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Drexel University (PA)

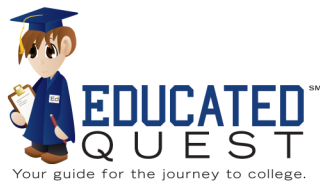
With over 15,500 undergraduates, Drexel University is the largest private university that is strongly committed to cooperative education aka “co-op.” It is also the fourth largest among independent (non-religious) university in the US after New York University, the University of Southern California and Boston University.

Drexel is considered not only against the flagship state universities in the applicant’s home states, but also against more selective private schools that do and do not offer co-op. While it is quite possible to find other schools within Pennsylvania alone that offer co-op in computer science and engineering—Carnegie Mellon, Lehigh, Penn State, Pitt and Temple, for example, all do—it is much harder to find a school that offers it in the liberal arts, design professions, hospitality or business, among other programs. Most schools offer access to career-related opportunities for most majors through paid or credit-bearing internships.

Drexel is not the only private university that emphasizes co-op in virtually all majors. Northeastern University, in Boston, and Rochester Institute of Technology, in upstate New York, do too. The difference is that Drexel’s academic and co-op calendar operates on a quarter system. Classes run only ten weeks versus 14 to 16 weeks for a school that runs on semesters. A Drexel student is technically a student in classes or on co-op for every quarter following the summer after the freshman year. There are two quarters of work and two quarters of school during the sophomore, pre-junior and junior years. Students will take five or six courses over the ten weeks they are in school.

This past fall, Drexel welcomed nearly 3,300 freshmen, up from 2,300 only the year before, according to the university’s [2017-18 Fact Book](#). The incoming class this fall will also have more than 3,200 students. In order to get a class of 3,200 students last fall, the university accepted 22,500 of 28,500 applicants, an acceptance rate of 79 percent. The median SAT score for the class was 1250, up 60 points from the year before. The median ACT score was a 27. Seventy-six percent of the class came from the Mid-Atlantic states (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania). Forty-six percent came from Pennsylvania alone.

Drexel retained 89 percent of the classed that entered in 2015 and 2016, a slightly lower rate than the state schools that many applicants considered. However, retention is up from only 84 percent for the class that entered in 2014. Since Drexel is a co-op school, and most co-op students opt to stay five years to do three co-ops, when their major allows, five-year graduation rates are more relevant than four-year or six-year graduation rates. The most recent five-year graduation rates were available for the classes that entered in 2008 (63%), 2009 (64%) and 2010 (66%). These graduation rates were achieved with classes that lost larger percentages of freshmen; the best retention for these three years was 85 percent for the class that arrived in 2010. Higher retention should lead to higher graduation rates for the classes that arrived over the past two years.



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Costs

Drexel offers generous [merit scholarships](#) compared to other large private city-based universities. Without them, the Drexel educational experience is one of the more expensive in the United States, with a [total direct charges \(tuition and fees, room and board\) over \\$67,000.](#), leading to a total first-year cost of attendance that could easily exceed \$72,000. The university has announced that it will try to keep annual tuition and fee increases at or below two percent. Other schools that applicants consider have had increases between three and four percent.

While Drexel charges all students in good standing for only four years of tuition, opting for a five-year, three co-op program can easily add more than \$20,000 to the costs of completing a degree for an additional year of housing and the payment of student fees for each quarter on co-op. These fees are more important for students who remain in Philadelphia on co-op—and 80 percent do—because they allow students to use recreational facilities and participate in extracurricular activities while working full time.

Aside from scholarships, the best ways to lower the costs of a Drexel education while pursuing a five-year, three co-op program are to take one online or evening course during each quarter on co-op—permitted by the university, for no additional charge—or to begin the first two years at a community college where Drexel has an agreement to accept the transfer credits. Taking a single course during each of the six quarters on co-op reduces the time on campus for the senior year by at least three months, possibly six if the student enters with enough AP credits or takes classes during the summer after their freshman year. Drexel is relatively generous in allowing incoming students to apply AP or community college credits towards a degree, although it will be difficult to apply credits earned in math and the sciences towards degrees in science, health fields or engineering. Another way to reduce costs is to do the co-op close to home or in a community that has lower living costs than Philadelphia.

Drexel does not publish student debt information. However, this writer does not recommend that students or their families take out higher interest loans through the Federal Parent PLUS loan program or a private lender to cover the costs of a college education. In addition, the Federal Government limits undergraduate student debt to \$31,000 under its interest-subsidized and low-interest student loan programs. These programs allow a first-year student to borrow no more than \$5,500 for the freshman year and an average of \$6,375 per year over the remaining four years.

Curriculum

Drexel offers [80 full-time majors](#), including several unique programs that you are not likely to find at many other large public or private universities as well as many [unique minors](#). You can study virtually any subject in the arts and sciences, business, communications, computing, design professions, education, engineering, health sciences and administration, hospitality management and tourism and media production



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and graduate with a unique combination of majors and minors between different schools, something that cannot usually be done at larger public universities.

Drexel also offers [several accelerated programs](#) towards advanced degrees, including a law degree as well as an assured admissions program into the university's medical school. The [Pennoni Honors College](#) offers the opportunity to not only pursue honors-level work. It also offers about 50 students a year the opportunity to submit proposals for a self-designed major.

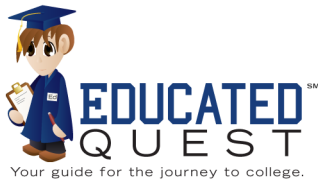
Incoming freshmen may enter a school within Drexel undecided on a major by checking Undeclared for the school of interest, or choose the Exploratory Studies option which allows for a Liberal Arts/Media/Business or a Science/Engineering academic pathway through the university's Goodwin College of Professional Studies. But students interested in the programs in Architecture, Education, Health Sciences, Nursing, among others, can enter them only as a freshman. While larger schools often "cap" the numbers that can choose majors, Drexel does not as long as there is space available in the classes required to complete the major. This is not always the case at the larger public universities.

While other schools ask students with lower GPAs--not uncommon in the scientific and technical majors--to take classes if they cannot be placed in a co-op, Drexel is able to place all but one to two percent of eligible students in paid or unpaid assignments. Those who accept unpaid employment work only 20 hours per week and may find a second job to help pay expenses.

Drexel also offers venture funding for students who have entrepreneurial visions to allow them to develop, refine and implement their business plans while on co-op. The university goes further to aid student who want to become entrepreneurs than most other schools. Drexel has the only school dedicated exclusive to education for entrepreneurship in the US. Others offer entrepreneurship as a minor within a liberal arts or engineering curriculum or as a concentration within a business school.

While the five-year route is the more popular option among all undergraduates, new majors as well as those with smaller enrollments will offer only the one co-op option. This is to help ensure that all students in the major have the opportunity to complete all of the required courses in the major and graduate on time. It appears that as a major builds enrollment over time and the career center makes more connections, a five-year, three co-op option is made available.

You are less likely to see large classes at Drexel than you would find at a flagship state university such as Penn State, Pitt or Temple. bBut you will see them in the introductory courses such as Biology, Chemistry or Economics that are required within several majors. Drexel advertises a student/faculty ratio of 10 to 1, lower than any larger state university, while less than ten percent of all undergraduate courses had more than 50 students.



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Drexel students gave their faculty a rating of 3.59 (out of a possible 5) on RateMyProfessors.com. But students at Penn State (3.71), Pitt (3.74), Temple (3.70), Rutgers-New Brunswick (3.74) and the University of Delaware (3.73) held their faculty in higher regard as did students at Rowan University, a similar-sized school considered by New Jersey residents (3.71).

Community

Few college towns offer more for young people to do than Philadelphia. The city is the fifth most populous in the United States after New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston, as well as one of the most ethnically diverse. Access to cultural and social opportunities as well as airline, bus, subway and train services from Drexel is excellent. There is simply no reason for a Drexel student to bring a car to school if s/he lives on or near campus and works at co-op in the city.

Drexel's campus is not as dominated by tall buildings like other schools in large cities, including cross-town Temple, though there is no dominant architectural theme nor considerable green space. The University has built modern facilities in media arts, science and recreation, among others, in recent years. Few streets cross campus, making Drexel relatively easy for campus police to patrol. While the campus is clean, and has some attractive structures, location is its greatest strength. Drexel's main campus in University City is next to the University of Pennsylvania and close to the University of the Sciences, making it possible for the city to develop broader educationally focused strategies for the neighborhood and for developers to offer a large selection of "university-affiliated" housing options near both campuses.

Considering the size of Drexel's student body (around 15,500 undergraduates) and the school's urban location, reported arrests for possession of alcohol (only 31 on campus *total* from 2014 through 2016), drug possession (only 27 on campus *total* from 2014 through 2016) are very low on the main campus, according to the University's most recent [Clery Report](#). The university prefers to discipline students through its own policies and practices for crimes committed on campus. However, this is a city school, so students need to have more street sense to stay safe.

With so many students on co-op during any given quarter, Drexel is not likely to be a "spirit and sports" school such as Temple or Villanova. While the university competes in NCAA Division I (scholarship) varsity sports and plays against Penn, La Salle and Saint Joseph's in basketball, Drexel is not considered to be one of Philadelphia's "Big Five" basketball schools because it does not play Temple and Villanova.

Comforts

Drexel requires all freshmen and sophomores to live in university housing, unless they reside within ten miles of campus or receive approval to commute from the home a family member or legal guardian for financial or medical reasons. The University actually provides a list of zip codes that fall within the ten-mile radius. Sophomores have more



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options under the two-year residency requirement. They may live in the residence halls, fraternity or sorority housing, University-affiliated apartments owned by American Campus Communities, a private developer or University-approved housing, which is also privately owned. In addition to the halls available to freshmen, Axis and University Crossings are open to sophomores as well as pre-juniors, juniors and seniors.

Altogether, less than a third of Drexel students live on campus, less than ten percent of the men are members of fraternities and less than ten percent of the women are in sororities. Drexel has 13 fraternities and sororities, nine of which live in university-owned housing in a row on 34th Street or on Powelton Avenue. The other four Greek organizations, which are on the same streets, own and manage their houses.

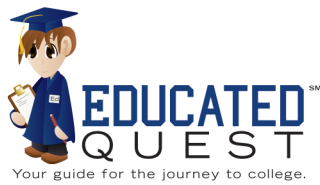
Because Drexel operates on a quarter system where students either go to school or work on co-op over 12 months housing decisions should reflect where the co-op is likely to be. A 12-month lease can work when a student remains in Philadelphia all year round. But a university housing contract or Greek housing are more flexible options for students whose co-ops take them out of the city.

Connections

Drexel handles co-op through a single office that has more than 50 full-time career development professionals who match students with positions available. Students may apply to up to 25 positions after completing a Co-op 101 preparatory class that covers resume writing, interview preparation and job search skills. The university also offers a course to help students become better acquainted with Philadelphia. The metropolitan area has among the largest sectors in the arts and design, consulting, education, financial services, health care and public/non-profit management, among other industries, and Drexel is well connected in every sector.

While some co-op programs try to match students with assignments with the same employer over three co-op cycles, Drexel does not make this promise. The preference is to listen to students and their observations about different work settings. Those who are not happy in their first setting are matched to others where the student and counselor believe that success is more likely. Students can also be fired during a co-op cycle. They must write a letter of apology to their former employer before they can be placed in a new position. The employers are evaluated as well as the students so that their talents and skills are properly utilized.

Engineering and Information Sciences positions pay the most, followed by Biomedical Engineering, Science and Health Systems. However, students in education will, on average, earn about half as much. In other cases, Media Arts being one example, they might earn no salary at all. In these situations, students work only 20 hours per week as opposed to full time. International co-ops typically carry a stipend for air fare, as well as housing arrangements similar to study abroad programs where students live in university housing on a host campus. The stipends and subsidized housing are necessary because these co-ops are among the lowest-paid for salaried positions.



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Although nearly half of all Drexel students who participate in co-op are often hired by one of their co-op employers, they may also find work through the University's Fall and Spring Career Fairs, each of which attracts approximately 250 employers or the Engineering Career Fair. The university also reported that students who take advantage of a three co-op program earn, on average, a starting salary that is approximately \$6,100 higher than those in the same major who opt for only one co-op.

Over 61,000 of the approximately 112,000 Drexel alumni registered in LinkedIn live in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. This is interesting because more than half of the undergraduate student body at Drexel came from states other than Pennsylvania. The New York area ranks a distant second with just under 10,200 alumni. Drexel separates student and alumni career services, although the number of alumni networking events is impressive for graduates who live in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Graduates may join the University's alumni association for no charge while other large schools, public and private, charge dues.

Conclusions

Drexel is a great option for mature students who have some idea of what they want to study and want to test their thoughts in the workplace as soon as possible—especially if they can cover their costs. They can build an impressive resume, often a better one than they would have developed had they chosen a more selective school.

The Report Card: Drexel University

- Four-Year/Six Year Graduation Rates: Not Applicable/B
- Freshman Retention: B+
- Costs: C+
- Curriculum: A
- Community: A
- Comforts: B
- Connections: A