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Carnegie Mellon University

Located within two of the nicer neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University is a mid-sized (6,400 undergraduate) school that might have one of the more eclectic student bodies at any college anywhere.

At one extreme, Carnegie Mellon is one of the best universities to study computing, engineering or the sciences; at the other it is one of the best to study architecture, fine arts, and the performing arts. In between it offers demanding liberal arts, science and business programs as well as opportunities to combine interests across different schools. Faculty and alumni include 20 Nobel Prize winners, 12 Turing Award (in computer science) winners, and more than 150 Academy, Emmy and Tony Award winners.

Carnegie Mellon is considered against the more selective public and private universities that offer similar majors. But it is not usually shopped against a more specialized performing arts school such as Juilliard, nor is it often considered versus an art and design school such as Parsons. Given the diversity of academic programs at Carnegie Mellon as well as the lack of a medical school, it is difficult to identify a school of similar size and selectivity with a similar mix of academic options. The closest match might be MIT which has 2,000 fewer undergraduates, but also a [similar selection of majors](#) as well as graduate and professional schools. When undergraduate and graduate/professional school enrollments are combined, Carnegie Mellon and MIT each has more than 11,000 students. A less selective, but [comparable school for academic options](#) might be Lehigh University (PA). Lehigh has about 1,400 fewer undergraduates than Carnegie Mellon as well as smaller graduate and professional schools. Georgia Tech is probably the most comparable public university, excluding the performing arts.

The university allows applicants to choose up to three of [six undergraduate schools](#), but does not force them to choose a major, outside of the more specialized programs in the visual and performing arts. Those who are denied at their first choice can be considered for their second and third choices. It is quite common, for example, for applicants to list the School of Computer Science, the School of Information Science and the Tepper School of Business on one application. It is also quite common to see applicants consider Tepper and the Deitrich School of Arts and Sciences. Deitrich has also been a fallback for students who were interested in the visual and performing arts. The visual and performing arts programs evaluate talents as well as academic performance. Half



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of the evaluation for a candidate in the visual arts is based on the faculty review of a student's portfolio. Eighty percent of the evaluation in the performing arts is based on auditions for the faculty.

It's tough to get into Carnegie Mellon. Only 13 percent of the applicants for the class that entered this past fall were accepted. Across the eight undergraduate schools, 36 percent of the admitted students decided to deposit, very good for any school. The percentages that committed to Carnegie Mellon were much higher for the School of Design (70%), School of Drama (64%), School of Information Systems (50%) and the School of Computer Sciences (42%). About a fifth of the class is accepted through Early Decision.

Carnegie Mellon also places students on a "priority" Wait List as well as a "regular" Wait List. The priority list could consider an applicant's choice of school versus the number of available seats in that school. The higher the yield—the percentage of accepted students who deposit—for the school, the less likely an applicant will get off a wait list.

Acceptance rates by college ranged from seven (School of Computer Sciences) to 51 (School of Architecture, after academic and portfolio reviews) percent. The average ACT Composite for each of the six undergraduate schools was no lower than a 31 (in the College of Fine Arts). With the exception of this college, where admissions are talent-based, the 25th percentile for the Critical Reading section of the New SAT was no lower than 680 for any school, and no lower than 700 for the Math. [The majority of the incoming freshmen were women for the first time in the university's history. Women represented nearly half of the entering class in the School of Computer Science, 43 percent of the first-year contingent in the College of Engineering and 57 percent of new entrants into the Tepper School of Business.](#)

Carnegie Mellon retained 96 percent of the students who entered in 2016. The university graduated 76 percent of the students who entered in 2011 within four years. Both numbers are excellent for any school of any size.

Costs

Carnegie Mellon is quite expensive, with an estimated Total Cost of Attendance of approximately \$70,100 for the current academic year. But the university also tries to meet the full need for those who it considers qualified for financial aid. Merit scholarships are few. Only 42 freshmen in an incoming class of nearly



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1,700 received a merit-based award, according to the university's most recent common data set.

According to the [National Association of College and University Business Officers](#), Carnegie Mellon has a much lower endowment (\$2.15 billion in Fiscal Year 2017) than all of the Ivy League schools and many more selective universities that have a medical school as well as scholarship sports such as Duke, Northwestern or Stanford. MIT, the most similar, but more selective school, has an endowment of nearly \$15 billion. Despite its connections and patents, Carnegie Mellon also has a lower endowment than schools such as Boston College, Amherst College, the University of Richmond (VA) and Pomona College. Carnegie Mellon's endowment is about \$170 million more than Georgia Tech, but that school also has public support. There is less money to allocate for gift aid and merit awards than there is at 43 other public and private universities.

While nearly half (46 percent) of the students who graduated in 2016 had no student loan debt, those who borrowed owed an average of more than \$31,000. The maximum that they could have borrowed through the Federal Direct Student Loan program was \$27,000 over four years, and \$31,000 over five. Given that over 75 percent of a class graduates within four year, the amount of debt is higher than it might have been at similarly selective schools. The university reported that 100 members of the class that had to borrow took out private loans. These averaged just over \$49,000.

Curriculum

While Carnegie Mellon does allow students to change schools if they desire a change in academic direction, transfers into the visual and performing arts programs are not possible, and transfers into the schools of Computer Science, Engineering and Information Systems are quite difficult. The university requires only three courses across all majors in all schools: one in Computing, one in Writing and one under Analytics and Arguments. But each school also has its own degree requirements. AP and IB credit policies for courses taken in high school are also decided by the individual schools.

The list of [globally ranked academic departments](#) at Carnegie Mellon takes up four pages in small print and includes programs within each undergraduate school of the university. The length of the list is quite remarkable, considering that Carnegie Mellon, [founded at the start of the 20th century](#), is a younger school



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than most of the schools that its students considered, including Georgia Tech, Lehigh and MIT.

There are also cross-disciplinary programs that allow students to combine interests in computing or the sciences with the liberal arts, in effect placing a student in their own “school,” though it takes tremendous initiative to design a personalized program and get it approved. It’s extremely hard to double major at Carnegie Mellon because each school has its own requirements in addition to those for its majors—only a quarter of undergraduates do so—but is fairly easy for students in Business, Computer Science, Information Systems and the liberal arts to add a minor, and nearly half do. Students may apply once to be considered for SURF, the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship, and multiple times for be considered for SURGE, the Summer Undergraduate Research Grant.

Students will not have as many large classes at Carnegie Mellon as they might at larger public or private universities. According to the university, less than 10 percent of the nearly 1,600 courses offered in 2016-17 had more than 50 students; just under five percent had more than 100. Sixty-five percent had fewer than 20 students. For comparison, 70 percent of undergraduate courses at MIT have fewer than 20 students, but only 45 percent of those offered at Lehigh, a smaller school, are this small.

Carnegie Mellon students gave their faculty a rating of 3.76 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](https://www.ratemyprofessors.com). They held their faculty in higher regard than students at Lehigh (3.68) or Georgia Tech (3.60) but in lower regard than students at MIT (3.93).

Community

Carnegie Mellon built out [its campus](#) from a main academic quad that will appear more familiar to people who visit schools such as [Columbia](#) or [MIT](#) that are located in tight spaces within larger cities. Aside from the quad, the mix of buildings is eclectic, as it is at these two schools. The major difference is the setting around the campus. Carnegie Mellon joins with a larger school, the University of Pittsburgh, to form more of a “college town” with many student-centered shops and restaurants. If you visit city schools, Carnegie Mellon will feel less congested than campuses such as Columbia, Harvard, MIT or NYU.



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The talent within the student body helps to build community through its own events, exhibitions, performances and presentations, including student business plans. Meeting of the Minds, a week-long symposium held in April, is the largest showcase of the talents among the students. But those who want “spirit and sports” mixed with their education should consider other schools. Carnegie Mellon competes in NCAA Division III (non-scholarship) athletics in the University Athletic Association against other selective schools such as Case Western, Emory and Washington University in St. Louis and competes in football in the President’s Athletic Conference against smaller schools, mainly in Western Pennsylvania. The university has 24 social fraternities and sororities, sixteen of which have their own houses, on [two Greek quads](#). But its very hard for such organizations to dominate life at a school where the academics are so demanding and athletic events are low profile.

Given that around two-thirds of the undergraduates live on campus, including all of the first-year students, drug and alcohol-related violations are quite low. From 2014 through 2016, there were only three drug-related arrests *total* on campus, according to the university’s [2017 Clery Report](#), and no more than 37 disciplinary referrals in any of those years. Reported alcohol-related arrests dropped by more than 50 percent from 97 to 44. But the university also reported more incidents of Dating Violence, from 5 in 2014 to 22 in 2016. Stalking and Burglary also remain concerns.

Pittsburgh is one of the best college towns in the US. Carnegie Mellon students benefit by being near the major cultural institutions in the city as well as its sports venues and business community. There’s no reason to bring a car to school. The city’s bus system is quite extensive while parking is expensive and difficult to find.

Comforts

Carnegie Mellon appears to take a middle ground with residence life between similarly sized Ivy League schools where nearly everyone lives on campus and state schools where upper-class students prefer to live in a less supervised living experience such as Greek life, a private house or apartment.

Entering students are assigned to one of [15 house communities](#), each, staffed by a Housefellow, a Community Advisor (CA), and a staff of Resident Assistants (RAs). Only one residential community, [Hamerschlag](#), is exclusively for freshmen, the rest mix them with sophomores, juniors and seniors. This is your traditional corridor-style (several rooms sharing a common bathroom), cinder block wall,



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residence hall. It's a toss-up as to whether to live in a freshman hall versus one that is mixed. The latter help build mentoring relationships; the former helps build bonds over the full undergraduate experience.

Carnegie Mellon encourages all students to live on campus, even going to the point of having [cost and advantage/disadvantage comparisons on its residence life Web site](#). But university also has one of the best college [off-campus listing](#) sites around the Internet. It is possible for students willing to share with at least two roommates to hold rents to around \$500/person/month, plus utilities within some of the better neighborhoods close to campus.

Connections

Carnegie Mellon graduates can go anywhere, and they do. They're as likely to begin their working life in New York City or the San Francisco Bay area as they are to stay in Pittsburgh. Given the rankings of the academic programs as well as the home states of the US students—California ranks first as the home address for freshmen, followed by New Jersey and New York—the university attracts recruiters from the East and West Coasts.

The [number of career events](#) hosted by the university is quite extensive for a school that graduates fewer than 2,000 seniors each year. According to the university's Career and Professional Development Center, over 12,000 jobs were posted during the 2015-16 academic year as well as more than 5,000 internships. Nearly a quarter of the graduates in the Class of 2016 found their first full-time job through an internship. Just under a fifth were hired through the on-campus job fairs. Slightly less a fifth were hired through on-campus interviews. Eighty-six percent of the class was either working or continuing their education within six months after graduation.

Carnegie Mellon has an alumni base with a very high profile. Actors Albert Brooks, Carol Channing, Ted Danson, and Jack Klugman, among many others, went to Carnegie Mellon as did writer/producer Steven Bochco and composer Henry Mancini. While Carnegie Mellon is also quite noted for accomplishments in business, computing, engineering and the science, nine of its 12 Nobel laureates received the award in Economic Science, including John Forbes Nash, subject of the book and movie *A Beautiful Mind*. Alumni have also gone on to form startup firms that have become globally recognized, including Adobe Systems, Red Hat, and Sun Microsystems, among many others.



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Among the nearly 94,000 Carnegie Mellon alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), just under 19,000 have remained in or around Pittsburgh. The San Francisco Bay Area ranks second with over 12,300. Over 11,000 live and/or work around New York City. At least 1,700 are based in or around Boston, Seattle, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Chicago. Just under 1,000 are based in China.

Conclusions

Carnegie Mellon is one of the finest research universities in the world. The importance of this university in business and to the advancement of computing, the sciences, engineering and the arts takes a back seat to few other schools. Carnegie Mellon is one of the best places within higher education to develop your professional network or find a potential business partner—as long as the experience will prove to be affordable.

Report Card: Carnegie Mellon University

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

Freshman Retention: A

Costs: C+

Curriculum: A

Community: A

Comforts: B+

Connections: A