percent of an entering class arrives with intentions towards medical school.

	Acceptance Rate 2016	Yield Rate 2016
University of Rochester	38%	23%
Carnegie Mellon University	22%	34%
Case Western Reserve University	35%	15%
Johns Hopkins University	12%	41%



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	Acceptance Rate 2016	Yield Rate 2016
Tufts University	14%	46%

UR retained 96 percent of the first-year students who arrived in 2016, quite comparable with the more selective schools listed above as well as the most similar Ivy League universities. Seventy-six percent of the students who entered in 2010 graduated within four years, also excellent. But unlike similar schools, UR offers academic and financial incentives for students to stay for five.

Costs

This year UR charges approximately \$67,400 for tuition and fees, room and board. The university reports that it will meet 100 percent of demonstrated need. UR also offered merit-based awards; the average in 2015-16 was approximately \$13,600.

Average indebtedness for student borrowers who graduated in 2016 was approximately \$30,700. This includes graduates who were on campus for five years. The Federal Direct Student Loan program allows undergraduate borrowers to borrow a maximum of \$31,000 over five years. Only 12 percent of 2016 borrowers needed to take out private loans to complete their education, low for a fairly expensive school.

Curriculum

UR tries to take a middle ground between an open curriculum and one with a set of distribution requirements. With the exception of a writing-intensive freshman seminar, there are no specific course requirements. Students declare a major in one of [three divisions \(Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Engineering\)](#) by the end of their sophomore year, and must complete a cluster, a set of three or more courses, in each of the other two divisions. The curriculum makes it easy to enter undecided on a major, allowing time to consider not only a likely major but also the complementary courses in the other divisions.

More than half of UR graduates complete a double major, although clusters can also become minors. About 30 students each year also opt to self design a major. It is quite common for students to combined very different majors, especially combinations with Computer Science, currently the most popular major, with Business (relatively new at UR), Humanities and Social Sciences.

UR not only offers [combined degree programs](#) with its graduate and professional schools; it also offers a program called '[Take Five](#)', where graduates can attend the university full-time, free of tuition and fees, for one additional year provided that they take undergraduate courses *outside of their declared major(s)*. The Take Five year can



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used for academic enrichment or to add complementary skills that might enhance a student's prospects for employment or admission into further education. Students who transferred into UR as juniors can also take advantage of Take Five. In addition to Take Five, UR offers the Kauffman Entrepreneurial Year ([aka 'e5'](#)) for fifth-year students to take courses that support entrepreneurship, work in an internship in a start-up setting or develop and seek funding for a business plan.

Like its neighbor, Rochester Institute of Technology, UR offers options for internships and cooperative education during the academic year. However, these are less popular than pursuing research opportunities on campus with faculty or developing proposals for funded research. Nearly 80 percent of the student body is involved in undergraduate research, high for a university that also has some heavily lauded graduate programs.

There will be some large classes (over 100 students) at UR in the introductory courses in subjects such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Psychology that are required to complete several majors. Nearly 12 percent of classes offered during the 2015-16 academic year had more than 50 students, although over 70 percent had fewer than 20. These numbers compare favorably with Carnegie Mellon, Johns Hopkins and Tufts, but are also superior to Case Western (13 percent more than 50 students, less than 60 percent with fewer than 20).

UR students gave their faculty a rating of 3.7 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#), higher than students at Case Western (3.67) gave their faculty and about the same as Johns Hopkins students gave theirs (3.72). However, UR students held their faculty in lower regard than students at Carnegie Mellon (3.76) or Tufts (3.8).

Community

The [UR campus](#) is half inside/half outside of the City of Rochester, divided by the Genesee River. Neither side makes much use of the riverfront, and the water is dirty. The campus is a mix of 19th, 20th and 21st century designs. The academic center appears to mix some of the more famous elements of the campuses of Harvard ([the colonial style academic quad](#)) and MIT ([the Great Dome](#) at the center of campus). The [interior of the Rush-Rhees Library](#), the university's main library, is comparable to the main branches in major cities. The university's buildings in the academic center of campus are connected through an underground tunnel network that will feel crowded on the coldest days. [Wilson Commons](#), the student center boasts one of the largest Starbucks stores on a single floor for any building in the US.

The campus is not immediately adjacent to the East End, the more arts-oriented section of the city, but the university operates an extensive shuttle bus system to help everyone get around town. Its better to leave a car parked and ride the buses, especially to the



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'Collegetown' retail section of campus, anchored by the university's bookstore. Collegetown borders the university's medical complex, a center of tremendous traffic congestion.

UR's motto, *Meliora*, is used repeatedly to bond the community around events and programs among students, alumni, faculty and staff. The motto explains that the community "always strives to be better." [Meliora Moments](#) are collected online, and posted. However, the intentions behind the motto are being challenged as students have protested in person and in writing over the [university administration's handling of a complaint filed with the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) by eight faculty accusing a tenured professor, T. Florian Jaeger, of sexual harassment based on incidents reported by 11 former graduate students.

The university's initial investigation of the complaints against Professor Jaeger ruled the professor blameless. Protests ensued on campus, leading the same parties to refile their complaint, and the university's trustees to authorize an independent legal counsel to investigate it. That investigation has not been completed as of this writing. While Professor Jaeger has been placed on leave, the [publicized handling](#) of the original complaint has the potential to further [diminish student trust and confidence in the university administration](#). Ironically, these events are taking place in the city where woman's suffrage leader, [Susan B. Anthony](#) began her national campaign for voting rights in 1872. A first-year residence hall on the UR campus is named for her.

The university's [Clery Report](#) shows that there were 14 reported incidents of Sexual Assault-Fondling in 2016, high for any school of any size, as well as 29 reported drug-related arrests in 2015, also high. Reported drug-related disciplinary referrals trended upwards between 2014 and 2016 from 104 to 235. There were also more than 300 reported alcohol-related referrals each year during that period.

UR competes in 23 varsity sports, more than any university in New York State after Cornell and Columbia. Squash is the Division I (scholarship) sport; the rest are Division III (non-scholarship). UR competes in the [Liberty League](#) against schools as small as Bard College and as large as local rival Rochester Institute of Technology and in the [University Athletic Association](#) against other exceptionally selective schools such as Carnegie Mellon, Case Western and NYU. The University Athletic Association is the only sports conference in the US whose members are exclusively private research universities that are also members of the Association of American Universities.

Between UR and RIT alone, there are nearly 18,000 full-time college students in and immediately around the Rochester area; other schools such as Nazareth College and St. John Fisher College add even more. However, while the full-time college going population is about the same as many places that host a large state university, Rochester is not a similar college town. The campuses are not close together while only



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one school (RIT in hockey) is heavily invested in a spectator sport. However, UR attracts virtually any entertainer (especially at the Eastman School of Music) or speaker that any selective university would bring to campus.

Comforts

UR houses just over two-thirds of its students on campus. First-year students may live in one of [six residence halls](#), mainly in corridor style (several rooms sharing a common bath) double rooms. Genesee, the newest hall, opened this fall. First-year students may also opt for quiet, substance-free, co-ed living by alternating room or [special interest groups](#). [The university also requires sophomores to live on campus, but allows only juniors or seniors to live in university-owned apartments.](#)

Unlike other universities that have a fraternity row on the outer edges of the campus, UR placed their row closer to the academic center. UR's 15 residential social fraternities either live in their own houses on campus or the residence halls. The Greek social community attracts just over a fifth of the undergraduate student body, relatively high for a selective university that does not have a high-profile athletic program.

UR has a unique [Neighborhood Ambassador Program](#) where students who live off campus on a limited number of popular streets, help classmates in a transition to off-campus living, especially in their interactions with long-term neighbors. While such a program helps to maintain town-gown relations, it drops a hint that the community would prefer that student parties stay on campus. It is possible to live less expensively off campus when students expect to be in the Rochester area for the summer.

Connections

Major reductions in force at Bausch and Lomb, Eastman Kodak and Xerox have left the university and Wegman's as the major employers in the Rochester area, and allowed UR to become a more national supplier of talent to business, government and the non-profit sector. Boston, New York, Washington DC and Silicon Valley are all popular destinations for recent UR graduates. The alumni base is also quite large in and around Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles, among alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](#). Just over a third of UR students come from other countries, the largest contingents from China, India, North Korea and Mexico.

Rochester has the promise to become a stronger technology center, especially in the areas of health care and optics. The city and the university both do their part to support local economic development, most interestingly student-originated businesses. UR is one of the few private research universities that has its own [Student Business Incubator](#). It's also rare to find a school that does as much to [encourage students in all schools and majors of the university to think like entrepreneurs.](#)



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Career services at UR are excellent, a standout being [Industry Road Trips](#) to other cities to expose students to career options as early as the sophomore year. UR is quite transparent when it comes to [career outcomes data](#). Interestingly, the percentage of 2016 graduates of the School of Arts and Sciences and the Hajim School of Engineering were about the same (50 versus 53 percent with nearly all of the balance continuing their education). The average salary for Engineering graduates was approximately \$70,400 and just over \$51,000 for students who earned degrees in the School of Arts and Sciences.

Conclusions

UR has all of the academic resources that an excellent student could expect to find at a leading mid-sized research university, and the academic reputation of the school is globally respected. The curriculum and the choice of courses and majors are a dream for students who can motivate themselves to plan their academic program on their own, and even take an extra year to do it. Career services and alumni connections are as strong as you will find at similar, but more selective, schools. The support for a promising entrepreneurial idea might be better, given that start-up costs will be lower than they might be in places such as Baltimore, Boston, New York, Philadelphia or Pittsburgh.

But while UR attracts a respectable percentage of new students through Early Decision and offers reasonable need-based financial aid packages, the low yield rate shows that UR is not the first choice of many who decided to come. [The news coverage of the “Jaeger Effect” also hurts the university in its efforts to attract female students](#). And while the academic opportunities available at UR might be comparable to schools such as Carnegie Mellon, Johns Hopkins or Tufts, Rochester’s amenities, economy and location are not. However, if Rochester’s local and regional economy are to rebound, they will need UR and RIT to continue to help lead the way.

Report Card: University of Rochester

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